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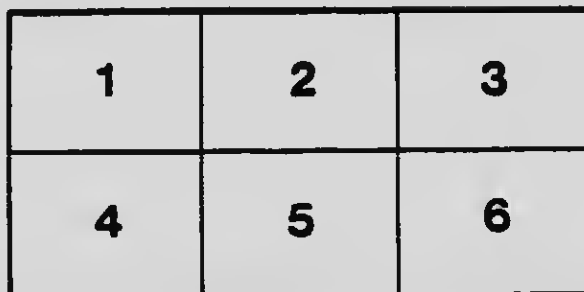
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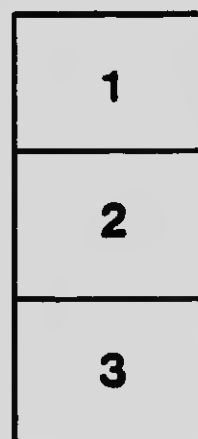
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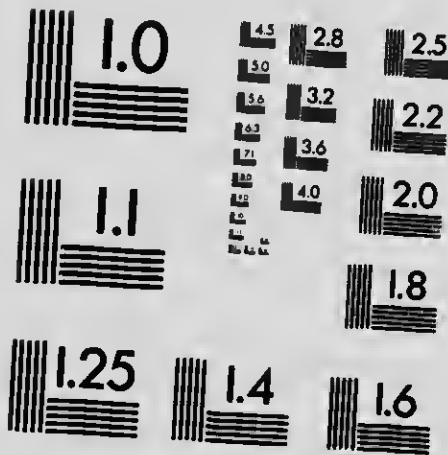
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PAULINE .



PAULINE .

By *PANSY* (MRS. G. R. ALDEN)
Author of BY THE WAY OF THE WILDERNESS
&c.

ILLUSTRATED

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PAULINE .



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I.

The Twenty-first of June.

"**W**HAT!" said Mr. Curtiss. He looked frowningly at the letter in his hand, and added presently, "What can this mean?"

Nobody answered; he was talking to himself. He laid down the letter and went to fumbling over a pile of others that were evidently waiting for attention. Then he stepped to the door of an inner office and spoke.

"Mr. Chase, do you know where Henry is this morning?"

"Henry?" said an elderly man, pushing his spectacles to his forehead, and looking bewildered for a moment. Then he added: "Oh, haven't you heard? Why, I believe the word came after you left the office. We had to let him go; his mother is dying, so they thought. Poor fellow! he was all broken up."

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"Ah!" said Mr. Curtiss, "that is very sad." He waited a moment as if to indicate sympathy, and then went back to his own troubles.

"I wonder what he did with the letters of mine that he had? You don't know of his leaving any word for me?" he asked.

"No, I don't. He had but a few minutes; he wanted to catch the five-twenty train — was obliged to, in fact, if he went last night. He locked his desk and I am afraid carried the key away with him, after giving me the papers that he said demanded immediate attention. He was so excited, you see, and in such haste. Is it something of importance, Mr. Curtiss?"

"It is a blunder on somebody's part," said Mr. Curtiss, referring again to the offending letter. "I supposed I was booked to lecture before the Deepwater literary association on the twentieth and have made all my arrangements to that effect; and this morning comes a letter from their secretary mentioning the twenty-first as the date."

"Ah!" said Mr. Chase, "that is rather awkward. And Henry has the correspondence in his hands? I see. Quite annoying. Still, the secretary of a literary society is likely to be correct, don't you think?"

"He ought to be, certainly," said Mr. Curtiss, with an attempt at a laugh; "but so ought I, and I supposed that I was."

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"I know; but Henry has been a bit crowded for a week or two, you remember, and worried about his mother. I'm inclined to think that is the way it happened. Does the misunderstanding embarrass you? Are you engaged for the twenty-first?"

"Tentatively; thank you; pardon the interruption." Then Mr. Curtiss went back to his desk and read the troublesome letter for the fourth time; and hunted among more papers, and finally leaned his elbows on the desk and his head on his hands and thought.

At last he turned to his telephone, and, after arranging the preliminaries, there followed the sort of one-sided conversation that is so exasperating to a third person.

"Is this Dr. Potter?"

"I am sorry to have to tell you that I cannot complete the engagement with you for the twenty-first. I find that I am already engaged elsewhere."

"I know, but it seems there has been a misunderstanding, owing probably to a mistake made by our office secretary."

"That is true, and I am very sorry indeed; I thought I had planned most carefully."

"Unfortunately, no; the other engagement is one that was arranged for many weeks ago. The mistake in date is evidently one that was made in our own office."

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"I must say 'No' again. I considered the twenty-first my only free evening, when I proposed it to you. Of course the twentieth is now disengaged. Would it be possible for you at this late date to plan for that?"

"I understand. Then the utmost that I can do is to promise to put you first on the winter list, if you care to have me."

"I can readily imagine your annoyance. If there were anything I could do, be sure I should be ready. My own embarrassment is extreme. I assure you I am not in the habit of blundering in this manner."

As he turned from the telephone, feeling that he had incommoded and annoyed some very influential people and given them a false impression of himself as a business man, he told himself that it was a very disagreeable complication, and that Henry deserved to be discharged.

A suggestion had come to him to telegraph to Deepwater and ask if they were sure of their dates, but he had abandoned it as absurd. Of course the secretary of a local society would know the evening that had been selected for the closing lecture of the course. He had also thought of telegraphing to Henry, but had remembered that he was twelve miles removed from railroad and telegraphic communication.

The situation was undoubtedly annoying.

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Charles Gordon Curtiss, of the law firm of Curtiss, Curtiss & Gordon, had a double reputation to sustain. He was young to have been admitted to the famous law firm, and he was young to have won distinction on the lecture platform. This latter distinction was quite pronounced. Public speaking had been a specialty of his throughout his college course. In the intercollegiate debates that had been numerous during his career as a student, his own college had been disposed to settle back complacently to await victory, whenever the name of Charles Gordon Curtiss was on the list of contestants.

"Besides knowing how to say things in a most effective manner," said, at one time, no less an authority than President Holland, "Curtiss invariably has something to say; and you know it is quite remarkable to have those qualifications unite in one person."

Others besides President Holland acknowledged Mr. Curtiss's marked literary ability.

"You ought to have been a teacher," his favorite professor told him, testily. "It is ridiculous to waste your sort of talent in a law office."

There had been a period in his life when Mr. Curtiss had sympathized with his professor, and had seriously meditated devoting himself entirely to literary pursuits; but there

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were obstacles in his way. In the estimation of his father and two grandfathers, to have a Gordon Curtiss choose any but the legal profession would have been sacrilege. Realizing the intensity of the family feeling, the young man decided to let his own predilections lie dormant, and go with the current. Duly entered, however, as junior member of the great law firm, the young man allowed his tastes and studies sufficient liberty to make him speedily sought after as a lecturer on literary themes. He worked faithfully at the legal drudgery which, as junior member of the firm, fell to his share, but in his hours of relaxation rewarded himself by writing popular lectures to be delivered during the weeks that he called his vacations.

It will readily be credited that he lived a busy life. Too busy by far, the society ladies of his circle believed. The only son, and for that matter grandson, of one of the oldest "first" families in the conservative city in which he lived; fine looking, talented, universally admired, society was ready to make much of him. It had opened its doors very wide and poured its eager invitations upon him, and was amazed and annoyed that its advances were met with an indifference that was in itself almost insulting. For a time society questioned whether it would not be well to drop

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entirely such a blinded young man, but it ended by compromising. The leaders thereof assured one another that Gordon Curtiss was very like his grandfather, the famous old Judge Curtiss, who had been so fond of his musty law books that it had been almost impossible to coax him away from them for a single evening. It had been said of him that he would live a bachelor all his days. Yet, at thirty-eight, tradition said that he had astonished every one by suddenly marrying a pretty girl of nineteen, who did not know a legal volume from the latest literary production, and had no interest in either.

"That is the way Charles Gordon will do," said the wise ones. "Here he is twenty-eight years old and with no thought of marrying, apparently. Some fine day he will bring home a butterfly who will run riot over his methodical life, and laugh hosts of his finespun theories to the winds. My grandmother used to tell of the wonderful change there was in the old judge after his marriage."

"Gordon Curtiss is more like his own sweet mother than he is like any grandfather among them," Mrs. Ellis, a family friend, would affirm. "He has inherited certain sturdy elements, no doubt, from both the old judges; but when he is sitting quietly without a thought that any one is observing him, there is a look in his eyes

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so like his dear mother's that it brings the tears to my own eyes. I believe he is like her, too, in true nobility of character. Depend upon it, she will be a fortunate woman who wins that young man's heart; it is pure gold, I believe, as his mother's was before him."

Mrs. Ellis having no daughters who might be supposed to be ready to win Gordon Curtiss's heart, could speak her opinion plainly.

And she spoke truly; Mr. Curtiss was like his mother, sweet Cecil Gordon. He had loved her through all the beautiful years that she had spent with him, with a passion that was almost more like that of a lover than a son; and when she had faded and gone away, it had seemed to the boy as though this life could have nothing more in the way of happiness for him. That was when he was barely twenty. At twenty-eight it was his mother's pictured face that he still wore next his heart, and his mother's tender voice and caressing fingers were what he longed for when he was weary, or out of accord with his world. Mrs. Ellis undoubtedly understood him better than did any other of his acquaintances; she had been his mother's friend.

The young man clung reverently to that mother's high ideals of manhood and duty and privilege; he might almost have been said to have made them his gods and to have fallen down and worshipped them because they were

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his mother's. Yet with the strange inconsistency that seems to beset human nature, he knew that with regard to the most sacred of these ideals he was living a life that must disappoint his mother.

It will have to be admitted that the blunder which committed him to two widely separated platforms on the same evening was excessively annoying to Mr. Curtiss. Both platforms, as it happened, were ones not easily secured, and the world that they represented was of such a character that a young man might be justified in feeling flattered by its invitations. As he made hurried preparations on the morning of the twenty-first for the Deepwater express, he told himself once more that there had been great blundering on Henry's part, and that if he attended to the legal engagements of the firm in like manner, he would soon reach the end of his career. Nevertheless he knew in his heart that he should utter no word of rebuke on Henry's return, for the boy had been heard from, and his mother was dead.

When the train began to slow up for Deepwater, Mr. Curtiss stood, bag in hand, on the platform, wondering how he should get away with the long afternoon, and bestowing vigorous mental criticism on the railroad arrangements that made it necessary for a busy man like himself to consume nearly the entire day in

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order to meet an evening engagement. He had no acquaintances in Deepwater that he cared to look up, and he told himself that there could be no very marked local attractions in the aristocratic old town, else he should have heard of them.

At this point in his revery the train halted for a single moment as if reluctant to make such a concession, then hurried on, Mr. Curtiss being the only passenger left behind. A handsome carriage, drawn by two spirited horses that attracted the newcomer's instant attention, waited at the quiet little station. A gentleman on the platform was watching the receding train with an expression of annoyed surprise.

"He hasn't come!" he called out to the people in the carriage, a whole volume of exclamation points in his tones. A chorus of regrets and questions that nobody could answer greeted the information.

"Is there no other train by which he could reach here in time?" asked the man who was holding the reins.

"Not that stops," said the man on the platform. "The five-twenty ought to stop here; it is an imposition that it doesn't. As soon as I get home I intend to see what can be done about it."

Mr. Curtiss regarded him sympathetically. He too felt aggrieved over that five-twenty

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train; if it could have been induced to stop at Deepwater he need not have wasted his entire day. Meantime, where was the representative of the literary society who should be there to meet him? Whoever had not arrived, *be* certainly had. Then the telegraph operator came to the door of his cage and addressed the man who was waiting for somebody.

"Mr. Kenyon, here is a telegram for you; just came." The gentleman turned quickly, and Mr. Curtiss did the same and regarded him with renewed interest.

"Here is a state of things!" said Mr. Kenyon, walking toward the carriage as he read his telegram. "Hallam has been thrown from his wheel this very morning and sprained his ankle. Can't take a step in at least three weeks." More exclamations of regret and sympathy from the carriage circle. Then this, from the man who held the reins:—

"Upon my word, Rich, you are having your share of annoyances this morning! Let us hope that the wind will change before night."

With the sound of that name Mr. Curtiss seemed to reach a decision. He came forward with lifted hat.

"I beg pardon, but is this Mr. Richard Kenyon, of Deepwater?"

"That is my name," said that gentleman, wheeling quickly and regarding the intruder

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with a look that said as plainly as words, "Who in the world are you?"

"Then may I hope that you are looking for me? My name is Curtiss — Charles Gordon Curtiss."

"The mischief it is!"

It was certainly not the sort of greeting that Charles Gordon Curtiss had expected. Moreover, he saw surprise and bewilderment — not to say dismay — on some of the faces in the carriage.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Kenyon, recovering himself, "but may I ask what happened that you did not appear yesterday, and just what you expect us to do now?"

"Yesterday!" faltered Mr. Curtiss.

"Yes, certainly. I understand you are the Mr. Curtiss who was engaged to lecture before our literary society? Well, several hundred people filled our little hall to overflowing last evening and waited for you for more than an hour. Not having heard one word from you to the contrary, we had faith to believe that you would appear from the clouds, or somewhere, before the evening was over."

"But my engagement with you was for the twenty-first," said Mr. Curtiss.

"Oh, no, indeed! I assure you that our little town has been placarded for more than a week announcing you for the twentieth, and

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the last letter received from you had the date written out."

In reply, Mr. Curtiss drew from his pocket a letter and spread it before Mr. Kenyon. It read:—

"This is simply to assure you that all arrangements are now completed for your lecture before us on the twenty-first inst., and we are looking forward to it with unusual pleasure. A member of our committee will meet the 12.28 train and see that you are cared for."

The young man glanced rapidly down the lines until he reached his own signature "Richard L. Kenyon," then an exclamation escaped his lips that he used only in moments of keen excitement.

"Great Scott!"

"What is it, Rich?" came from the carriage. "Did you write him for the twenty-first? Did you really? Girls! do you hear that? Rich put the *lecture* on the twenty-first!" Outbursts of laughter from the carriage, and eager voices all trying to talk at once, while Mr. Curtiss, conscious that there was something to this that he did not understand, tried to explain his part of the embarrassment to Mr. Kenyon. The man in charge of the horses burst in upon them. "The truth is, Mr. Curtiss, that

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Mr. Kenyon is to be married on this twenty-first day of June, and naturally enough he has fixed all important events, your lecture included, for the same date. That's the entire story in a nutshell. It was his 'best man' that we drove down to meet, having given up the lecture as inexplicably lost to us."

It certainly seemed the wisest, indeed the only courteous way, to make a joke of the entire matter and laugh off the embarrassment as best they could.

Mr. Curtiss began graciously to express the proper regrets at their disappointment and to minimize his own, when a feminine voice from the carriage interposed.

"Richard, will you step here a moment?"

A low-toned conversation between Richard and a lady on the back seat followed, while the others essayed to further explain to Mr. Curtiss. He, however, had only two distinct thoughts in his mind, and they were:—

"That girl has my mother's voice! the only voice like it that I ever heard; and she has eyes and hair somewhat like hers. I wonder who she is."

II.

The Unexpected Happened.

IT was the voice like his mother's that lured him. But for that, Mr. Curtiss, when invited, nay, urged, with utmost cordiality, to take the place of the unfortunate bicyclist so far as a stranger could, and serve during the wedding festivities, would have been duly grateful for the honor intended, but would have plead pressure of work and the great relief that an unemployed evening would be to him, and have steadily declined the invitation. When had he been known to assist at wedding ceremonies? And how many invitations to do so had he declined during the past three years? He did not remember; he only knew that somebody seemed always to be getting married and inviting him to aid in the operation, until he had grown to almost dread the sight of the peculiar shaped envelope that warned of another function. It was not that he did not believe in marriage, or that he was inclined to be misanthropical or unmindful of his friends; it was only that he was a very

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busy man, having undertaken, after the manner of young men of brains, to do at least three times as much work as there were hours in which to accomplish. It had required skilful management to decline courteously some of his invitations; but assuredly Mr. Richard Kenyon, the acquaintance of an hour, had no claim upon him; unless indeed it were the claim of gracious brotherhood, that he might help him to feel less chagrin over the almost unpardonable blunder that had thrown the usually methodical business man's affairs into chaos. Mr. Curtiss told himself that it was a thought of this kind which made him accept finally the waiting seat in the carriage and let himself be whirled toward Dr. Kenyon's home as one of the wedding guests; but in his secret heart he knew it was a desire to hear again the voice that was so like his fond memory of his mother, and to discover if there were anything in one of his pet fancies that voice indicated character. If that girl on the back seat, with wavy hair and eyes of unusual depth, should prove to be indeed like his mother in more than these externals, why then — he should like to know her.

There had been some fluttering among the maidens of the bridal train when it was known that no less a person than Charles Gordon Curtiss was to be among them as one who

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serves. Most of them had never met him, but they knew just where his name belonged in the social and literary world. Of course it was an honor to have him present at one's wedding.

"Nettie Wallace ought to be the proudest girl in Deepwater to-day," one of the younger maids of honor had said. "Who would ever have dreamed of her having Gordon Curtiss an attendant at her wedding! She must be glad that Mr. Hallam's ankle was sprained at just the right moment."

"Nettie doesn't care," came from Alice Porter, who was winding sprays of clematis about the mantel columns. "So that Richard Kenyon is at her wedding, there may be no other man present, or, for that matter, in existence, and it will not affect Nettie's happiness. When I marry, if that woful day should ever come, I do hope I shall be as fond of the victim as Nettie is of Rich. I can't conceive of such a state of mind, it is true, but I can imagine that it must be horrid to marry without it. Who had the courage to ask the great Charles Gordon to officiate?"

"It was Constance's idea, of course; nobody else would have dared, even if he had thought of such a thing, which I didn't. Constance summoned Rich to her side and proposed it, while Mr. Tudor was trying elaborately to

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explain the blunder to Mr. Curtiss, and the rest of us were in a bubble of fun over it all. We teased Rich unmercifully about being able to think of no date but the twenty-first. He was real nice though, as usual, and caught at Constance's idea in a minute, as he always does, and said just the right things to Mr. Curtiss. Wouldn't it be nice if Rich and Nettie were going to housekeeping and could have Constance live with them and take care of them? Dear me! I should almost be willing to get married myself if I could have Constance Kenyon come and live with me; that would make ideal work of housekeeping; and she is just wasted in this house that Mrs. Kenyon cares for so beautifully."

It was in ways like these that the gay bridal party tried to plan out Constance's future for her. But that which they with one accord agreed would have been "nice" was not to be. "Richard and Nettie" did not go to housekeeping. When Richard Kenyon had used every hour of his month's vacation in bridal touring he brought his wife back to his old home, and they occupied together the rooms that had been his since his boyhood. Refurnished they had been, and made beautiful with bridal gifts, but they were the same old rooms, with some of the boy Richard's treasures in them still. Alice Porter, who had known

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Richard Kenyon from his childhood, remarked that she should hardly think he would realize that he was a married man; that if it were not for Nettie, who was always watching at the window for him to come from the bank, he would surely be in danger of forgetting it.

But that all potent "if" held sway. Nettie was always on the watch for his coming, and always at the door to meet him; and Mr. Richard Kenyon had a happy and ever proudly increasing realization of the fact that he was a married man. Among others who realized it was his cousin Constance. When Richard Kenyon was seven years old and his cousin Constance was but a few weeks removed from the same age, she had come into his father's house to stay. A sudden railroad horror had deprived the little Constance, Dr. Kenyon's only sister's only child, of father, mother, and grandmother in a single hour. Of course Dr. Kenyon's heart and home had opened to receive her, and from that hour she and Richard had grown up together; so entirely united in plays and plans and pursuits, and growing in many ways so much alike that, in their earlier years, strangers mistook them for twins. And twins they were, or at least brother and sister, to all intents and purposes. In the course of time, Constance's very name faded from the memory of all but a few. Constance Elinor

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Stuart was the full name; but there was no one left of the name of Stuart to keep its memory fresh; and in speaking of them it was so much easier to say, "Constance and Richard Kenyon," instead of "Constance Stuart and Richard Kenyon," that the girl's last name, without definite intention on the part of any, presently disappeared from Deepwater circles. At preparatory schools and afterward at college a select few knew Constance as "Miss Stuart." But Richard was at college in the same town, and so evidently had his cousin in charge and so evidently did they depend upon each other for all the offices generally rendered by brother and sister, that it was only the few who knew of them in any other relation. Long before this period, Constance had ceased to feel any surprise when formal letters and notes came for her addressed to Miss Kenyon.

It was after both had graduated from their respective colleges and were at home again as "Constance and Richard Kenyon," that the first great change since babyhood swept over their lives. "Mamma Kenyon," as Constance in her childhood had fallen into the habit of calling her, instead of always using the more formal name "Aunt Rebecca" — "Mamma Kenyon" suddenly, unexpectedly, dropped out of her busy effective life and went away to heaven.

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Had a thunderbolt out of a clear sky struck at them the family believed that they could not have been more stunned. Mrs. Kenyon was one of those efficient, self-sacrificing, patient, cheery women who shoulder other people's burdens tenderly, and seem to have none of their own, and whom nobody seems to think can wear out and slip away. Least of all persons in the neighborhood could she be spared; so everybody felt. Not Dr. Kenyon himself, the successful and always overworked physician, would have been more missed from many homes than was his far-seeing, wise-hearted helper. As for the void that she left in the home of which she was the centre, who shall write? Those who have felt the wrench of bereavement need no written words, and to those who have not learned by experience, the story cannot be told in words.

It is a question whether Constance was not more sorely bereaved than even Richard himself. The young man had loved his mother tenderly, and he mourned her sincerely; but he was a man among men, and had a man's place to sustain in the world, and a man's outside interests to absorb him; while Constance had been the daughter in the home; and she and the mother had been in most loving accord in all their daily round of interests. Ever since Constance had reached the age when it could

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be done, the wise, sweet aunt had taken her into partnership, saying often, "Shall we" do thus and so? instead of "Do you" this or that.

It was such training, in part, that helped Constance, after the first days of stunning bereavement had been lived through, to rise to the thought that she had still a partnership to sustain, with one of the partners gone on ahead to the other home. She must fill her own place bravely and faithfully, and she must do more; she must try each day to make the vacancy left by that other less painfully glaring. It was a hard task. A girl of twenty might well falter and stand at times appalled before its magnitude. That she wrought loyally and bravely not only Dr. Kenyon himself and Richard, who leaned upon Constance almost as he had upon his mother, realized, but outsiders looking on with sympathetic interest said frequently one to another that "Constance Kenyon was really a wonderful girl; that she had taken up Mrs. Kenyon's work not only at home, but outside, among the poorer patients, and everywhere indeed in a manner that was simply marvellous for one so young." And Deepwater was sure to add that if Constance should marry and go away from them they really did not know what would become of either the doctor or Richard. No such appall-

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ing "if" ever came to disturb the peace of father or son. As soon expect a morning in which the daylight had forgotten to break, as one in which Constance would not be there to live for them.

Yet she had not been sufficient to them. In her unselfishness she had not hoped or expected to be entirely. As the years passed, until it was three since the mother left them, Constance began to remind herself that Richard would be likely to marry before long. It was not probable that so thoroughly noble a young man as he would long escape the loving toils of some woman's heart. Who indeed would have him escape them? Richard would bring home a wife, a sweet dear girl whom they would all love and cherish; and who would be much more to him, of course, than ever cousin or sister could be; that was natural and right; she would think about it frequently and grow used to the idea before the time came. But dear "Papa Kenyon," who had all his life been too busy to give her other than a few hurried words each day between his constant ministrations to others, yet who had thought for her and done for her as a loving father all her life — he would be left more entirely to her care after Richard married, than before. Not that he should not love his daughter-in-law very dearly indeed; they would be as tender a fam-

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ily in their home relations as they had always been, but in the natural order of things Mrs. Richard — whoever and wherever she was now — when she came to live with them would have her husband to think about and care for as a wife should, and she, Constance, would have the father. And she would be to him always all that the blessed mother who had gone to heaven could possibly expect of her. This was Constance Kenyon's unspoken vow. She did not tell herself in words that she would never marry and leave him; nor even marry and stay with him if that were ever possible; she simply left the thought of marriage entirely out of her life, while she planned unselfishly for it in Richard's.

And then — the unexpected happened. Not Richard but Dr. Kenyon took to himself a wife. Deepwater was astonished when it heard the news, but not more so than for a time the good doctor had been over the bewildering discovery that there was left in the world any woman who could be of special interest to him. He had not resolved never to marry; he had been too sorely bereaved to do any such thing; he had simply not thought at all along any such lines. He had gone to Cheltenham to attend the medical conference because he was the presiding officer of that body, and it was his duty to be there. He had gone to Deacon

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Wallace's for entertainment because he was assigned to that home. There he had met Mrs. Annie Wallace, the widow of Deacon Wallace's son, who was spending the winter with her father-in-law's family. That is nearly all that Dr. Kenyon knew positively about it. Just when he discovered that the presence of Annie Wallace was necessary to his happiness he could not have told. When he sat himself down one midnight in front of his own library fire, and stared at the coals, and let them flash into his heart the positiveness of the discovery, he was an astonished and bewildered man. But he was a man of action. No sooner had he settled it with himself that this discovery had to do with a feeling that had come to stay, than he set about shaping the course of future events to his mind, with such skill and celerity that before Deepwater had fully recovered from its amazement over the proclaimed engagement, he brought home his bride and installed her as mistress of his house. No, there was no disturbance of any sort connected with this new departure. The curious ones might scan Richard Kenyon as closely as they pleased; his handsome face was unclouded and his smile as gay and free as ever. He still walked down the elm-lined avenue that led to the gateway, with his arm linked confidentially in his father's, whenever they chanced to be going out at the

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same time. People, looking on, said it was wonderful that Richard bore the innovation so well. Constance, they said, was only a niece, which was very different from being a daughter; she had no right to feel aggrieved; but as for Richard, — really it was hardly to be expected that a son would accept the new order of things so easily.

Yet people were entirely right in their astonished conclusion that no one felt aggrieved. This is to be no repetition of the constantly told tale of domestic infelicities connected with the coming of a new mother into the home. If either Richard or Constance had felt personally wronged by the doctor's second marriage, both had sufficient self-respect to keep such thoughts quite to themselves; but in point of fact they did not feel it. The new member of the family was genial and winsome in all her ways. She was, moreover, a well-educated, thoroughly well-informed woman, and before many days had passed the young people said frankly to each other that she was a decided acquisition to their family circle; and Constance in the privacy of her own room assured herself that nothing could have been more natural and reasonable than that a middle-aged man like her uncle should have felt the need of more congenial companionship than ever so estimable a niece or even daughter

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could furnish; of course he too knew that Richard would be likely to marry before very long. She did not allow herself to so much as admit that behind this careful explanation of hers lurked a sore little feeling that she had attempted and failed.

Perhaps the young people grew closer together, if that were possible, after the doctor had some one whose time was always ready for his leisure. They rode more than they had, and took longer drives and walks now that there was no danger of the doctor appearing suddenly in need of some ministrations, to find a deserted house. They spent more evenings together, at lectures and concerts and in social life, sure that the doctor would have his cup of hot coffee or his iced tea, as the case might be, looked after carefully before he started on some unexpected night drive. By degrees, without intending that it should be so, the idea of Richard's marriage slipped away from Constance's mind, or lingered in so dim a background that she forgot to bring it forth and grow used to it. If she had thought about it at all she would have been able to say that Richard seemed very well satisfied as he was. In the home, during Richard's and the doctor's absence, Constance and the new mistress passed very pleasant hours. They were not in the least like the old hours when Constance and

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her "heart-mother," as she had sometimes called her aunt, had been together; she would not have had them the same, but they were very pleasant, and were without friction of any sort. Where their tastes did not accord, each was sufficiently indifferent to the other, in an entirely good-hearted way, to make it a matter of small importance that they differed. It was easy to drop the point of difference and glide into some line in which they could agree. Constance never said, "Mamma Kenyon," and never, never, in confidential and tender moments whispered the sacred word "mother," as she had been wont to do in the old life; but she said "Aunt Annie" simply and naturally, and was quite reconciled to the fact of the lady's presence.

Then, almost as suddenly as before, came another radical change in the home life.

III.

To whom was she Necessary?

IT came to pass that Mrs. Herbert Wallace chose Deepwater as her summer home because her sister-in-law had married Dr. Kenyon and gone there to live ; at least, that was a link in the chain of circumstances that brought about the removal. And Mrs. Herbert Wallace had brought with her to Deepwater her pretty young daughter, Nettie. Now Nettie was one of those free-hearted genial girls who make acquaintances readily, and who feel in six weeks' time that they have always lived in the atmosphere which then surrounds them. She had not been in Deepwater much longer than that, when the young people were calling her "Nettie Wallace" and feeling that no gatherings were complete without her presence.

And then, suddenly, it dawned, first upon Constance perhaps, after Richard himself, that no place in this wide world was to be complete, or even tolerable to Richard Kenyon hereafter, that did not include Nettie Wallace. It will have to be confessed that, despite all her pre-

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vious preparation, there had been a strange tightening of the cords about Constance Kenyon's heart when she made this discovery. And when it grew upon her that Nettie Wallace was of like mind, and that she must evidently teach herself to say "Richard and Nettie," a feeling of desolation such as she had never before experienced took possession of her.

"He is just the same as my brother," she told herself, "the only brother I ever had, and he has not gone to heaven, but I have lost him. It will be very different after this forever and ever."

She rallied, of course, from this woe-begone frame of mind. She had, or she thought she had, a strong spirit, that would not allow her to brood over her own trials or disappointments to the discomfort of others. True, she had never, since she was old enough to realize it, been very sorely tried, but here, too, she thought she had.

Richard Kenyon had never discovered her pain. He had found in his cousin a most sympathetic and efficient helper in all the plans that had to do with his changed life. It was she who gave the casting votes about carpets and curtains that were to be a surprise for the bride, and it was she who followed the painters and paperers and upholsterers with unwearied

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feet and quick-seeing eyes that would tolerate no blemishes.

It was Constance also who aided and abetted her aunt in making the wedding reception all that it should or could be, and who rejoiced with her heartily in the prospect of welcoming her own and well-beloved niece to her heart and home as a daughter-in-law.

It was even Constance's quick-wittedness that had given to the wedding the éclat of having Charles Gordon Curtiss for one of the attendants. In short, Constance Kenyon, throughout the nerve-trying weeks that preceded the wedding ceremonies, earned again the right to be called a blessing to her uncle's family.

"I don't feel sure that there would have been any wedding but for you," Richard had said to her in a burst of gratitude, when he was making his farewells after the ceremony, "because, you see, without you it would have been impossible for us to get ready. Nettie feels the same; she says you helped her as much as you did the rest of us, though she did live at the other end of the town."

"I think you would have married Nettie," Constance had said with a sisterly smile and a careful putting down of a belligerent lock of hair on Richard's head as she spoke, "without regard to the wedding clothes or cards or

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decorations; and she would not have cared extremely whether there were any wedding breakfast or not, so that the minister came, and the all-important words were spoken that gave her to you."

And Richard, with a happy laugh and a warm pressure of the hand for his sister-cousin, had answered:—

"I guess that is about the truth, bless her! It isn't wedding fineries and furbelows that she is thinking of. You would have been just such a bride as that yourself, Constance, if you had ever married. But I wonder where the man would have been found who was worthy of you?"

Constance had laughed merrily. The idea that under any conditions in life she could be like little Nettie Wallace could not but have its amusing side; then in the solitude of her own room she thought of it all again and smiled, a quiet smile that had in it a touch of pain.

"If you had married," Richard had said; they all spoke in such ways of her. How sure they seemed to be that marriage and home and close special ties were not for her! Probably they were right; she had taken such a position for herself years ago; but that was when she had thought herself necessary to her uncle; and after his marriage there had always been Rich-

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ard to think about; now — to whom was she necessary?

She put away the question with a resolute air, and told herself not to begin at twenty-five to be sentimental. It was necessary at that moment that she should go down and see if Kate had given fresh water to the flowers in Richard's rooms, and left no touch of her presence anywhere about. But the thought, or the pain connected with the thought, recurred again and again; grew upon her, indeed, as the weeks and months passed.

The bride and groom returned and took possession of their beautiful rooms, and the new life in the old home commenced and ran its daily round of sunshine and satisfaction. What could be more delightful than the existing conditions? All Deepwater was sounding their praises. It was "so nice" in Richard Kenyon to choose for a wife his stepmother's own pet niece who had been almost a daughter to her. And they had such good times together, father and son and mother and daughter. Dr. Kenyon had seemed to grow young since his marriage; people had said one day when they met him and Richard down town together, that the two could pass for brothers instead of father and son. So Deepwater talked, and enjoyed to the utmost the round of receptions and dinners and evening parties that were in-

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dulged in with the bridal couple for an excuse. They were so much interested in the prominent four of the family that they almost forgot to talk about Constance Kenyon; but occasionally some one said: "Poor Constance seems rather left out in the cold. I wonder if she feels it?" And another would add: "It is almost a pity, as things have turned out, that she never married." They, too, used the past tense in speaking of her. Yet Constance was only twenty-five.

She stood before a window of her own room looking out upon the dreary view. The grand old trees that were her joy in summer had been stripped entirely of their clothing, and the lovely lawn was hidden under a blanket of leaves that had fallen during the night and the storm. The summer was over; so indeed was autumn, the lovely part of it. Cold winds and dreary rains and snows must be expected now, at least at intervals, for long months. They seemed long to Constance in prospective. She had never before thought of the winter in this way. Even that first one after dear "Mamma Kenyon" went to heaven, they had made the rooms cheery, and toasted the doctor's slippers before the fire, and hoped and prayed that his office bell would not ring; and until it rang, Richard had read aloud to him from the evening papers, and she had played his favorite music for him

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and sung an old song or two. Then, when the inevitable bell called him away, there had always been Richard left, who read aloud to her more interesting matter than could be found in the daily papers. Or else they talked together, often of old times and tender memories; yet, some way, they were not sad, not painfully sad, at least, for they knew, both of them, that they should do injustice to the mother's memory if they let thoughts of her spoil their lives.

This autumn everything was changed, not so much for the others as for herself. Downstairs the family were gathered in the library as usual waiting for the tea bell. It was their favorite sitting room when they were alone. The doctor was at home, and in dressing-gown and slippers was resting in his easy-chair, trying to make believe that he did not expect the inexorable office bell to call him presently out into the night and the storm. His wife was reading bits to him from the evening papers, and Nettie at the piano with her husband to turn the music was playing snatches of favorite tunes and breaking into song occasionally between the readings. A lovely, restful home scene. No one missed Constance even enough to ask, "Where is Constance?" She felt quite sure of this, and in her reasonable hours was able to say that it was as it ought to be;

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it was enough that she was always welcome; she did not wish to be uncomfortably missed. Generally she was reasonable; there was no misanthropic vein in her wholesome nature. But on this gloomy November evening an undeniable sense of loneliness amounting almost to desolation had possession of her. She had been hurt just a little that day. It had occurred of late several times that Richard and Nettie, and often the elder Mrs. Kenyon, had received and entertained callers who were her personal friends, and had quite forgotten to summon her to enjoy their visits. It was never intentional forgetfulness; Constance promptly exonerated them from such an idea.

"Where were you?" Richard would ask when she entered the room soon after the guests had departed. "Why didn't you come down to see the Wilsons? You used to be very fond of Callie Wilson." Then, when Constance would explain that she had not known of their coming, there would be exclamations from both her aunt and Nettie. "So careless in them! they ought to have sent Kate to call her." Yet a like experience would perhaps occur on the following day. They simply could not remember her. Aunt and niece, or mother and daughter, had not yet grown used to the delight of belonging to the same home, privileged to spend their lives together; it was

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all so fresh a pleasure that they gave themselves up to its enjoyment and forgot Constance. As a rule this did not trouble her; she had many friends who asked directly for her, and there were many others whom she saw because she was as a matter of course making one of the family party. She did not in the least attempt to stand upon her dignity, nor to hide away in her own room waiting for slights; she knew that nobody intended to slight her. Nevertheless there were occasional hours, like the one on this November evening, when her loneliness pressed upon her; when the very fact that the passing her by was unintentional emphasized to her the knowledge that she was very much alone in the world, and of special interest to nobody living. It can never be pleasant, I should think, for any woman to have a realizing sense of such a fact. Most women are not only very necessary to the happiness and comfort of some one, but they like to be.

Constance had really been hurt that afternoon, and the sense of being left out was stronger upon her than ever before. It had come to pass that the young man, Charles Gordon Curtiss, who had so unexpectedly made one of the wedding party, had not dropped his new acquaintances as soon as the immediate festivities were over. Instead, he had seemed

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to make a special effort to establish friendly relations; coming to Deepwater on two or three occasions for the sole purpose, apparently, of paying his respects to the bride and her friends, and accepting with heartiness sundry invitations that could have been declined without discourtesy.

At all these functions it had seemed natural, as Constance had been the one at the wedding to whom Mr. Curtiss's attentions were due, that he should continue to look after her interests, whenever there was occasion. She had by no means been unwilling to have this distinction; on the contrary, she had frankly admitted to herself that Mr. Curtiss was a better talker and in many respects a pleasanter companion than any young man, except Richard, that she had ever known. It is possible that there had been moments when in her heart she did not except even Richard. Be that as it may, when it came to pass one evening that Mr. Curtiss came to Dr. Kenyon's without invitation of any sort, simply to make an informal call, and spent an hour with them in the library quite as a friend of the family, and Constance, who had retired to her room to write letters, had not been summoned to enjoy the visit, simply because nobody thought of it, she had certainly been more tried than on any previous occasion of the kind. And this very

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afternoon, it being known to both the other ladies of the household that Constance was only in the linen closet attending to the marking of some linen, precisely the same thing had occurred. Mr. Curtiss had called and remained until just as she was descending the stairs, her duty done. She had caught a glimpse of him as he went down the elm-lined walk, and had stepped to the window to make sure that her eyes did not deceive her. At that moment he had glanced back and recognized her. He had halted and almost turned as if to retrace his steps, then had seemed to change his mind and content himself with a low bow. Constance had watched him quite down to the gate, then had moved slowly from the window with a disappointment at her heart that was unusual over the loss of an afternoon call.

In the library, Mrs. Richard was adjusting the blinds to her liking; she glanced around on Constance's entrance to say:—

"Why, Connie dear, where have you been? You missed Mr. Curtiss; if you were like any other girl in the world that would be quite a trial. I think he is a delightful talker. Have you been for a walk?"

"Oh, I remember; so you did go to the linen closet, you dear girl! and we selfish people forgot all about it and thought you were out walking. Wasn't it too bad?" This last

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addressed to the aunt, who at that moment entered the room.

"I would have known that she was not out if I had thought about it at all," said that lady serenely. "I am going to own at once that I was simply heedless. Constance, dear, it is very absurd in us to forget to send for you. I think you will have to adopt the fashion of staying downstairs during calling hours until Nettie and I recover our common sense. If Mr. Curtiss, by the way, had had sense enough to ask for you, we should have been reminded of our duty."

On other like occasions Constance had made haste to say that it was of no consequence; but this time she said nothing at all, and went soon afterwards to her room, where she stood looking out upon the dead leaves and the rain. She told herself that it was the weather that made her feel so depressed and so easily disturbed. It would have been the same, of course, if it had been Dr. Dennis instead of Mr. Curtiss who had called; only Dr. Dennis, her dear old friend and pastor, would have asked for her especially, and so reminded the others of their duty, and Mr. Curtiss had not. He had asked for "the ladies," so much she had learned incidentally of Kate, and of course he considered her included. Did he think, she wondered, that for some reason she had chosen

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not to see him? This was the third time she had failed in meeting him when he had called. Why had he looked back that afternoon and hesitated as if inclined to retrace his steps? What must he have thought of her gazing out of the window after him? Her face burned at this remembrance, then she smiled at her inconsistency. If Mr. Curtiss supposed that she did not care enough for his acquaintance to be willing to receive his calls, he surely would not imagine her to be stealthily watching his movements from a hall window! But it was certainly trying; and she was very — lonely. She hesitated for a word and was almost tempted to say miserable; but laughed wholesomely at this folly, and realized that she had no right to be miserable. Nevertheless she permitted herself to consider gravely the question of a possible change of some sort, for a while at least. They were sufficient to and happy in themselves, those four who constituted the family now, and they ought to be. What she had overheard one of the Deepwater matrons say was undoubtedly true: that she was only Dr. Kenyon's niece, and that it was very different from being his daughter. If she could leave them to themselves for a few months, it might be better in every way. Possibly they would learn to miss her, though her sterling good sense told her that she was not

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an important factor in the home any more. Mrs. Kenyon was a practical housekeeper and enjoyed her work; and Nettie liked nothing better during her hours of leisure while her husband was at the bank, than following her aunt and mother-in-law about, supplementing her work. She had taken to doing quite as a matter of course certain pleasant household tasks that it had fallen to Constance to look after ever since she was a schoolgirl. Oh, no, she was not needed any more at home.

IV.

"It's for Miss Constance."

YET where could she go? She had friends of course whom she could visit; invitations were frequent and pressing; but she shrank from such an idea. It was one thing to arrange and plan, and wrench herself away from home for a few days' visit, conscious that she must make her stay short and hurry back to fill a void, and quite another to pack her trunks for long visits to her friends, because she was not needed at home. If she had money of her own, she might travel; Richard had once planned delightful journeys for her and with her, to be taken during his vacations, but all that of course was over. She had not so much as a penny of her very own, but she had never before felt this to be a trial. Dr. Kenyon was wealthy and liberal and had never allowed her to feel her dependence for a moment. Since she was a girl of fifteen she had received an allowance each month amply sufficient for all her little wants or fancies; for the rest, her shopping was

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charged as a matter of course in the monthly accounts, and she had no occasion to think of them. Neither was there occasion now. No one begrudged her her allowance, nor her freedom as a daughter of the house. There was plenty for them all, and neither Mrs. Kenyon senior nor Mrs. Richard belonged to the class of women who think of money in such connection. No one begrudged Constance Stuart anything, or thought of her other than kindly and affectionately. Yet because she was Constance Stuart and not Constance Kenyon after all, she could not keep herself at all times from thinking thoughts that troubled her. Why had she not one friend in this old town where she had spent her life? A friend so near and dear that to be with her and do for her, to read and drive and visit with her, something as she had done with Auntie in the long ago, would be joy enough for any life? Oh, she had scores of *friends*, but not one *Friend*. There had been times when she had thought of making one of Nettie, but there was nothing to be put into words. Nettie was a dear girl, as bright and sweet as she could be, and was in every way worthy of the love that Richard lavished upon her, but she was not and could never be such an one as Constance meant when she used that word "Friend" in the isolated sense.

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The twilight deepened, and the street lamps were lighted and flared out, intensifying the gloom, and the rain fell steadily out of the leaden sky. The very sound of it against her window increased her sense of dreariness so much that presently she felt the roll of a tear down her cheek. This startled her a little. Why should she have tears to shed? They should be kept for real woes.

“I am very silly,” she said aloud, “and growing sentimental in my old age! I might much better light the gas and brush my hair and go downstairs with the others; that is where I belong, and that is where they think I belong. I am not going to learn to gloom and sulk because I haven’t everything. ‘Count your mercies, Miss Connie,’ dear old Grandma Coulter used to say when I went with Auntie to carry her soup and tea; ‘Count your mercies, Miss Connie; you have enough of ’em to keep you busy.’ And I’m sure I have.”

There came a knock at her door that she recognized and answered without turning from the window.

“Yes; what is it, Kate?”

“A note for you, Miss Constance; the boy is waiting for the answer.”

There was nothing startling in either of these statements. Constance’s girls, as the members of her Bible class were called, were

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continually arriving at perplexing periods in their lives and sending eager or pitiful petitions to their guiding star for advice or assistance. There were eleven of them, and they filled many of her leisure hours and fairly satisfied the part of her nature which they touched.

"Very well," she said to Kate; "you need not wait; I will write the reply and bring it down with me. I suppose tea is just ready, is it not?"

She waited to brush her hair and arrange to her liking the lace about her neck before she opened her note. It read thus:—

"MY DEAR FRIEND: I am about to do something that is extremely unconventional, but I find myself acting under an impulse that refuses to be set aside. I called at your uncle's house this afternoon in the hope of meeting you; it is the third time within a few weeks that I have made a like effort and failed. This may have been mere accident, but I am also aware that it may have been design. I have resolved to ask you frankly which it is. I am in town of necessity to-night until the ten-fifty train. May I spend the evening with you and tell you something that I have an earnest desire you should know, or would you prefer not to hear it? If you have discovered from my manner the strong desire that I have for a

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closer acquaintance with you, and if my failure to meet you is because of a kind effort on your part to save me unnecessary pain, will you write at the bottom of this page these four words, "There is no reply," and return it to me by the messenger? If, on the other hand, you have not thought about me at all, and this note seems to you to come from a mild lunatic, will you not grant me one hour of your time this evening, — or if that is not feasible, will you mention a day and hour when I may hope to call upon you and find you disengaged?

"Very sincerely,

"CHARLES GORDON CURTISS."

The messenger was waiting and the tea bell was ringing; there was no time for even a careful choice of words. Constance thrust the note into her pocket, turned hurriedly to her desk, her cheeks the color of the roses that filled her room with their breath, and wrote without hesitation: —

"MY DEAR MR. CURTISS: I am sorry to have missed your calls. I shall be at home this evening and shall be glad to have a visit from you."

Then she went down to the waiting supper.
"I don't understand how you keep so fresh

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a color," said Mrs. Richard, letting her eyes linger in admiration on the flushed face. "Here you have been housed all day just as we have, and you look as though you had just taken a brisk walk of a mile or two! Look at her cheeks, Richard, and her eyes!"

"It is because she hasn't walked a mile or two in this beastly weather," said Richard. "It is going to be a horrid night; people who venture out this evening will show that they have important errands. I hope no one will decide to fall desperately ill and send for you, father."

"Don't mention it, please!" said his step-mother. "As surely as we set our hearts upon an evening of leisure for your father, he is called out before he has time to get comfortably seated. Haven't you noticed it?"

Yet that evening proved an exception. They gathered in the library after tea, Mrs. Kenyon and Mrs. Richard with their lace making, and Constance with her sewing and her nervousness, — and her indignation with herself for being nervous.

"I am like a silly schoolgirl anticipating her first advent into society," she told herself reprovingly; "it surely is not so unusual for me to have callers that I should start at every sound like a simpleton."

Nevertheless she did just that. There were

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complications this time, it seemed to her. What if Kate, having of late been in the habit of showing Mr. Curtiss to the library, should do so to-night, and he should have to make his call in the presence of the family? Would not that be awkward for him, inasmuch as he had already that day spent an hour with them? Also, would it be treating him quite as he would have a right to expect to be treated after that note? Yet how could she go to Kate and instruct her that when Mr. Curtiss came he was to be shown to the parlor, and only she was to be summoned?

Meantime, Richard read aloud in a book that ought to have held the attention of them all; and Constance could never afterward recall so much as a sentence in it. At intervals the reader paused to lead a discussion over some statement of the author; this was in accordance with a pleasant family custom, but Constance, being appealed to for her opinion, was on two occasions obliged to confess with a glow on her cheeks that might again have awakened Nettie’s admiration, that she had not heard the paragraph under consideration. She heard the bell, however, and so did they all; the reader interrupted himself to indulge in some severe criticisms of the interrupter, and to congratulate his father that at least it was not the office bell; his wife said it surely could

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not be callers on so stormy an evening. "Just hear the rain!" she said. It was supposed that all were relieved when the intruder proved to be only a messenger with a belated package. Mrs. Kenyon said it was a shame to keep the boys hurrying about on such nights as these. Rainy-day purchasers ought to have their packages marked "unimportant" when they could, so that discrimination might be used in delivering them. In the midst of the merry argument which this proposed innovation provoked, the bell sounded again. This time Kate brought her tray, and Richard groaned and his wife sighed when they saw that it held a card. But Kate went straight to Constance.

"It's for Miss Constance," she said firmly; and that young woman arose in a flurry that she fancied was noticeable, and followed Kate in silence from the room. In her confusion she left the card on the library table. Richard reached for it with the remark: "I wonder who has ventured out in this storm? Constance's girls do not indulge in calling cards, do they? Why, it is Curtiss again! That's queer, isn't it?"

"Oh!" said his wife, eagerly, "I hope he has come to invite Constance to hear the oratorio. I was anxious to have her go; she enjoys fine music so thoroughly, and since that Miss Brainard asked to go in our care, I was

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afraid Constance might think it awkward for you to have charge of three ladies. By the way, Richard, we shall not have to wait for the two o'clock train after all; a special has been arranged for, to leave at eleven, or at the close of the concert. The Bakers were in this afternoon and told us about it. Isn't that nice? I do hope Mr. Curtiss has come for that; probably he thought of it after he was here this afternoon, and resolved to see about it this evening. He can't get any train, you know, until the ten-fifty."

But Mr. Curtiss had not come to make arrangements for the oratorio; he had not so much as remembered that there was to be one of exceptional worth on the following week, lover of music though he was. He knew upon just what errand he had come, and had given to its doing some of the most earnest thinking of his life.

In the months that followed, when Constance took time to think of it, she could not but be amused over the person of consequence that she had suddenly become, not alone in her own home circle, but with Deepwater people generally. They had known always that she was "as good as gold," and they were very fond of her. They had often talked about what a valuable person she would be in the community when she should become middle

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aged, and should have dropped naturally and pleasantly away from the occupations and engagements that belong to youth. Then, without cares and responsibilities of her own, she would have pleasant leisure for the duties and burdens of others; and they weighed down her shoulders, prospectively, with work that would be sure to be ready for heart and hands, so soon as the swift passing years should mark her definitely as among those for whom youth is past.

And then, behold, without even the preparation that good-natured conjecture and gossip give, it became known that Constance Kenyon had not only declined to become that useful and respected member of society, a refined, cultured, large-hearted old maid, but was to marry, of all persons in the world, who but Charles Gordon Curtiss himself!

The Kenyons and the Stuarts had been "first families" for generations back, yet Deepwater had not aspired to have such honor come to them, as that the names belonging peculiarly to them should be linked with the Gordons and Curtisses of Philadelphia. Yet be it known that they all with one accord, in afternoon and evening sessions assembled, affirmed that it was "just the thing!" If Gordon Curtiss had searched the world over he could not have found a more suitable mate

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for himself in every way than Constance Kenyon. The wonder was that no one had ever thought of it before. Constance had seemed so indifferent to the society of other than her cousin Richard, all through the years when girls are supposed to be thinking about marriage, that, some way, they had fallen into the habit of fancying that she was not like other girls, and meant never to marry.

Then came to the front a maiden lady of good heart and a passion for prophesying, to affirm that she had thought of it. When Constance Kenyon and Gordon Curtiss walked down the aisle together that night after Richard's wedding, she had said to herself: "What a fine-looking couple they make, to be sure! if they had been getting married themselves, they could not look more appropriate."

Mrs. Richard heard of many of these good-natured and altogether kindly bits of gossip as she went to and fro, and spread them out at home for the benefit of the busy Constance, who laughed and blushed and commended the prophetess for her marvellous discernment, and was more than willing that the dear old ladies and younger ladies of Deepwater should get what pleasure they could out of a discussion of her affairs. She was too happy herself in those days not to have her heart brimful of desire for the happiness of all the world.

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Occasionally she stopped before that window out of which she had looked on that dreary November evening, when the branches of the trees were bare and the dead leaves were sodden, and the rain fell steadily, and wondered if she could be the same girl who looked then. That lonely homesick girl, feeling left out and desolate. She remembered that she had almost questioned the Providence that had brought her to such a waste place. Why should she, of all other girls, have been singled out for loneliness? Other girls had mothers, or they had sisters, or brothers, or home ties of some sort strong enough to fill their lives, and of such character that the ordinary changes of life could not break them. Why should she be left with nobody? No, she had not said this in words; she had not definitely thought these thoughts; but it was because she had steadily refused them admission when they came pressing to be received. Yet even then the Providence that she was struggling not to arraign was planning for her, home and care, and love so tender and strong that she almost trembled before the power of it, as she asked herself, this time with heart aglow with thankfulness, why it was that she, of all women in the world, should be so blest.

The girl had great joy of heart during those days, in the consciousness that her human love

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had brought her closer to the divine. She had been a member of the church since away back in childhood. She had vivid remembrance of the day when Dr. Dennis with his hand on her head had said: “Little girl, you love Jesus, do you not?” Unhesitatingly had come her reply, “Yes, sir.” And then, with his kindly hand still resting on her head, he had told her what uniting with the church meant, and how the bread and wine commemorated the love of Jesus for her; and, “did she want to come with the others, next Sabbath, when they stood up in the church and promised to love and serve Jesus?” Of course she did; her heart felt full of love for all the world; and her dearest friend Nellie Eastman was to join the church — why should not she? It meant more than that. Her aunt had trained her carefully, and she was as fully ready for church membership as any child of nine could be expected to be. She had united with the visible church that next Sabbath, and all Deepwater would have witnessed that she had adorned her profession through the years. Yet Constance Kenyon had vaguely felt at times that her religion ought to be more to her than it was.

It had made her conscientious and faithful in all her known duties, and was, she believed, the mainspring around which her life circled. Still, she was dimly conscious that there were

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people who had more than she. It was the word "duty," not privilege, that held her. Sometimes she told herself that probably as she grew old, the joy of a religious life would be hers; that when people were young and the world was bright, perhaps duty was all that they were expected to feel. And then, suddenly, even her religious life seemed to be illumined. When the flood of new joy swept over her soul, she recognized, or thought she did, the hand of the loving Christ in opening heaven on earth for her, and her soul bowed before Him in an ecstasy of grateful love. She gave herself anew and joyfully to His service, and assured her heart that it was blessed to be His servant, and that she realized the sweetness of it as she had not before.

V.

Another June.

THROUGHOUT his twenty-eight years of life, Mr. Curtiss had been noted for his wisdom. If the nurse who held him in her arms when his eyes first saw the light, and who clung to him in worshipful affection still, was to be believed, he had been exceptionally wise from the very first. As a young man not only had this state of things continued, but, what is perhaps rarer, he had been exceptionally patient with the follies of others. For instance, in his secret heart he had believed that most of the young men of his intimate acquaintance, during the months that intervened between their engagement and their marriage, had been very foolish indeed. Often had he assured himself that if he should ever reach such a period in his life's story—and without definite resolution in that direction, he still believed that he never should—one thing was certain; he would preserve his common sense, and show to lookers-on that marriage was merely an

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incident in a busy and important life, and not at all an absorbing force that must needs take precedence of other interests heretofore considered first.

Let it be admitted just here that when at twenty-eight, or a few months past that age, Charles Gordon Curtiss found himself under engagement of marriage, he had many things to learn with regard to his own heart.

At first it astonished him that he could not go about this matter with the calmness that had characterized him on other important occasions. It almost bewildered him that it refused to be "simply an incident" in his life, but pushed itself to the front and insisted upon being thought about.

In short, Mr. Curtiss had done what some of his friends had prophesied that he would do — lost his heart suddenly and utterly; but he had lost it to the one woman in the world whom it would have been possible for him to marry. This at least was what he believed.

He knew now that on that day when he stood waiting on the railway platform at Deepwater, and had turned quickly at the sound of a voice, that he had looked upon the face of the woman who had been created and cared for in order that she might become his wife.

He had imagined at the moment that the thrill of soul which her voice gave him had

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been caused by its likeness to his mother's; but very soon he had become aware that, although Constance Kenyon, not only in eyes and speech, but in certain subtle, indescribable, though distinctly felt ways, was very like that precious memory of his, there were other and more potent reasons why his soul should have been instantly drawn to her soul; they had been created each for the other; and God, who watches over human lives, had kept them apart and sacred in their loneliness until the hour when they should recognize their oneness.

He believed this and yielded to the joy of it, and was as absorbed and as far from wise as any man of his acquaintance had ever been in like circumstances.

One way in which his energy spent itself was in pressing for a speedy marriage. Why should they wait? he argued. Constance, like himself, was fatherless and motherless; there were no close home ties to be rearranged carefully lest loving hearts somewhere should feel left out. There was a sense in which they were both alone in the world. He, with his hosts of friends, was far more alone than was Constance; and his home, the ancestral home of the Curtiss family, was waiting for its queen. There was no good reason why they should spend years or even months apart getting

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ready for their life together; they were ready now; they belonged to each other; it had been so planned by the Father in heaven; he was sure of it, so was she; let them by all means spare themselves the loneliness of longer separation.

So he argued, and so eager was he that, if he could have had his way, — although it was nearing the Thanksgiving anniversary on that aforesaid rainy November evening when he had not so much as thought of the oratorio, but had made known his heart to Constance, — he would have chosen the swift-following Christmas season for the ceremony that was to make known to the world their oneness. But Constance was decided in her negative, and was sustained heartily by her relatives. Mrs. Kenyon affirmed that it took her breath away to think of getting ready for a wedding on such short notice; and Richard added almost savagely that Curtiss ought to be ashamed of himself; it was quite enough for him to rob them at last of what they had looked upon as a part of their home, without being in such indecent haste about it. His wife, with the tears dimming slightly her bright blue eyes, had kissed Constance as she said: —

“O, Connie, dear, I am glad for you, I am indeed. I wanted you to be married to a good man like Richard, and have the joy and the

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sacredness of it all for your very own; but there is a hard part to it, you know. We love you so dearly, and to Richard you have been all his life more than an ordinary sister; and it will never be again with us just as it has been, don't you see?"

Yes, Constance saw, and she kissed her and called her a dear little sister whom she should always love just the same, and did not reveal then, nor afterwards, how "different" life had been for her of late, nor how utterly desolate the first part of that November evening was. They had loved her dearly all the time and she knew it, but she liked to think that things would never be again just as they had been.

Overcome in one direction, Mr. Curtiss set his wits to work on another plan, and here he also firmly set his will. Since the ridiculous conventionalities of life of which he had always more or less disapproved would not admit of a Christmas wedding for them, why, then, they would choose a historic date, even the twenty-first of June, just a year from the date of their first meeting. That surely would give ample time for the elaborate making ready that those least concerned seemed always to think so important; and for himself, he should not yield another hour. A little later he gained twenty-four hours on this date. For a man who considered himself not in the least romantic, his reasons for

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this change were peculiar! He had decided that he would like best to be married on the date that he ought to have appeared in Deep-water to lecture, namely, on the twentieth of June. This would enable him to carry out a fancy that he had for bringing his bride to her new home on the twenty-first — precisely, to an hour, one year from the day on which he first heard her voice and saw her face. Mrs. Kenyon heartily approved of the change for quite another reason: she discovered that the twenty-first of June fell that year on Friday.

"You wouldn't be married on Friday, of course!" she said, with marked emphasis on the name of the day.

"Why not?" was Constance's composed question; and Mr. Curtiss went off into a burst of laughter over Mrs. Kenyon's evident dismay.

"Why not! Why, my dear child, no one chooses Friday for a wedding day. I never heard of such a thing; did you, Nettie? Oh! of course you must change the day, you really must."

"I don't think I have any objection," said Constance, joining in Mr. Curtiss's laugh; "but I haven't any scruples against Friday. Have you, Gordon? Because if you have, perhaps we ought not to go to the house on that day. Will not that be dreadful, too, Aunt Annie?"

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"Well," said Mrs. Kenyon, "I don't call myself superstitious, and yet I confess that I would a little rather, if I were you, see my new home for the first time on some other day of the week. However, that is for you two to settle, of course; but Friday will certainly never do for a wedding day. I can see just how queer it would look on the invitations."

It was all amusing to Mr. Curtiss, who had forgotten that there were people who cared exceedingly about the names of the days, but he was duly grateful to Mrs. Kenyon for helping him to carry his point, and Thursday, June twentieth, was finally the elect day.

"They are the most unconventional couple that ever breathed," Mrs. Kenyon explained to Richard; "they will really have to be watched lest they do something ridiculous before it is over. Fancy their being married on *Friday*, for instance! If there had not been some other reason for a change of date I don't believe either of them would have cared about that. Then their plans for the wedding trip are so queer. If he cannot get away until some time in July, why don't they wait until then to be married? But no, he must take Constance to her new home on the twenty-first day of June, no matter what happens. And then, after she has her servants in hand and everything in such shape that it will be hard

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for her to leave, he proposes to scurry her off for a wedding trip! It takes a man to plan, I must say. I suppose he likes the idea of being superior to custom. Though, as a rule, people of his stamp want to do just what their grandfathers and great-grandfathers did before them."

The Curtiss homestead was talked over a great deal in the Kenyon family when Constance was not present. The keenest interest, not to say curiosity, was evinced concerning it. Mrs. Kenyon admitted that she thought it was rather absurd in Mr. Curtiss to keep everything connected with it hidden in a sort of mystery. It was all very well for him to surprise Constance if he chose; that was natural, she presumed; she remembered that Richard had had the same fancy about his rooms; but herself and Nettie, one would suppose, might not only be told all about the place, but invited to make suggestions with regard to the changes. They might reasonably be supposed to understand Constance's tastes better than a man who only a year ago had never set eyes upon her; but Gordon seemed to think that he knew more about her this minute than did anybody else in the world. He was the sort of man who did not care much for advice, she believed, on any subject. Mrs. Kenyon really admired him very much indeed, but she could

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not rise above a little feeling of pique sometimes in not being made the important factor in all these affairs that Mr. Curtiss could have made her had he chosen to do so.

She was correct in her belief that he did not feel the need of advice. Nevertheless his reticence was caused by habit and not by design. Had he realized what a pleasure it would have been to Mrs. Kenyon and Mrs. Richard to have been shown through the fine old place that was to be Constance's home, he would have taken pleasure in exhibiting it to them; but Constance must not set eyes even upon the grand old trees until her name was Constance Curtiss. He knew just the tree under which he meant to place her on that fair day, June twenty-first, while he went a little distance away, and looked over at her and said to himself: "There is once more a Mrs. Curtiss. The old home so long desolate has a mistress again; that is she, and she is my wife!" He had never explained even to Constance about that old tree where she was to stand.

It was little wonder that Mr. Curtiss enjoyed renewing and beautifying his old home. Had Mrs. Kenyon known how beautiful it was, she would have excused him from asking advice concerning it. Dr. Kenyon's house was of substantial brick, and was set in the centre of an ample square of lawn and shade on one of the

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pleasantest streets in Deepwater. But the Curtiss homestead was surrounded by wide stretching acres laid out in lovely parks, with grand old trees and velvety lawns. And there was a conservatory where grew all manner of flowers and ferns and foliage plants that helped to make summer all the year round. The house itself was of stone, and was ample enough for generations of Curtisses to have lived in it together.

Carefully kept up to modern times and thoroughly furnished with all possible modern conveniences, the present owner, in his improvements, had yet contrived to keep the spirit of the long ago so uppermost that it might have passed for some fine old English home with its many trees and its wide stretching lawns where the lights and shadows lay in entrancing beauty. A feature that Mr. Curtiss was sure would have a fascination of its own for Constance, was a gurgling brook that danced merrily on its way through one portion of the estate, losing itself now and again in shrubbery that, while apparently growing according to its sweet wild will, was yet under highest cultivation.

Set in the heart of the western and finest part of the fine old city, the "Curtiss Mansion," as it was called by the older residents, was far the finest and most aristocratic place

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in that city of homes. And Constance knew almost nothing about it!

It was one of Mr. Curtiss's pleasures in anticipation to introduce her unawares to all this loveliness of nature when he knew that she was bravely making her little sacrifice, and preparing to live among the stone pavements and the massive brick and stone blocks of the average city street. The Kenyons were all more or less familiar with the city but forty miles removed from Deepwater, but their errands thither had chiefly to do with down-town life, and not one of them, save the doctor himself, who never entered into details, had seen the Curtiss place.

There was little to be done to get the carefully preserved house ready for its mistress, yet that little took all of its owner's leisure hours, and helped to make the winter and spring pass more quickly than he had dared to hope. It was a busy spring for him in the office; his successes during the winter not having been confined to the lecture platform, had increased his duties and responsibilities as a lawyer.

Therefore it was not until the afternoon of the nineteenth day of June, just as the sun was setting, that he found opportunity to take that last look at his perfected home which he had planned should be taken before bringing its

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future mistress to it. He looked at his watch as he swung himself from an up-town train — he had been in too much haste to wait for the trolley, though the ride to his estate by trolley led through the pleasantest part of the city — and reminded himself that he would not have a great deal of time to give to details; he could only hope that all his orders had been carefully carried out.

The lawns on either side of the tree-lined avenue leading to the house looked unusually lovely in the low June sunlight, but he passed them with swift step and a smile on his face at the thought of how difficult it would be to draw Constance away from such charms as those to give attention to a mere house.

He made rapid dashes through most of the rooms, his complacence increasing with every step. Mrs. Reefer, the housekeeper, who had been housemaid for his mother, had been faithful to every detail. There was nothing left to regret, and there seemed to be nothing to wish for. It had suited his fancy not to admit his retinue of trained service to the house as occupants until its mistress had seen it in its solitude; but they were all near at hand awaiting her will. It gave him pleasure to think that his wife would have none of the domestic trials incident to the lot of most young housekeepers. Two of those whom he had secured had been

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treasures to his mother; for the others, Mrs. Reefer had been trained by that same dear mother, and knew whom to engage and how to train them. Constance should have absolute authority in her home, but no care that any forethought of his could ward off.

VI.

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IN the sitting room that Mr. Curtiss had fitted up for his wife's special use he allowed himself to linger that June afternoon. He had been lavish here in directions that he knew to be in accordance with Constance's tastes, and the general effect justified his belief that her tastes were perfect. He had also in certain directions pleased himself, knowing that he would still please Constance. There was a sewing-chair of unique design and peculiar workmanship, in which his mother used often to sit. In truth no other ever occupied it. He had locked the chair away in his private room when the shadows fell upon his home, not being able to think of any other person as making use of it. He was willing that Constance should. There was a curious workbasket of sweet-scented foreign wood beautifully carved, a trifle that he had brought to his mother from abroad, and she had been charmed with it. It used always to stand beside her chair. It stood there now, with a bit of unfinished

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work in which the needle was set for another stitch. He smiled at the thought of what Constance would say when her eye fell upon that. It was Constance's own, a small white bit that she had been working on one evening when he came unexpectedly. During her momentary absence from the room he had carefully pocketed it with a view to the unfinished workbasket. It would look so very homelike, he thought, lying there waiting for her, that he had not been able to resist the temptation. It had cost him some minutes of guilty silence while he helped search for the work that had so unaccountably gone astray ; but other members of the family had come and gone in the meantime, and it was finally decided that the article must have been carried away with some of Nettie's "things." Naturally it had never been found, and they had wondered over it, and it had cost time and trouble to match the material. He had himself undertaken this task, and sent to the bewildered Constance another yard or two of the white, delicate stuff that, it appeared, was being manufactured into a sleeve. He had been properly ashamed of himself for causing all this trouble and delay, and had also been secretly glad every time he thought of the unfinished sleeve lying in the waiting basket.

It all looked charming to him that evening, with the departing rays of the sun glinting the

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needle, Constance's needle, and touching also his mother's small gold thimble that lay waiting. He had taken steps toward the assurance that the thimble would fit. On the day after to-morrow, when they stood here beside his mother's chair, he would tell Constance how he had brought the gold thimble to his mother one day, and she had said, with one of her tender smiles, "I will wear it, my son, whenever I am taking stitches for you; and some day you will give it to your wife, and tell her from me that it has taken love stitches for you all its life, and must always be kept for such service."

They were little matters, perhaps, about which to weave memory and sentiment, that sewing-chair and the scented-wood basket and the bit of work and the thimble, but they reached to Gordon Curtiss's inmost heart.

Close enough to the sewing-chair to reach out a hand toward it was a small rosewood table in the bay window, and on it lay his mother's Bible, open, as he had been used to seeing it. His mother was always drawing her Bible toward her to glance at a verse that she was studying. Did Constance have such a fashion, he wondered. He did not know; he thought she must; she was very like his mother in small sweet ways. She would like to have this Bible when she knew its story; they would use it together, he and Constance. He had not

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been so constant a Bible reader as his mother had wished, yet no one certainly could respect the book and the habit of reading it more than did he. He reached for it, and opened to a verse that had a memory. His mother had read it aloud one day while her hand toyed with the thick locks of his hair; he had come in tired with some special work, and had dropped on his knees beside her and laid his head in her lap, after a fashion of his childhood. She had read the verse twice with slow, impressive emphasis: —

“As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.”

“That is a good resolution, Gordon,” she had said, “the best one I believe that a young man can make. My son will take it for his life motto, and his mother’s heart will rejoice.”

She had a way of making statements concerning his future in a tone of sweet positiveness, as though not asking for a promise so much as speaking a prophecy. It seemed to him this June evening as a benediction. His house! he was about to establish it, a home. “As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.” He said the words aloud with slow and solemn emphasis, and it was almost to him as though his mother was there and he was responding to her prophecy. He was not

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exactly a praying man, though he sometimes prayed. He bent his knees at this time beside his mother's chair, and spoke with deep feeling:—

"I dedicate this house afresh to my mother's God; I ask that within its walls we may be kept from word or deed that shall dishonor Him; and that we may be able to live our lives together in a manner that shall satisfy my mother." The last touch of sunlight for that day rested on his mother's picture, that occupied an easel near at hand. It lighted up her pictured face with what seemed to the young man a reflected glory from the heaven where she lived. He bent and kissed the face, his eyes dimming with tears as he did so. But they were grateful tears. His mother's prayer had been answered for him; God had been very good; it seemed eminently fitting that he should in gratitude rededicate his mother's home to God. Nay, more, that he should give himself. Constance would be in sweet accord with it all, he was sure of that. Constance was good. They had not talked much together on such themes, but he knew that she held to his mother's faith. He had been with her in the old church at Deepwater one Sunday during a communion service. With his eyes shaded by his hand he had watched her as she took the bread and the cup, and her face had seemed

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to him as the face of an angel. It was certain that they two could make of this home that which would satisfy his mother; he had never quite satisfied her while she was here. God was good to let him atone for it now. He had never in his life been so deeply moved. He went out of the room softly, as though there were a Presence there that must not be disturbed. He even looked back, when he had reached the door, to say aloud, "When I come again I will bring Constance with me." He had a feeling that his mother heard.

The twentieth day of June came and went; and during its hours that ceremony repeated so many times since it took place in Eden that we may be justified in calling it old, yet which to the new lives deeply concerned in it is forever new, and fresh as the flowers that compose their marriage bell, took place once more.

Deepwater was at its best, and Mrs. Kenyon and Mrs. Richard had been equal to the occasion. Dr. Kenyon's handsome home had never looked more beautiful than it did that day in its bridal array. No pains nor expense were spared in giving to Constance all the honors that could have been showered upon a beloved daughter; and the hundreds of guests who moved about the brilliantly lighted grounds agreed that there had never been a more elegant bride nor a finer-looking bridegroom. "I have

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always considered Constance a fine-looking girl," said Mrs. Stevens Potter, who was an authority in all matters pertaining to the fashionable world, "but I must say she outvied herself to-night; she was simply queenly. I could not help thinking how charmingly she would fit into her new home, which is almost palatial. Isn't it delicious that she has never seen the place and hasn't an idea of its beauty? She told me she presumed that she should miss this lawn and these trees. Think of it! And she has miles of lawn, while the wonderful old trees were Judge Curtiss's pride and joy. I should like to be an invisible presence when the bride is introduced to it all. I thought of the roses in the Curtiss conservatory when I saw her bouquet to-night. Do you know, they have fifty varieties!"

Deepwater rolled these and kindred bits of information as sweet morsels under its tongue. It rejoiced heartily in Constance Kenyon's prospective grandeur. She was a Deepwater girl to all intents and purposes, even though she was not born there; she had spent her life thus far among them. She could not attain to the height of eminence in the world of wealth and fashion without reflecting her glory upon Deepwater; they were proud of her, and intended to be. Not for a moment did they think that Mr. Curtiss had condescended. They could

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not forget that no better blood than that of the Kenyons and Stuarts flowed in the veins of human being. But, that point being conceded, there was no harm in feeling proud that such names had become allied with the honored ones of Gordon and Curtiss. Deepwater felt that mutual pride was the order of the day.

No fairer evening was ever granted to a bridal pair than that twentieth of June that made Constance Kenyon Stuart and Charles Gordon Curtiss one "until death did them part"; and as the lookers-on watched the carriages containing the bridal party roll out of sight they felt themselves justified in believing that no young couple ever began life together with fairer prospects of happiness.

Mrs. Gordon Curtiss, as she sat next morning in the room at the hotel which had been her husband's home during the later years of his bachelor life, went over in pleasant memory all the details of her recent experience, and agreed with the verdict that as fair a morning had come to her as is granted to mortals this side of heaven. She was alone in the room, and when she presently reached the place in her thoughts where she was willing to give detailed attention to immediate surroundings, she looked curiously about her to learn what manner of place it was that had been home to

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her husband for so long. She arose and walked across the room and threw open the door of the inner apartment in order to take a deliberate survey. They were pleasant rooms, she decided, exceptionally pleasant when one remembered that they belonged to a hotel and not a home; and then she smiled, a glad, grateful smile, over the contrast that a real home such as she could make for him would be to a man who had been without home ties for eight weary years. Ah, wouldn't she make a very garden of Eden for him! She went back to the window with this thought, and looked out of it eagerly; she was impatient to begin. This twenty-first day of June they were to take possession of their house. In another hour it would be exactly a year since she first saw her husband's face and heard his voice. Mr. Curtiss had planned that when the city clock struck the hour, at that precise moment the doors of his fine old home should be thrown open to welcome its new mistress. His wife had discovered that this little plan in all its minute details was so dear to her husband's heart that she had veiled her curiosity and asked no questions about the Curtiss place, but was holding herself in readiness to be surprised. They should be on their way by this time, and again she leaned from the window to see if she might catch a glimpse of Mr. Curtiss. On

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reaching his rooms the night before, he had found waiting for him a message that had taken him to his business office immediately after breakfast. He had deplored the necessity for leaving his wife alone so soon, and had said that he would on no account do so were not the occasion imperative, and the errand of such a nature that it could be done only in person. It was connected with the tiresome lawsuit that had made it impossible for him to leave town for more than a day's absence. He thought that he had planned to have this day free, however, and had foreseen all possible emergencies, but it seemed that he was mistaken. However, a dozen words with Mr. Aleck Gordon or even with Mr. Chase would be all that was necessary; he felt sure of being able to return within the hour. Constance had laughed at his anxieties about leaving her alone for even so short an absence, and had begged him to remember that she was not a little girl, and had been trusted in town before; had even been allowed to come all the way alone and take care of herself as best she could through a round of shopping. She would not be lonely in the least. Never mind if his books had all been sent to the house, she did not care to read; she would sit by the window and watch the world hurrying by, and imagine stories about different people, while she waited for his face among the crowds.

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It was quite time to expect him now, and she watched the street crossers with added zest. A young woman with an exceedingly pale face and in a black dress that was a trifle shabby about the edges held her attention. She was dodging skilfully between horses, drays, furniture vans, trolley cars, and what not, making her way across a wide street where four great thoroughfares met. She held by the hand a little child who could not have been more than three or four, and some of her dashes seemed to be reckless ones.

The watcher drew a sigh of relief when the two were safely across, and assured herself that she should not like to attempt that alone, especially with a child to care for, and the young woman looked frail and timid — the sort of woman who seems to need protection. She wondered to which of the many streams of life surging by this one belonged. Despite the frayed dress and shabby finger tips there was an indefinable something that marked her in Constance's eyes as having belonged at least at some time to the better class of society. The child was strikingly handsome. Even the slight attention Constance had given him had impressed her with his beauty. Probably the mother was a widow. Poor young creature, left alone in this great world that could be so dreary and cruel! left with a child to rear, a boy, and

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one with the dangerous gift of beauty to add to his temptations. She was letting her thoughts hover about this sombre picture while she kept her eyes upon the crossing with inner senses and outward vision alert for one form and face. Then there came a tap at her door, and the pleasant-faced chambermaid entered. A very attentive chambermaid was Dilsey. Mrs. Curtiss did not know it, but just before her husband went away that morning he had slipped a generous piece of silver into Dilsey's hand and told her that he depended upon her to see that his wife was well cared for during his absence. She bore a twisted bit of paper on a tray and waited respectfully while Constance read.

"I kept the boy, ma'am," she volunteered, "because I thought you might want to send word back."

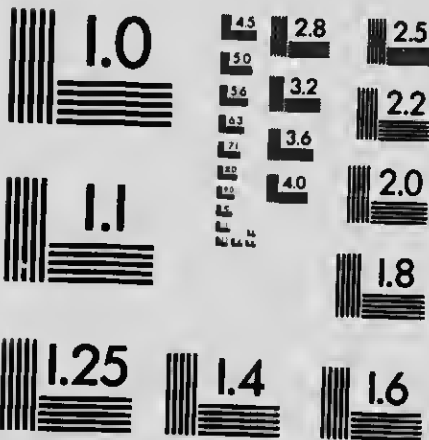
"No," said Constance, "thank you, there is no reply." The girl caught the tone of disappointment in which she spoke; but immediately the lady smiled as she realized how bright her sky must be when so small a disappointment had power to cloud it. The twisted paper held a message from her husband that read thus:—

"MY DARLING: I am the victim of a great — I am tempted to say trial, I presume it is only a disappointment. I find that compli-



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Pauline.

cations have arisen with regard to that critical law case, that demand my personal attention for a matter of two, possibly three, hours. There are points about the case understood at present only by myself; and unexpected developments involving the interests of others make it necessary for me to go over them with the other members of the firm and make them clear. Can my dear wife wait patiently for me even though I should be detained for three long hours? That will be fully two hours past the time that we had set to enter our own doorway! I know it, dear, and am more tried than I can express on paper. You may be sure that I shall make all possible speed, and we will reach our home on the twenty-first, anyway.

"Dearest, may I ask a special favor of you? I am no doubt foolish, but I remember you told me you were not familiar with the part of the city where my hotel is situated — what I ask is that you will *on no account* go out alone, even for a short walk. I know that my dear wife will not deny me this first request."

VII.

"Who Are You?"

OVER this bit of solicitude Constance laughed an amused laugh; yet it was also a pleased one, and in her heart was a grateful glow. She who for years had been the family errand girl, trusted to make her way about the city whither she would; trusted to take care of herself in all weathers and at almost all hours, was henceforth to be guarded as something so precious that she must not even walk out alone by daylight! She liked it.

The pretty chambermaid, who had lingered, despite the word she had received, to see if there were not something she could do to help the wife of so liberal a man as Mr. Curtiss, heard the sweet laugh, saw the happy look in the wife's eyes as the pink deepened on her fair cheek, and said to herself with a softly little sigh, as she at last turned away, "She's awful happy! they mostly are when they first get married. I wonder if it ever lasts?"

The pretty chambermaid had problems of

Pauline.

life to study for herself, and was not altogether sure that the possibilities of her future, though the outlook was rose color now, were safe to trust in. God pity any who are planning to set sail on the sea of wifehood without leaving a few verities to rest upon!

In five minutes the chambermaid was back to see whether she should draw the shades in the back room or leave them up, and she lingered to say: —

"Mr. Curtiss said that I was to keep watch, ma'am, and do everything for you that I possibly could till he got back; and I'm sure I'd like to, myself."

Constance smiled on her. "Mr. Curtiss was very thoughtful of my comfort," she said. "I shall tell him that you were most attentive; but I do not need anything at present, thank you." The winsome smile emboldened the girl.

"We know Mr. Curtiss, all of us here," she said, "and we all like him real well, and wanted him to have a nice wife, and we think he's got her. You and he are awful happy together, aren't you?"

The smile deepened into a laugh. "I should not have chosen just your adjective to describe it," said the 'nice wife,' "but we are certainly happy."

"They mostly are at first," said Dilsey, think-

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ing her great thought aloud. "What I'd like to be sure of is its lasting; seems as if lots of things didn't last. There was a woman here in these very rooms, she had 'em while Mr. Curtiss was abroad the last time; she was a bride, and they was awful happy for a few mont' and then he began to drink and was hateful; and one night he kicked her!"

Constance gave a little exclamation of dismay. It was foolish, of course; she must be growing superstitious as well as sentimental, but it seemed dreadful to think of a bride in these very rooms being kicked by her husband!

"That's gospel truth," said Dilsey, interested in the evident impression she had made. "She left him after a while; they hadn't been married a year yet, when she wouldn't live with him any longer, he was that bad; I'd have done it too, if it had been me. If a man drank and carried on, and was mean to me, I wouldn't live with him, would you?"

"The trouble reaches farther back than that," said Constance, earnestly. "I would not marry any man whom I could not respect with all my soul. Love that is not built upon a solid foundation of respect and trust is not worthy of the name."

"That's what I think," said Dilsey; but she went out quickly, as though she did not want to hear more just then. She was sure of

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her love, poor girl, but not by any means certain about the respect and trust.

Left to herself, Constance went back to her window gazing and her reveries. She wondered what had become of the pale young mother with her handsome boy. She might not be a widow after all; she might have left her husband because he kicked her! The young wife shivered again over that dreadful story, then smiled at her folly. She wished that she had a bit of work to take up her thoughts, or a book to read. Was it possible that that pretty chambermaid who was so anxious to do something for her could supply her with reading matter? She might ring and make the effort. Only she could think of nothing in print that she cared to read just then. It was absurd that she should not go out for a walk; the morning was alluring, and she felt the need of a little vigorous exercise. She was not half a dozen squares removed from a part of the city with which she was acquainted; but she had no idea of going out; instead, it gave her exquisite pleasure to think that she was under bonds, and must not go. Then came the chambermaid again. There was a young woman in the office asking to see Mrs. Curtiss.

"To see me?" said Constance, in surprise. Who could it be? She had many calling acquaintances in town, but none of them were

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sufficiently unconventional, or for that matter intimate enough, to call upon a newly made bride who had not yet reached her home, and whose cards were out for a later date.

"I don't know what her name is, ma'am, she didn't give it. She's a nice-looking woman enough, but she's awful pale and sick looking. She says she wants to see you very particular; that she hasn't any card, but that if you knew who she was you would let her come up fast enough. She's got a real handsome little boy with her."

Constance turned in startled wonderment. Could it be the poor young woman whose perilous street crossing she had watched? If so, what could she want with her? It was hardly possible that this was an acquaintance. She ran rapidly over in mind the various sewing girls and cooks' assistants who had done duty from time to time in her uncle's house of late years, but none of them fitted the present requirements. Besides, the woman, despite her frayed appearance, was distinctly not of that class. Still, it must be one whom she had known in some capacity, and she might be in distress, or at least in need of a friend.

"Are you sure she knows for whom she is asking?" Constance inquired, as all these bewilderingments hurried through her mind.

"Oh, yes'm; I asked very particular. She

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said she wanted to see Mrs. Charles Gordon Curtiss, the lady whose wedding is in all the morning papers."

The newly made bride took time to smile over the idea of having a wedding in the papers, then directed that her caller be shown to her room. Whoever she was, and whatever her errand, she must not be turned away without a hearing.

"It may be something that demands immediate attention," she told herself, as she gave one more look at the street crossing with a hope in her heart that this new development would not detain her long; Gordon might be able to get away sooner than he had said. Then the door opened, and the small pale woman in a black dress, a trifle rusty and somewhat frayed, and with gloves that were much worn, entered the pleasant room, still leading her handsome boy by the hand. She dropped without invitation upon a couch, like one overcome with fatigue.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "I seem to be unusually weak; I have walked too far this morning; and I carried my boy, too, across some of the streets where they had been watering; his shoes are thin and old. Sit down, Charlie, and rest while you can."

She was very pale and small; and her eyes, that were almost too large for her face, ex-

“Who Are You?”

pressed both timidity and appeal. She was manifestly a woman needing the sheltering care that had fallen to the self-reliant Constance's lot. The boy's eyes were not like his mother's, except in size, and his handsome face was aglow with health and wreathed in smiles.

“Isn't this a pretty room?” he began eagerly. And Constance asked herself whose voice it was that his recalled.

“I am sorry you have overwearied yourself,” she said to her caller, with gentle grace. “Will you take this easy-chair and rest a little before you tell me what I can do for you?”

“I do not suppose you can do anything for me,” said the woman, “not a single thing! and yet I *had* to come; it seemed to me that I must. I did not question it at all, but started the very minute that I could, after I heard of it. I thought I should be in time to prevent it, perhaps; and if it had not been for missing my train, I should have reached the place yesterday. I did not want you or anybody to be as miserable as I am. At least, I don't think I did.”

This was all bewildering to Constance.

“Are you miserable?” she asked gently; it was the only word she could think of to say; it seemed to her hard that any woman should be miserable while she herself was so blessed.

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This woman was young, too; not older than herself; perhaps not so old. What was it she had hoped to be in time to prevent? And failing in that, what was it she expected to accomplish by this visit?

"I am very sorry for you," she said aloud; "if there is anything I can do to help you, be sure I shall be glad to do it."

The woman turned her great sad eyes upon Constance with a look that went to the depths of her heart, but the words she spoke were as bewildering as ever.

"Nothing can help me, nothing in this world. There is nothing left for me but to die; I should want to do that right away, only—there is Charlie. I don't think I came for help. How could you help? I suppose I kept on, after I found I was too late, because I wanted to turn your happiness into misery. There was a while that I wanted just that. Why should you be in the highest heaven of happiness, and I in despair? And yet, I suppose I might have let you fancy yourself in heaven for a while. It is sure not to last. Don't I know!"

And now Constance began to be thoroughly alarmed. This woman whom she had carelessly admitted to her room was evidently insane. What mischief might she not do herself or others before she could be got rid

“Who Are You?”

of? With this thought in mind, she turned toward the bell with a feeling that she must summon somebody to her aid.

“Oh, you needn’t ring,” said her caller, quietly. “There is nothing to be afraid of; at least, nothing that I can do. I wonder that I haven’t gone mad, with all I have had to endure, but I haven’t. I can convince you in five minutes that I am perfectly sane, and know only too well what I am talking about, when once I begin. But now that I am here I have a miserable feeling that I might perhaps have kept away, and let you be happy for a while. I was happy; why should you not have your turn? You are only a victim, after all.”

“Who are you?” asked Constance, her face growing pale, and a strange sense of fear and dread creeping over her. “Who are you, and what do you want of me?”

“I don’t know what I want of you; I don’t think I want anything. What could you do, poor creature, except suffer? But as for me, I am what you think you are: I am Mrs. Charles Gordon Curtiss, the lawfully wedded wife of the man who stood up beside you last night, and vowed to love and cherish you ‘until death did you part,’ just as he vowed it to me. I was there an hour after you left, and heard all the town busy with your praises and his. I came from Deepwater this morning; if there

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had been a train, I should have followed you last night.

"You think I am mad," she continued after a moment's pause, during which Constance, who had risen and taken a step toward her, stood as if transfixed with horror, or terror, and gazed upon her. "You think I am mad, don't you? I almost wish I were! You poor creature, I am sorry for you! Isn't it good that I can have such a human feeling as sorrow for others left in me still? I did not suppose that I would feel it for you; but I can see that you have been deceived, just as I was. Oh, he knows how to do it! An angel from heaven couldn't have spoken truer-sounding words, nor sweeter ones, than he always spoke to me until he wearied of me. I was ill, you see, — but I couldn't help that, could I? I tried hard to be well, for his sake, and when I was not, and he saw that I couldn't be, he might have waited a little while, don't you think, until I died? But he didn't. He never had any patience with illness. It isn't in the nature of Charles Curtiss to like frail fading things; he wants radiant health and beauty like yours."

"Stop!" said Constance, suddenly, and the sound of her voice in its sternness startled even herself. "You are not to speak such words of my husband; I will not hear them."

"Who Are You?"

"Poor woman! you haven't any husband. I tell you I am Charles Gordon Curtiss's wife. I was married to him in Florence five years ago this very June. I have the witness here in black and white; you shall look at it for yourself; you will see that it is no forgery. Forgery! why should I want to forge a thing like that? Since I could not keep his love, I care only for the honor of my boy. He ought to own his child. I believe in my soul that if he had deserted only me, and had sent for the child and given him his name and his rights, I would have hidden away in silence and died, making no sign. But could I see my boy ruined without an effort to save him? You wouldn't have done that. And yet I cower away in terror this minute over the thought of how angry, how fearfully angry he will be when he discovers that I have followed and betrayed him. Proof? Haven't I proof enough? even before he comes to confront me. Look at the boy, his boy! Did you ever see eyes like those on any face but one? And the shape of his head;—why the very set of his lips is his father's."

Constance turned and gazed as if fascinated at the beautiful child-face, looking the while herself, as she might have looked had she been reading the record of a soul's doom. Was it the face of her husband in miniature on which

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she was looking? Was it his father's eyes that were so like, so like?

Her caller watched her with a curious pity slowly gathering in her own sad eyes.

"It is too bad!" she said suddenly, much as a child might have spoken; there was a strange mixture of child and woman in all her ways. "In the night I thought I should almost enjoy telling you my story, but I don't; I am very, very sorry for you; you believe that, do you not?"

"I do not believe anything that you are telling me" — Constance's voice was hoarse with pain — "but I must hear now everything that you have to say, and understand just how it was that you came to be so horribly deceived. Where did you meet this man who you think is now my husband? And when did this marriage take place that has crazed your brain?"

"Poor creature!" said her caller again, regarding her with eyes of undoubted sympathy, "I do not wonder at you in the least; it is an awful shock. If I could only be insane! I do not suppose I should care about anything then. People with crazed brains do not know that they are crazy, do they? Why, I met Charles Gordon Curtiss nearly six years ago, while he was abroad. Haven't you heard of his spending two years over there, in the interests of his firm?"

“Who Are You?”

The cord that seemed to be about Constance's heart pulled suddenly tighter, as though a cruel hand had drawn it; she had heard frequently of Mr. Curtiss's two consecutive years abroad.

“I was there, at Florence, with my poor mother; she died, thank God, before she knew anything about the misery that came to me. Mother and I were poor relations in a wealthy family. I am, like yourself, well born. Charles Curtiss looks carefully after all such matters, because, you see, he fancies himself in earnest, each time. You and I are not the only victims; I have found that out too.”

VIII.

For Honor's Sake.

C ONSTANCE suddenly put her hands over her ears as if to shut out torture, and spoke in sharp, tense tones.

"If you persist in insulting my husband in this manner, I can do nothing for you. Gordon Curtiss is above being hurt by lying tongues, and his wife will not hear them. But your poor brain is crazed, I know it is, and I ought to have patience with you; go on, tell me your story."

She had softened her voice with the closing words, and she even drew her mouth into the semblance of a smile intended for soothing and sympathy. The small woman in front of her seemed not to have heard.

"You call him Gordon?" she said reflectively, rather than as a question. "I always said Charles; he liked it best."

And then Constance could seem to hear his voice saying to her as he did one night early in their engagement: "Call me 'Gordon,' dear, if you like the name as well; my mother

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always did ; there are reasons why I am a trifle prejudiced against the other name." Then when she had looked her curiosity he had added : "Silly reasons ; I have acquaintances abroad who are not in every way agreeable ; there is a sort of kinship among us and they always call me 'Charles,' and I do not like them to have anything in common with you."

He had smiled as he said it, and she had laughed and told him he was too exclusive, but she had always, after that, said "Gordon." And now her strange guest's words went through her like a knife. The woman continued her story without further prompting.

"Mother and I were out there with father's sister who had married a rich man. After mother died I lived on with them, ostensibly as one of the family, but I was in reality nursery governess and nursery drudge. The children were disagreeable, and their mother was willing that they should be, to me. Charles Curtiss was a frequent guest in the house, and saw it all, and his kind heart was touched with pity — he had a kind heart in those days. I was a poor fool, and I believed that pity was really 'akin to love,' and when he professed that love came too, I believed that, and was glad, oh, so glad, to be married to him. I cried because mother was not there to share my joy. My aunt did not like the marriage ; she had imagined that

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Charles Curtiss was interested in her oldest daughter—I presume he made the girl think so; though I did not believe it at the time—so we had no wedding, nothing like the Deep-water experience, only a quiet ceremony in the Chapel; he said he preferred it that way, and I, poor fool, believed every word he said. But there were witnesses, and at least five of them are living now, and can testify to the truth of what I am telling you; there was nothing secret about it. I lived in heaven for nearly a year. I can see now that he began to weary of me before the year was out, but I did not realize it at the time. Then he went home to America, recalled suddenly by business so urgent that there was not time to plan for me to accompany him.” Again that awful tug at the ever tightening string about Constance’s heart. Mr Curtiss had told her once, that after spending nearly two years abroad, he started homeward at an hour’s notice. The story continued.

“He was to return in a very few weeks, or I was to be sent for to go to him; but he never returned, and I was never sent for. It is a short story, after all, you see. A beautiful dream; heaven for a year; then, a slow awakening, and after that years of—you may supply the name. I had letters at first; very tender and very plausible ones. Unexpected business complications held him, and he did not

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want to send for me, because he was arranging matters so that we could make our permanent home in beautiful Florence and need never return to this 'American desert.' I trusted in him as I would in an angel, even after the letters and remittances ceased; long afterward; but I know now that he never meant to come back; never meant any of the nice things he said and wrote. There was a time when I believed him dead, and I worked hard to put myself into decent mourning for him. It was not long after that, that a New York paper fell into my hands that contained an account of a brilliant lecture he had given the night before! I had not known that he was a lecturer, but I knew he could do anything he chose. He wrote poetry, exquisite poetry, some of it so tender and pathetic that a stone, almost, would have cried over it. After that I wrote to him: I wrote volumes! I told him about our boy with his eyes, and the letters were returned to me! Not unread, mind you, they had been opened, and enclosed in other envelopes and addressed: 'Mrs. Charles G. Curtiss.' The same hand that addressed them had written those first loving letters to me; but in these there was no word of his, not so much as a reference to his child. Don't you think that was the refinement of cruelty? Even then I believed in him. That sounds insane, doesn't it? But

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I got up a theory that he had been unfortunate and lost money, and that he was resolved not to come back to me until he could come in a manner that befitted the position of a Curtiss. You know what an old family the Curtisses are? and they are all proud; so I hoped against hope and against sense, and wrote, oh, such letters to him! I begged him to come back to us, or at least to let Charlie and me hear from him. I told him I was at work, and that I could support Charlie and myself as well as not until he could do for us again, but that I could not live without his letters; and he never wrote one line! After a time he grew tired of returning my letters, I suppose; they did not come back. Then I lost all trace of him, and all hope. And then, — I saw a report of him in a stray paper, that he was going to be married! After that, I resolved to find him. I knew the old family home was somewhere in this region, and I meant to get Charlie there in time to save him. But it took me a cruel while to raise the money, and then I fell ill, and it was thought that I would die; but I had to live, you know, for Charlie's sake, until I could find his father. And at last I accomplished it, and reached Deepwater just one hour after the ceremony had been performed that you thought made you his wife!"

It was a much longer story than that. Con-

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stance, from listening at first with a half terror at the thought that she was alone with an insane person, listened later in a terror born of other fears. Her face grew pale and then paler, and a strange ashy hue overspread it, and her heart began to beat in great thuds that made her faint; but still she listened, and from time to time thrust in her sharp, keen questions, which were answered with a promptness that took her hope away.

By very slow degrees, and fighting skilfully every inch of the road, she let the fearful suspicion take hold upon her that not herself, but this other woman, was Charles Gordon Curtiss's lawful wife, and the beautiful boy whose set of chin was like his father's was Charles Gordon Curtiss's deserted son! She was too stupefied by the revelation to feel the full horror of it, but sat as one dazed, and stared at the woman, and thought the strangest things about her, and about herself, as one might whose brain was reeling. Yet she was keen, too, and plied those questions and felt each time the stab as of a knife at her heart whenever the story would match certain facts in Mr. Curtiss's life, of which she had heard before. She reached again for the marriage certificate and read those two names: Catherine Pauline Frazier and Charles Gordon Curtiss.

"He always called me Pauline," the woman

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said, with that curious way she had of interjecting trifles which had nothing to do with the tragedy she was making — “my uncle’s family called me Catherine, but he never would; he hated the name, he said; and it pleased me just as well, for my mother always said Pauline.” Constance visibly shuddered; here was another of those awful trifles with which the woman was unwittingly proving her truth. They were sitting, she and Mr. Curtiss, in Nettie’s parlor, and he was addressing an envelope for her: “Miss Catherine Holland,” and as he made the graceful curve to the “C” he said: “I am glad your name is not Catherine; I had an Aunt Catherine who was not a pleasant feature of my childhood, and made me contract a prejudice against the name.”

“Look here,” said the child-woman, suddenly sitting erect and looking earnestly at Constance, — long afterward, in recalling her, Constance applied that name “child-woman,” she was in some respects so like an undisciplined child, — “I have decided what I will do; it is all too late for me; and besides, I am not going to live long, anyway; I have a dreadful cough; my mother died of consumption, and so did all her family; if Charles had only been willing to wait for a few years! Well, never mind, he wasn’t; he never liked to wait for things; what he wanted he wanted immediately, I knew that

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was his nature. But I almost wish I had stayed away and let him alone; only I couldn't, you know, for Charlie's sake; it really doesn't matter for me, now. But since I have seen you, I have thought of a plan; I believe in my soul that you would be good to him; and if you will take him and get his father to own him and bring him up as a son of Charles Gordon Curtiss should be brought up, I will give my baby to you and go away, and never trouble either of you again in this world. Think of it! I'll trust my baby to you; and he is dearer to me than life — Oh, that isn't saying much, is it? because I don't care anything about my life any more; I want to be done with it. You would be good to Charlie, always, wouldn't you? You would for his sake, anyway; he is his son, remember."

With those words Constance started up and back in horror, the awful spell upon her broken at last.

"Stop!" she said, her voice not fierce but solemn. "Do not say another word like that to me. Do you think I would live with a man who is not my husband? If a third of your story is true, it is I who must go away, and it is you that he must take to his home this day; you and your boy; his boy! He must and he shall!"

The child-nature in the other woman was for

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the moment uppermost, she gazed at Constance with wide half-frightened eyes that were yet fascinated, and presently changed into admiring eyes.

"You are beautiful," she said slowly, "and wonderful! Could you do that? Could you go away from him, knowing that he loves you and wants you? Could you give him up for my sake? I couldn't, if I thought he loved me the least little bit. I could lie in the dust before him and kiss his feet, even now, after all that he has made me suffer; but I could not give him up and go away."

"It is for honor's sake," said Constance, her voice cold and hard. "For honor and truth's sake, not for yours."

The woman put up her small hands to cover her face and cried out feebly: "If we could both have known you long ago, we might have been saved. You are good, and you are strong. But it is too late. I find that after all my effort to be here I do not want to see him; I am afraid. As I sit here and think of meeting him, my breath almost stops, in terror. You do not know him as I do; he can be hard, and cruel; oh, he can! I have said nothing about that, but—we quarrelled sometimes even during that year, and *I know*. He has the Curtiss temper; he told me so himself, and he said that the Curtiss temper when roused was a terrible thing."

For Honor's Sake.

If Constance could have grown paler she would have done so under this added thrust of that awful knife. She had heard of and laughed fearlessly over the Curtiss temper.

"My dear," the queen of Deepwater gossips had said to her once, "he is very like his father, the old judge, in some respects, and that man's temper was something fearful! I hope you will never have occasion to discover that his son has inherited that trait."

And Constance, as she laughed indulgently because the gossip was an old family friend and meant no harm, had said that despite all such warnings she was not able to conceive of herself as in the least afraid of him. Yet this child-woman sat crying and shuddering because she feared him! Then Constance thought of the bride who had been in that very room and whose husband had kicked her!

They talked long. The story was gone over again and yet again in minutest detail, and certain possible threads of explanation were followed up with the eagerness of despair until they vanished. The two hours that Mr. Curtiss had set as his first limit of absence, passed, and it was nearing the close of the third hour when Constance, suddenly becoming aware of this, started up in frantic haste. Her resolution had been taken; her one passionate desire now was to get away before the man that she

Pauline.

had called her husband should return. The one added horror that she told herself she could not bear, would be to look upon his face again and hear his voice. She must go away at once, and forever. "I am going," she said, and she looked toward the inner room, where her street wraps lay waiting. "I am going now, at once. There is no time to be lost. You will wait here to see him when he comes. Of course you will; it is the right thing, and therefore the only thing to be done."

"But where will you go?" faltered her visitor, with terror-stricken voice; she had accomplished so much more by her visit than she had expected or even desired. "What will become of you, and what will he say or do to Charlie and me? Oh, I am afraid to stay! He might even kill us!"

"Madam," said Constance, "you are a woman, and not a child nor an idiot. Do not talk such words. There is certainly no physical danger to be feared; you must know that, at least, since you are not a lunatic, as I had hoped you were. It doesn't matter to anybody where I am going. I shall leave a note, explaining all that will need explaining; I wish never to see him or you again; and that is as it should be."

With hands that trembled as with an ague chill she tore a leaf from a small tablet that was in her bag, and wrote:—

For Honor's Sake.

"I have seen Pauline! I am going away forever."

Then she rang the bell. The watchful Dilsey, who had been troubled by the length of the call and the continued absence of the husband, was at hand immediately. The lady whom she believed to be Mrs. Curtiss was putting on her street jacket.

"Are you going out, ma'am, before he comes?" was her surprised question.

"Yes," said Constance, "I am going out. Bring me an envelope from the office." By a strong effort of will she steadied her hand to write once more the familiar name —

CHARLES GORDON CURTISS.

Then she laid the sealed note on the table to wait for him.

"And what shall I say to him, ma'am?" asked Dilsey looking anxiously at the woman who could not have been paler had her heart ceased its beating. "Hadn't you better wait till he comes? He can't be long now; and you look like death, you do, being so tired!" and she darted a wrathful glance at the small woman cowering in the easy-chair.

"I cannot wait!" said Constance. "I have had an imperative summons. This note will

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explain. And this woman wishes to see Mr. Curtiss as soon as he comes. She will wait here; her business is important."

"And will I call a carriage for you?" pleaded Dilsey. "Or, would you want me to go along with you? I know I can, for the folks here like to please Mr. Curtiss, and he said I was to take care of you, ma'am, till he came back; you look that sick that I don't think you ought to go alone."

"I must go alone," said Constance.

IX.

"Who Was 'Pauline'?"

DILSEY followed her charge from the room, muttering to herself, and feeling very savage toward the intruder who seemed to have brought trouble already to the bride of a day.

The poor, pale creature had dropped back into the depths of the great chair, and covering her face with one hand was sobbing softly behind it. Long before this, her boy, growing weary of gazing from the window at the throngs below, had thrown himself at full length upon a couch, and was sleeping the sound sleep of healthy and overwearied childhood. As Constance gave a swift glance backward, the image that she carried away with her was his beautiful flushed face, with its strange likeness to that other face.

Left alone, the child-woman abandoned herself to a paroxysm of grief, and sobbed and sobbed as though she could never stop. Presently the boy awakened, slipped from his couch, and came to her side, his blue eyes still heavy with sleep, yet growing full of sympathy rather

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than wonderment. Evidently he was used to his mother's tears. He put up his small hand and tried to brush one from her cheek. At touch of the baby hand a great terror seemed to seize the woman. She listened, and from among the many sounds in the halls thought she detected a familiar one. She seized the boy by the arm, and scarce knowing what she did, hurried to the door, leaving it open behind her, and crossed the hall. The door to a small room, or rather closet, stood open; there was a chair inside, over which hung window draperies awaiting attention. Into this chair she sank and drew her boy to her knee. It appeared that he was used to sudden, inexplicable movements, and to silence. His mother held her hand to her throbbing heart and waited. Her feeling had been that she must get away from that room, must see that man before he saw or heard of her. She must be sure from his face that his mood was not, to begin with, one that would frighten her beyond effort. If it was not, perhaps the boy—he had never seen his boy.

She drew her breath in little gasps. Somebody was coming down the hall with quick steps, some man. If she could but stay hidden in this little room until she caught a glimpse of his face and heard his voice! Nobody disturbed her. Dilsey had been suddenly sum-

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moned to the fourth floor, and had found there perplexities that hindered and vexed her; for the moment her anxieties about the fair bride of a day slipped from her. It was Mr. Curtiss striding down the hall; he had been too impatient to wait for the elevator, and had come upstairs three steps at a time.

As he neared his own wide-open door he spoke eagerly:—

“Did you think I was never coming, my darling? The complications were —” He stopped, seeing no one, and called, “Constance?”

There was no reply. He stepped to the inner room, to find it vacant. It was nothing, of course; his wife had gone into the hall for a moment. Or she might have wearied of the rooms and gone down to the parlor. He would wait just a moment or two, and then go and see. There was a slight, a very slight, twinge of disappointment; he had imagined his wife as on the watch for him. He smiled at his folly, and reminded himself that he had been long delayed. She could not watch the streets all the time. It was certainly very trying that he had had to leave her alone so long. Then his eye caught sight of the letter addressed to himself. Of course he recognized the handwriting. He dashed at the envelope eagerly, and read the brief message.

Pauline.

"I have seen Pauline! I am going away forever."

The child-woman across the hall suddenly pressed one hand over her mouth to cover a low sound that was not like a scream nor yet a moan, but was a stifled mixture of both. Then she rose up, clutched her boy by the arm, and slipped like a swift shadow down the hall, down the long flight of heavily carpeted steps, making no sound, through the lower hall unchallenged; people were coming and going constantly, this one knew her own business, doubtless, out on the steps at last! on the street, across the street, reckless alike of horses and trolley, yet mercifully preserved, somehow, around the corner, out of sight of the room where that man stood wearing the face he wore when he read his letter! She wished she could forget that face; she was afraid it would haunt her always, and she had so many things to haunt her, poor creature!

For a moment or two Mr. Curtiss stood like one in a dream, reading and rereading those strange words:—

"I have seen Pauline! I am going away forever."

Suddenly his room bell rang fiercely; whirl upon whirl, that brought Dilsey flying down from the fourth floor and the clerk from the office. "Something must have happened!"

“Who Was ‘Pauline’?”

they told themselves, as they ran. Something had happened. Mr. Curtiss turned fiercely upon Dilsey. “Where is Mrs. Curtiss?” he demanded, in a tone that he might have used if he meant to accuse the girl of murdering her.

“She has gone out,” faltered Dilsey, dismayed, she knew not why.

“Gone out where?”

Dilsey recovered herself. “I don’t know, sir; she left a note for you; that ought to tell you more than I know.”

Mr. Curtiss held the open letter at that moment in his hand. The sight of it made him realize the importance of self-control; by a violent effort he mastered his voice and manner, bringing them into a semblance of the usual.

“Yes, of course; but she forgot to tell me where she was going, and—I was taken by surprise. Can you give me an idea, Dilsey, where to go for her?”

“No, I can’t, sir. She had a call, Mr. Curtiss,—why! where is that woman?” Dilsey looked about her in new bewilderment.

“What woman?” Mr. Curtiss could not keep himself from biting off his words as though he were in court examining an especially trying witness.

“Why, the woman who came to see her, and

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stayed till she tired her all out. Mrs. Curtiss looked that pale and sick that I made bold to coax her not to go out till you came, or to let me go with her; but she said she must go alone, she had been sent for, and the business was important; and the woman was to wait here to see you as soon as you came in; her business was important, too."

"Where is the woman?"

"That is more than I know." And Dilsey peered anxiously into the next room. "She was to stay here, Mrs. Curtiss said. I wish I had stayed too; it's against the rules of the house to leave strangers in rooms that don't belong to them; but I thought it was all right, of course, because she had come to see Mrs. Curtiss. She has gone, sir, so far as I can see."

Under the circumstances, Mr. Curtiss controlled his manner remarkably well.

"What sort of woman was she, Dilsey?"

"She was a little bit of a pale woman in a black dress and black gloves and everything; and she looked kind of scared some of the time. She was awful tired when she got here, and looked about sick; Mrs. Curtiss made her sit in the easy-chair and rest. She had a handsome little boy with her; just a baby, you might say, three, or four, maybe. She came hours ago, only a little while after the boy brought

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your note, and they talked and talked! I was up and down the hall a good deal, kind of waited around, you know, as much as I could, to be on hand if anything was wanted; but she didn't ring, and they seemed to be just talking, until at last, half an hour or so ago, she rang the bell and called for that envelope you've got in your hand, and told me that."

"Told you what!"

"Why, what I told you; she said she must go out right away; she had been sent for, or something like that; and she had got to go alone. I wanted to go with her and take care of her, as you told me, but she wouldn't let me. And she said the woman was to wait here to see you, just as I said. And why she didn't wait, after making all this fuss, is more than I can guess."

An awful and unreasoning anger swept over Mr. Curtiss. Had the small pale woman been within hearing, she would have thought of the Curtiss temper.

"How dare you," he said in a voice of thunder, "let a strange person in here to annoy my wife, and then let her go out on these crowded streets alone, after the charge I gave you this morning?"

Dilsey had borne a good deal that day, and her nerves were much stirred. She admired Mr. Curtiss, but she was not used to such

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words or tones from him. She too could speak a language to which he was not accustomed.

"I did not know that your wife was a prisoner," she said angrily. "The woman called for her all regular as people do at hotels, and I took up the word, and she chose to see her; and she chose to go out afterward, and she wouldn't let me go with her; and I don't see how any decent man can blame me."

Again came to Mr. Curtiss's perturbed mind the need for caution. He put an iron will upon his emotions.

"True," he said, in almost his natural tone. "I was so annoyed at the discovery that Mrs. Curtiss's kind heart has evidently been imposed upon by some designing stranger that I did not realize what I was saying. Of course you could not help what has happened, and I have no doubt but that you were very thoughtful and kind. Now will you go at once and have the house searched for this mysterious stranger? She must be wandering about it somewhere, if she wished to see me. Bring her here as promptly as possible; I should be out in search of Mrs. Curtiss." From force of habit he looked at his watch.

"It's some of that horrid law business, I s'pose." Dilsey was mollified and sympathetic, and volunteered this crumb which she

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meant for comfort as she turned to obey his directions. She believed that the “horrid law business” represented vexation and iniquity enough to account for anything; but Mr. Curtiss, being in her estimation the greatest lawyer in the world, could soon unravel the mystery.

Mr. Curtiss strode after her to close and lock his door, with a feeling that he must be alone with his misery. Then he read again the brief message that told so little, yet so fearfully much. Letting the paper drop from his fingers he pressed both hands against his throbbing temples and tried to think connectedly. What had happened? Who was “Pauline”? and what tale of horror could she have spread before his wife to lead her to write those words, “I am going away forever!” What had become of the woman? He must move heaven and earth to find her, for she alone could explain this mystery. No, he must first find his wife. He must go this moment! Why had he allowed a second’s delay? Yet where should he go? In that great city, which way should he turn to find a woman who had not only left no clew to her whereabouts, but had meant to leave none? Still, that, of course, was folly. If Constance, in a momentary passion over some fancied discovery of wrong, had allowed herself to make such a

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resolve, it would not be even so long a time as this before she would have repented her folly, yes, and her wickedness. Constance was not cruel ; she would have no wish to torture him. She had been rendered wild for the moment over some story. What could the story have been ? But her sane, strong nature would gain its poise, and she would come back to him, of course. He must be very careful ; much more careful than in his surprise he had been. Why had he allowed himself to speak so plainly before Dilsey ? The world must not know, no one in the world must know, that there had risen a moment's cloud between his wife and himself. He must be calm and self-possessed ; he must act as though nothing in the least serious had occurred. He must control himself in order to shield his wife.

With these and a dozen other conflicting trains of thought that seemed to whirl through his brain instead of being summoned by his reason, he got through with an awful hour ; doing nothing except to gaze at times at the human life continually surging by on the street below, with the feeling that his wife must be among them on her way back to him. Dilsey had returned in due time to say that she could find no trace of that queer woman, and that she must have changed her mind about waiting, and slipped away without anybody noticing her.

"Who Was 'Pauline'?"

The elevator boy had a dim notion that he saw a woman something like her go down the hall awhile ago, but he wasn't sure; it might have been when she went upstairs that he noticed her. Folks were coming and going all the time, and he couldn't remember; no more could any of them; but there hadn't been anything missed, so Dilsey guessed that the woman wasn't a thief, and maybe she would come back after a while and explain things. The uppermost feeling in Dilsey's heart was a desire to comfort the man whose face showed that he had been stricken.

He had forced himself to smile, and to thank the girl and tell her that all would be made clear when his wife returned. He had been greatly tried at first at the thought of her being on the streets alone; he had not realized that she was not a stranger in the city. She must have been summoned to some person who was ill, and as she had not known how long he would be detained, she had probably thought it not wise to wait for him. Then he had returned to his watch at the window, and had racked his brains once more in search of some clew to "Pauline." The name was not to be found among his list of acquaintances. This he assured himself a dozen times, then his mental consciousness said: Wait, what was that dim memory coming slowly up from his

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forgotten past? A girl in his mother's employ years ago. Had they not laughed together, his mother and he, over her high-sounding name: "Emogene Pauline?" They had called her Emma, he remembered. He had not thought of the name "Pauline" since he was a boy, nor of the girl who bore it. He recalled her distinctly now; or at least his mother's words concerning her grew distinct. "Have a care, Gordon, Emma admires you greatly. I heard her tell Nancy this morning that you were a gentleman, if there ever was one, and her silly little head is as full of dime novels and nonsense as it well can be. If you smile your thanks for service, as you did this morning, and hold the door open for her to pass, I am afraid she will think you have lost your heart to her!"

He could seem to hear himself laugh, as he asked his mother if she wished him to be other than a gentleman to girls in her employ. The silly little Emma had gone away after a few months — or was it weeks? — under circumstances that had distressed his mother, and filled her with apprehension for the future of one so easily tempted. His mother had tried to keep her in sight, he vaguely remembered, and had failed; the girl had drifted out of their lives; but her name was Pauline. Could it be possible that she had appeared to Con-

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stance with some strange and terrible tale fabricated with a view to extorting money?

It seemed an unreasonable idea: the girl, as he remembered her, had not skill enough for anything tragic; but what idea that was reasonable fitted the present situation?

X.

"Something's Wrong!"

AFTER that, Gordon Curtiss gave himself up for a time to a fierce anger that mingled strangely with his misery.

If his wife had so little confidence in him, so small a measure of faith for the man with whom she had stood but yesterday at the marriage altar and promised that only death should separate them, that she could turn from him in uncontrollable passion because of some tale that at the worst could only have referred to his boyhood, why should he care to seek her or to have her return to him? What hope could there be of their having a happy or even an endurable life together, if it had begun in such distrust as this? Would he have believed aught against her? Not if an angel from heaven had appeared and accused her! Then he went over the details again. Suppose his conjecture was correct, what could that girl Pauline have told about him, a boy of nineteen, to rouse such a passion of jealous anger? Whatever it was, why had it not

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occurred to Constance to wait and investigate? His life as a boy had been spent in this city; there were hundreds who could testify, if she needed their testimony, to the spotless name he had borne. Perhaps she had gone on a tour of investigation, and would return, presently, prepared to wind her arms about him and lay her head on his shoulder and say, "Dearest, I have discovered that that Pauline told me only lies!" It seemed to him that he could see himself, having heard this, putting her hands away from him; gently, not angrily, but yet putting them away as he said:—

"Have you, indeed! Do you know that if you had been accused before me of any evil whatsoever, I should have known at once, without investigation, that the tale was false?" Thus much her lack of faith surely demanded. Yet before that awful night was over, Gordon Curtiss assured himself a hundred times that if he could but see his wife's face and hear her voice he would forgive at once and forever, everything, anything.

By six o'clock he roused himself to send a telegram to Mrs. Reefer, stating that their plans had been changed, and she need not expect Mrs. Curtiss and himself until she heard from him again. Then he sent for Dilsey and told her he was going after Mrs. Curtiss, and should not return until the next

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day, perhaps not then; he could not tell just when Mrs. Curtiss could get away. Whereat Dilsey looked much relieved, and ventured to say that she was "awful glad he had got word from her!" And "Was it her mother that was took sick so sudden?" And "Why hadn't that little woman waited and told him all about it, as she promised to?" He got rid of Dilsey, he did not afterward remember how, save that he knew he took infinite pains to shield his wife from possible blame; then he went to Deepwater by the first train that would take him there. He had decided that Constance had gone home; since the night was coming, and she had not returned to him, where else would she go? He felt that he must find her that night, if he was to keep his reason.

He had taken the journey from the city to Deepwater many times during the year, and each time had chafed over the many stops that the train made, and the general tediousness of the way. On this evening it seemed to him to fairly crawl! There were times when he had the utmost effort to restrain himself from springing from the train at some way station, under the power of the feeling that he could walk, or run, to her faster than steam was taking him. As he finally swung himself once more on the Deepwater platform, and without wait-

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ing for omnibus or carriage, made a dash down the road, the station agent looked after him curiously. “Something’s wrong,” he told himself, oracularly. Mr. Curtiss took the short cut across the park, and when he reached its more shaded portion broke into a run. A hundred voices in his brain seemed crying to him, “Only last night!” They clamored it in his ears as he rang the bell at Dr. Kenyon’s door. Only last night he had gone out from that home with his bride on his arm, the proudest, happiest man that trod the earth!

The bell clanged through the house, and made Richard Kenyon wonder testily what “idiot” that was who couldn’t wait for decency. It was past calling hours, and Kate not being in attendance, it was Richard who answered the bell, and stood dumfounded before Mr. Curtiss.

“Where is Constance?” Both men spoke the words at the same instant. Mr. Curtiss was the first to take in that fact, and he seized Richard Kenyon by the arm and shook it violently as he said:—

“Where is she? What have you done with her? You can’t mean that she is not here!”

Long afterward, when Richard Kenyon had only contempt to express for Mr. Curtiss, he owned that his heart had ached for the man

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who seized his arm and shrieked those words into his ears like one insane.

It was a terrible story that he had to tell; as he tried to tell it to those roused and frightened people, who showed then more clearly than ever before what Constance was to them, he realized even more forcefully the meagreness of his information and the fearful strangeness of it all.

They got through the night. It was necessary that they should do so without action; there being positively nothing that could be done, save to make their fears more vivid by talk, until the early morning express took the three men to town, leaving Mrs. Kenyon and Mrs. Richard to cry and mourn and conjecture alone.

Dr. Kenyon returned that night; he felt compelled to do so. He had been twice telegraphed for; it seemed that he must look after and minister to the suffering at home, even though his own heart was torn with apprehension. He shook his head in response to eager inquiries; they had not been able to accomplish anything; he could not go into details. He had not known how dear Constance was to him until now.

Richard was gone for a week; then he came home to have a conference with his father and plan new ways of search; for as yet the searching had been utterly fruitless. It was a relief

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to the poor young man to speak out to his wife the growing fierceness of his feeling toward Mr. Curtiss.

“Oh, he is very innocent, and in agony, of course! Depend upon it, Nettie, he knows much more than he tells; it is a weak as well as an incoherent story. This ‘Pauline,’ he knows nothing about her, cannot conjecture what she may have told. He can recall the name only as one belonging to a little servant maid of his mother’s, years ago when he was a boy. She was a mere child about whom he knew little then, and has known nothing since. Do you believe that? I tell you she knows something of him, and doubtless has solemn reason for remembering him! We have all been careless; criminally careless. I wonder at my father, as I wonder at myself, for taking things for granted as we did. Charles Gordon Curtiss, of the great law firm of Curtiss, Curtiss and Gordon! that is positively all that we know of him! What if they were old, wealthy, influential families? How much does that sort of thing tell for the character of the next generation? Gordon Curtiss has spent years of his life abroad, — what kind of a man was he there? Nobody knows. We have sacrificed Constance! My poor sister! I know her well. She would not bear anything of this kind; of the kind that it evidently is. Injustice toward

Pauline.

this Pauline, whoever she is, would have driven Constance wild."

This idea grew upon him, and imparted itself to others of his family, as the weeks passed and the missing Constance made no sign, and they discovered no clew to her whereabouts. They had moved with utmost caution; Dr. Kenyon seconding earnestly Mr. Curtiss's statement that his wife's name must be shielded from public talk as far as possible. A great deal had been found to be possible. It is doubtful if any beside Mr. Curtiss ever knew how much time and money it took to keep the pens of reporters away from the story; but to a remarkable extent it was accomplished. Detectives were employed, of course, but their work was so quiet that only those immediately concerned knew of it. Among Mr. Curtiss's acquaintances the story gained ground,—perhaps the chambermaid, Dilsey, best understood how,—that Mrs. Curtiss, on the morning after her wedding, had been unexpectedly summoned to the sick and dying bed of one who was very dear to her; and for a time, well-meaning people drove Mr. Curtiss to the verge of frenzy by asking what word he had from his wife, and "Was it an accident that had caused the trouble?"

Some one said it was the lady's father who was so ill; a disreputable father they had him,

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who had appeared suddenly, and whom Mr. Curtiss would have none of. Others stoutly affirmed that this could not be so, for Mrs. Curtiss’s father was dead, and she had always looked upon Dr. Kenyon as a father. The only certain feature in the case was that there was a mystery; and those who called themselves Mr. Curtiss’s intimate acquaintances whispered about it solemnly; sometimes it was a father, at others a worthless brother with whom she had solemnly promised to have nothing to do, and she had broken her word and gone to him. Sometimes he had the smallpox, and his daughter, or sister, or whatever she was, had gone to him recklessly and was quarantined. There were days when the malady was even worse than smallpox, and the details too grave to be mentioned in other than whispers.

At first the talk was all kindly, so far, at least, as the husband was concerned. One and all agreed that he looked like death, and that no stranger, sadder experience could have come to him. By degrees there grew to be some shaking of heads and grave whispers that all was not as it should be, even with him; and another series of conjectures was set afloat that got themselves reported as facts, only they contradicted other facts, and so were not believed by all; and not one, even of the wildest guessers, reached the truth. Perhaps

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that is hardly necessary to state, when it is remembered that not even among those most nearly concerned was there one who really knew the truth. Shrewd suspicion was all that they had to rest upon.

Meantime, Mr. Curtiss kept his reason; and this, each night, was a fresh astonishment to him. Often he sat with his throbbing head held close between his hands, and told himself, bringing his iron will to bear upon the case, that he *must* keep sane and sensible for his wife's sake; and went out from his sleepless night to begin a new day of fruitless search. The members of his law firm pitied him profoundly. They, of course, knew all that there was to know, or all that Mr. Curtiss said there was to know. They had their shrewd suspicions, but they did not mention them even to one another; yet each knew in his secret heart that he believed, with the more outspoken Richard Kenyon, that the matter was better understood by Gordon Curtiss than he would have them think. But, unlike Richard Kenyon, they still pitied him.

"Poor fellow!" the elder Mr. Curtiss said, in the privacy of his own home, with only his own wife to hear. "Poor fellow! some of the wild oats he sowed when a boy have probably borne an unexpected crop."

His wife, who was only Gordon Curtiss's

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cousin, not his aunt, did yet put in her suggestive protest.

"But we never supposed that this boy had any wild oats in his life, you know."

"No, we didn't; he was always an exemplary boy. I cannot recall that there were ever any ugly stories about him; he was very different from poor Catherine's sons, but one can never be sure; these quiet, dignified boys who have behaved well at home, sometimes go to terrible lengths when they get away. Gordon was abroad a great deal for so young a fellow; and he went alone, you remember. Still, it seems a fearful pity to have his life wrecked in this way. If his wife had only confided in somebody, she might have been kept from rushing off and ruining him. It has about killed him as a lawyer, I am afraid. I don't believe he will ever be able to give his mind to business again; at least not until he finds her."

"And when he finds her it may be worse than it is now," said his wife. "I wonder that he doesn't think of that, since she left him of her own accord."

And among them all there was not one who unquestioningly believed in the man whom they had known and respected for years! No, that is not quite true; there was one who trusted him blindly and unswervingly, quite

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as a dog trusts his master, whatever that master does, or whatever others think of him. That was Dilsey, the chambermaid, at his hotel. Dilsey still talked, and was indeed the main source of information with a large class of people. Some things she surmised, and others it is to be feared she fabricated; always with the same motive, an ever increasing desire to have Mr. Curtiss appear blameless. Her loyalty to him extended to his wife, and she worked so earnestly to arrange a plausible theory which would fit the needs of both, that, as the days passed and nothing more trustworthy presented itself, she came to believe in her own statements, and spread her "facts" before all inquirers.

Meanwhile, those ubiquitous creatures, the private detectives, were completely baffled. It may well be believed that no money was spared in this direction; the very highest talent that the profession commands was brought into requisition, and the men worked industriously and followed up numerous clues that came to naught. They complained earnestly of the demand for secrecy; it was this that was crippling them. The entire American public belonged to the detective force, the chief said, and some of them possessed remarkable skill. If the lady's photograph could appear in the morning papers, together with an accurate description

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of her as last seen, there wasn't a boy in the slums but would consider himself an especially detailed detective to work up the case, and somebody would get on the track of her before night. The stricken husband, to whom these words were spoken, fairly gasped over them, and his pallid face seemed to grow paler at the thought. His wife's picture bandied about in the slums! the woman whom he had meant to shield so tenderly from every breath of air outside of the safe, fair world to which she belonged! He could not do it. Ten thousand times for her own sake he could not; it was his duty to shield her still; she had made it well-nigh impossible, but with the thought of her sure return ever before him he must do what he could. The utmost possible privacy must be insisted upon, even though it retarded their progress indefinitely.

In this decision the Kenyons concurred, though they reached it by somewhat different lines of thought.

"It would be but an added insult to Constance," argued the roused and indefatigable Richard. "It is not as though she were a lost child, remember; we may be sure that she knows exactly what she is about. She does not intend to be found, and we need not doubt that she has only too good reason for not desiring it. Privacy, so far as it is possible

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for us to maintain it, is all that we can do for her now. If I could see the poor girl and go down on my knees to beg forgiveness for having allowed her to be sacrificed to a great name, after that I might be able to help her a little with my sympathy. But I will not help to blazon abroad her pain and disgrace. If the fellow would but tell the truth now, so that we might know just what form the disgrace took, we would be better able to decide what steps to take; but so long as he persists in his trumped-up story, of which a baby might be ashamed, there is nothing for us but silence and endurance."

Richard's wife fully agreed with him; she was one of those good women who always agree with whatever their husbands think.

XI.

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AS it became increasingly evident that the strange tragedy in which they were having a part could not be entirely hidden from their social world, the elder Mrs. Kenyon found herself beginning each morning with an unspoken fear that the detectives would succeed and Constance's hiding place would be revealed. It was awful of course, looked at from whatever standpoint one might take, but the experienced woman of the world could feel how greatly the awfulness would be increased with Constance in their midst to be accounted for — a married woman who refused to live with her husband, and who must be disposed of in some way whenever there was a social function. She shivered over the thought. Never before had the good woman herself, to say nothing of the Kenyons, been associated with scandal. Pity her, poor woman! she was good and her heart was warm, but Public Opinion had been her god for almost half a century. Fond as she was of Constance, so long as the girl would not live with the man

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she had married, her aunt could not help hoping that she would elude successfully all searchers, and remain in hiding.

In the midst of this social upheaval, Mr. Curtiss fell ill—desperately ill. Doctors and trained nurses, as well as the outside multitude who waited for their bulletins, for days together were alike hopeless of the final outcome. The disease was fever, and the brain was seriously affected.

“No wonder, poor man!” said the sympathetic portion of the public; “he has certainly had trouble enough to turn a dozen brains.” For the most part the public grew sympathetic; even those who had shaken their heads and assured one another that there must be grave reason for his wife’s strange course, when they heard that he was probably sick unto death, said that they thought he had been sufficiently punished, no matter what the sins of his youth had been; and that if his wife had any heart she really ought to relent now; she might save his life by coming to him. And they haunted the door of the room where he lay fighting his battle, and waylaid physicians and attendants with offers of everything under the sun. Only the Kenyons and those closely related to them held aloof. Richard Kenyon had been heard to say that probably the most decent thing the man could now do for the world was to die;

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and when expostulated with, even by his father, for undue severity, he said that he knew his cousin Constance he believed better than did any person living, and they might depend upon it that it was for no trivial cause she had become dead to all her friends in this way. There could be no possible explanation that would not prove the man to whom she had given her heart to be a liar and a coward; and to have pity or sympathy for such a man was, in his opinion, to descend to his level. Dr. Kenyon did not attempt to argue, but turned away with a sigh to drown his vain regrets in work, of which there was abundance, as many besides Mr. Curtiss were ill; his wife admitted, also with a sigh, to her niece and daughter that while she would not for the world be guilty of wishing for any person's death, still, as things had turned out, it did seem as though it would be a little less hard for poor Constance and for all of them if the man should die. In that case, they could hope that in time people would forget about the dreadful affair.

It was a desperate fight, but Gordon Curtiss did not die. Youth and a good constitution and careful living were all in his favor. There was one other thing. "That man does not intend to die," said the consulting physician sententiously one morning as he came down from the sick room, "and when men

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like him make up their minds, it is more than half the battle; I believe he will get well."

There came a morning when, pallid and wasted, but the shadow indeed of his former self, but yet himself so far as regarded mental power, Charles Gordon Curtiss in his sitting room at the hotel waited for Dilsey to come to him.

Dilsey who had hovered about the nurses and waylaid the doctors and sat up nights when she might have been sleeping, in order to get the latest or earliest word from the sick room, and who had been ready day or night for every possible service, was now about to have what she would consider a reward.

Something of her devotion Mr. Curtiss had realized during the days of his convalescence, and had been touched by it. There were times when she seemed to him the only real friend he had left. As he sat studying new plans for accomplishing that which was ever uppermost, there had come to him a thought in connection with Dilsey, and he had sent for her forthwith.

"Well, Dilsey," he said, with a smile that went to the girl's heart, "we have had a hard battle, and they say have come off victor, if to be allowed to live can be called victory. I fancy that I am indebted to you for many things; they tell me you were faithful through it all, day and night."

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"Oh, I didn't do nothing!" said Dilsey, with radiant face, "there wasn't nothing I could do, only errands and things; I kind of hung around so as to be handy, but there wasn't much chance. Them trained nurses think they can do everything better than anybody else. There wasn't much that I wouldn't have been real glad to do if they'd let me."

"I have no doubt of it," said Mr. Curtiss. Then he remained silent for so long that Dilsey stole anxious glances at him, lest he had overestimated his strength; but he sat erect and composed, gazing thoughtfully at a sheet of paper spread on the table before him.

"I am at a loss how to put what I want to say," he began at last. "Did I not hear in the spring, or at some time not long ago, that you were expecting to be married?"

Dilsey struggled for self-control and failed, and put her neat white apron to her face and cried.

"Ah!" Mr. Curtiss said, regret and sympathy in his voice, "have I touched a wound? I hope you will forgive me; I am very sorry."

"It ain't nothing," murmured Dilsey behind her apron; "I mean you ain't done nothing, sir. I'm that silly —" She stopped, and let the tears and sobs have their way for a minute, and Mr. Curtiss waited. At last the apron

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was dropped and Dilsey's voice had evidently gone under the control of her will.

"I'm just ashamed, sir, but you made it all come back for a minute. No, sir, I ain't going to be married, ever. I was, but he—he—there was another girl that he went with some, and it's four weeks since she ran away with him; I ought to be glad of it—that it wasn't me, I mean. I couldn't respect him, you know, carrying on that way; and *she* told me that day that she wouldn't live with a man that she couldn't respect; and no more would I, I told her."

"Of whom are you speaking, Dilsey?"

"Of your wife, sir; she said so to me that day, and I don't suppose I shall ever forget it."

"Can you tell me about it?" said Mr. Curtiss, and the wistful note in his voice almost started Dilsey's tears afresh; "are you willing to tell me everything that my wife said to you that day?"

So Dilsey went over the story in detail, making it very vivid to the man who was hungry for the sound of his wife's voice. It was a short story, pointing its own moral. There followed a silence almost as lengthy as the first; then Mr. Curtiss roused himself.

"Well, Dilsey, I need not tell you that I sympathize with you in any pain that you may have had to bear; but my wife was right; love

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between men and women that is not founded on respect is but another name for misery. My object in asking you about yourself was to learn whether or not you were free to enter my employ, provided you should care to do so."

Dilsey assured him volubly that she was free to go where she liked, and that she would rather work for him than for any man living. There followed a very careful statement from Mr. Curtiss of the plan that had come to him during his convalescence. It amounted to establishing Dilsey as a sort of private detective who was to be responsible to him only. She was the only one among them, he reminded her, who had seen that mysterious woman in black whose coming had seemed to cause his trouble. He confided to Dilsey his belief that the woman's name was Pauline, and some of his surmises as to the possible nature of her story. He impressed the girl with the thought that to find her was only second in importance to discovering the whereabouts of his wife. His plan was that they two, in their different spheres and with their widely differing opportunities, should give themselves to the discovering of those two women. He proposed that Dilsey should enter his service at once, and he promised to make it right with the manager of the hotel. She was to seek employment where she would, furnished with abundant references

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as to her character and abilities, and to make her stay as long or as short as she considered best for the furthering of her search. Whenever circumstances seemed to make it desirable she was to become a boarder instead of a house servant, and to ostensibly ply any trade she chose, while she kept uppermost all the time the main object of her existence, being amply paid the while by her employer. She was to communicate with Mr. Curtiss by letter or special messenger or telegram as circumstances required, so as to keep him fully posted as to any possible clew, and she was to keep her ears always attent for the sound of the name "Pauline." At this point he stopped to ask anxiously if she felt quite sure that she would know the small woman again at sight.

"I'd know both of 'em," said Dilsey, promptly, "I'd know 'em anywhere; and I'd like nothing better than to be free to go where I was a mind to and hunt for 'em. I'll risk but I'll find 'em, too! Them detectives —" She hesitated for words strong enough to express her scorn at their failure.

Mr. Curtiss could not forbear a smile. During the entire conference, Dilsey had proved herself as quick-witted as he had believed that she might be. Her words and manner had put heart into him, and when he closed the door after her, having planned their first move-

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ments down to the minutest detail, he felt more hopeful than he had for many days.

There was another reason for this besides Dilsey's sympathy and quick wittedness. Mr. Curtiss believed that in securing the help of this young woman he had been divinely directed, and the sense of assurance that the thought gave him was new and restful to his storm-tossed soul. Alone, and unknown to other than God, he had passed through a crucial mental experience. When the thought first took hold of his consciousness that he was a deserted man, that the wife of his choice had deliberately gone from him, and that within twenty-four hours of the time when he had heard her promise to cleave to him until death parted them, there came, along with his pain and shame, another fierce unreasoning feeling. His whole nature turned in revolt from the thought of God, his mother's God. He had never definitely promised allegiance to this One who had ruled his mother's life, but he had almost prided himself upon the fact that he respected Him, revered Him, and that at some future indefinite time he should probably publicly acknowledge the personal claims of Christianity. He did not think that he believed in any mysterious "change" of heart. To his mind those phrases so often on the lips of a certain class of people, referred properly to a

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distinct effort of the will, a determination on the part of the individual to order his life in accordance with a certain prescribed code.

He had no objection to this; in truth he had sometimes wondered why he had not taken the step long ago to gratify his mother. Why had she not urged him to a public profession of his principles? He was by nature and education a gentleman; he recognized the strength and wisdom of the ten commandments and already managed his life in accordance with their principles, as he believed that all gentlemen must. In short, to take the vows of the church upon him was the only added step that this model young man believed necessary in order to the full recognition on his part of the claims of his Creator. More than once in conversation with his mother he had felt like putting into speech the words of the young ruler, "All these have I kept from my youth up; what lack I yet?" And he had been in secret sympathy with that young man as he turned away, feeling that he need not become a fanatic and give away his property in order to secure eternal life. At the same time he assured himself that that was of course only a dramatic way of putting the case, and that Jesus did not really mean to press such a line of action.

He disposed of the plain command, "Thou

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shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind," in much the same convenient fashion. Of course people ought to recognize their duty to God, and a public profession of His claims upon them was eminently proper. When he had sat in the old church at Deepwater and, behind his sheltering hand, watched Constance's face at the communion, he had told himself that it was a beautiful and appropriate service in which she was engaged, and that as soon as they were married he would join, with her, the church of her choice. When he had knelt beside his mother's chair on that evening before his marriage and dedicated the house anew to God, he had assured himself that it was all a "reasonable service," and that he had no objection whatever to taking the vows of the church upon him.

The utter revolt therefore of his entire being that had come with his trouble was a revelation of himself to himself. For the first time in his life he very distinctly recognized himself as in antagonism with God. He did not hesitate to tell himself that God had no right to overturn his life in this way and thwart all his plans for happiness. He had been correct and upright in all his dealings with his fellows. No man could put his finger upon any act of his and say, "That act wronged

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me." In business as well as in social life he knew that he had been a model; and this was his reward! If there was One who overruled events, it followed that this was simple injustice. Or, if the being called God could not control the world that He had made, why should one bow before Him as supreme? In either case He was not worthy of homage.

True, Mr. Curtiss did not set these thoughts before his mind deliberately, in logical array; instead, they rioted through his brain, leaving only one distinct impression, that he was in revolt from all the religious teachings of his childhood, and wanted to be. He set his lips in firm lines when he thought of his mother's Bible, and the verse that he had read from it on his knees, and told himself that if ever he went inside that room again he would tear that page from the Bible and trample it under his feet. Never again would he be found bowing before such a God.

XII.

The Unseen Force.

THIS of course was not a sane state of mind, it was rather the impotent anger of a child. But it haunted him for days together, and was followed by a condition not more hopeful. Had one who was anxious for his spiritual health been watching him at the time, he would have felt that the man had joined the class of persons who are described as "given over to believe a lie."

One "ism" after another that Mr. Curtiss, evenly poised and clear of brain, had heretofore been able to pass by with a superior smile assailed him fiercely now, and clamored to be accepted as the only true theory of life. Through them all, this child of many prayers, and of a mother's triumphant faith, struggled blindly, and reached at last a stage that might be summed up in the word: despair. The fierce attacks that had well-nigh overwhelmed him could be accounted for in part by his

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physical condition ; they clung to him throughout his illness, so that every lucid moment was a mental horror of some sort ; and when, in spite of all, he had fought his way through to that stage which was called convalescence, the blackness of despair seemed to settle down upon his soul ; despair of everything and everybody.

He had told himself fiercely that he should not have doubted Constance though an angel from heaven had accused her ; yet during these hours an imp of darkness seemed to stand at his elbow and whisper about her ; seemed to compel him to construct a plausible theory that would prove her only too willing to be free of him. Perhaps there was some one from whom she had supposed herself forever separated, and had too late discovered her mistake and was not able to bear its consequences. There were hours when he hated himself for such thoughts, but they came back to him. It was while he sat alone one evening in the grip of his misery that a letter was brought to him. It was only a few days since he had been allowed to receive his mail, and he had watched eagerly for letters, always with the unspoken hope that one would come which would throw light upon the tragedy he was living.

But on this evening the weight of his pain

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had produced a sort of apathy. There was nothing to be hoped for from letters, he told himself, nor from anything. He looked at the envelope indifferently, and was about to toss it aside until some other time; then a memory arrested him. That peculiar curve of the "G" could have been made only by his mother's friend Mrs. Ellis. Now that he thought of it, it was strange that he had not heard from Mrs. Ellis. Not that he cared, he said to himself; his mother's friend was nothing to him; *he* had no friends; but it was strange. She had been so true to his mother, and to him, heretofore. And he knew, although he had not owned it even to himself, that all day there had been a homesick longing in his heart for his mother: that one who had been true to him with every breath of her earthly life. He had found himself going over in memory some long-forgotten scene of his early youth, when with his head in his mother's lap and her hand wandering among the masses of his hair he had poured out to her some passionate story of disappointment or fancied wrong, and her sympathy had never failed. Oh, for a single half hour of his mother! He tore open the envelope. What if Mrs. Ellis had bethought herself of some word of *hers*, some incident of her early life that he did not know, and had written it to him?

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This is what was written : —

“To Charles Gordon Curtiss, the ‘only son of his mother.’

“As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you. — Thus saith the Lord.”

If Gordon Curtiss had not, after all, believed in prayer and in a covenant-keeping God, he could not have explained why there came to him then and there a sudden rush of feeling that swayed him in its power, and swept away as with a whirlwind the fogs of unbelief in which he had enveloped himself, and made him cry out with a great yearning cry, “O God! my mother’s God! give me help in trouble.”

The connecting link in this chain of influence was that Mrs. Ellis, alone in her room that afternoon, unable as she thought to minister in any way to the son of her friend in the sore trouble that had come upon him during her absence from the city, yet thinking earnestly of that friend of her youth and of the man tossing on the waves of an unusual storm, with no human voice to comfort him, remembered that in fine strong natures there come times when the love for mother takes hold with a firmer grip than ever it did in childhood, and clings, and draws, and sometimes

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wins, despite all obstacles. And she said to herself: "Did ever son have truer, sweeter mother than did Gordon Curtiss? Did ever son love mother more than did he? If I could but help him through his mother!" Then she bowed her head on the table before her and prayed for the son of her friend. Prayed as those pray who have been long used to taking hold on God and waiting for their answer and following its guiding. Prayed that God would give her a word to speak to that tossed and well-nigh shipwrecked soul that would anchor him and *bold* until the storm was past. And so praying she heard her answer. She might not go to her friend, for she was herself ill, but she could write, and God could go to him with her message. She knew what the message would be as well as though she had heard audible voice speak the words to her human ears — so plainly does God speak to those who wait upon Him thus. "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you. — Thus saith the Lord." Not another word save the signing of her name. Then she folded and addressed and sent the letter, with such assurance that it would be used of God, as those who do not pray in faith, and act upon their answers, cannot and *will not* understand.

There was much about it all that Gordon

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Curtiss did not understand, that he never fully understood, although in after years he studied deeply into the subject, and tried to grasp as well as he could with finite mind the mysteries that belong to God. But one thing he knew, and knew it with a certainty that was never afterward shadowed by a doubt; that there came to him a sudden mysterious change, unexplainable by human reasoning, that took hold upon his very springs of thought and converged them into new channels.

"Saint Paul and I are very sure of certain things," he said to Mrs. Ellis not long after this; "it seems to me at times as though we had had much the same experience. Almost I feel like saying that literal scales fell from my blind eyes. I had never conceived of a Force outside of myself as able to take hold of and literally make me over! but nothing less than that has been done for me."

And yet he knew, as surely, that there was a human side to it all. No clearer than he felt the unseen Force that took hold of his being and changed its trend, had he felt, before that, the Power that said to him: "Choose. I am waiting. That omnipotent will of yours *must* have its way; God has so ordered it. No cry to Him ever yet went unheeded, nor ever will; He waits to *do*. The Triune God *waits* for you! Will you let Him take hold of our

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case? Remember, once for all, it is as you will."

"And I felt," said Gordon Curtiss afterward, in talking about this with one who was eager to hear and to question, and to hear again every word and thought connected with that momentous time, "felt distinctly that it was the last 'waiting' which would be done, for me. I realized, as if revealed in a flash of God's own light, how innumerable had been my calls, how patient had been the waiting; how certain it was that His Spirit would not 'always strive.' If an angel visible to human eyes had been sent to tell me that I must choose then and there for all time, I do not think I could have been more sure of it."

It was therefore this changed man who sat with quiet face and resolute will, and planned for Dilsey and for himself a systematic search for the two women who had disappeared. Along with the calm that his new experience brought had come back his assured faith in Constance; though it had really not faltered, save when he was mentally unbalanced; he could even afford now to almost smile over some of the horrid fantasies that had disturbed his illness. Constance was true in every fibre of her being; some terrible blow had fallen upon her: he must give his life to finding her and righting her supposed wrongs.

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When Constance Curtiss walked away from her husband's rooms that day, she had no definite plan as to where she would go or what she would do. One consuming idea possessed her: that she must get away as soon and as far as possible from the man whom she had called her husband. It was characteristic of her that she did not even think of taking refuge in Deepwater. The old life of care-free girlhood was dead, along with the new life of wifehood that had seemed to dawn so radiantly for her: henceforth she was to be a new creature, unknown to any who had belonged to her past. Not that she planned this, she simply felt it, and following its instinct, covered her retreat without even studying to do so. She turned from the part of the city with which she had been familiar, and plunged into the rush of life still farther down town; walking quietly, and looking to all outward appearance like dozens of other well-dressed women intent upon their own business. So walking she reached presently a railroad station with which she was entirely unfamiliar, and joined the crowds who were hurrying to make a train. Entering a car with many others she dropped into a seat beside a woman with a bundle and a baby in her arms; almost immediately the train started. By request she held the baby while the woman fumbled for her money and paid her fare, mentioning a place unknown to

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Constance. The act recalled to her the fact that she had no ticket. A man seated behind them touched the conductor's arm : —

"When do we get to Rockport?" he asked.

"Eight o'clock," said the conductor. Because once, years ago, when she was a child, — an eternity ago it seemed to her now — Constance had gone to Rockport with her mother, she determined to pay her fare to that place. It was in another state and far away from this, but the name held her thought long enough for her to say "Rockport" and hand up a five-dollar gold piece to be changed. Thrust into the small hand bag that she carried was her uncle's latest gift. He had slipped it into her hand as he bade her good-by with a word that both had expected she would recall with a smile, and that both now recalled with a shiver; one of those careless jests that sometimes take on awful meaning afterward.

"Here is something for you when you get tired of your husband and want to do a little private skirmishing on your own account." No wonder that Constance shivered, June day though it was, as she recalled the words.

It was this gift which had enabled her to go away quietly and respectably. It was a purse, and it held one hundred dollars in gold. She had employed some of her lonely moments that morning in examining its contents, and had

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smiled at the thought that she had been so absorbed in her new life as to have forgotten to show the gift to her husband.

So it was a quiet little hotel in the quiet little town of Rockport that sheltered Constance that evening, while her husband, but a hundred miles away, walked the platform of the up-town station in a fever of impatience for the coming of the Deepwater express that he believed would take him to her.

Nothing could have been more natural and unsuspecting-looking than Constance's movements. Had she carefully planned to cover her departure, she could have managed no better. Rockport, though a quiet enough place, was connected with important interests. There was a boarding school or "college" — as they delighted to call it — on the hill less than three miles from the station, but the road thither was mountainous, and strangers, at least, preferred to take the drive by daylight; so there were often teachers or guests and sometimes young women students who on their way to and from college made use of the quiet, homelike hotel at Rockport station. Constance could easily be a new teacher, or a visitor. Again, there was a Children's Hospital but six miles removed from them, and Rockport was the junction; nurses and visitors were frequently detained there over night. Not only was there no curiosity

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aroused by the guest, there was scarcely even interest; it was a common occurrence. The chamber-maid reported to the cook that the "new lady" was not "fussy"; she took the first room that was shown to her, and didn't want any extras. Neither did she want any supper; but that, too, was not unusual. Guests from the eight o'clock train very often did not care for supper.

When Constance at last turned the key upon the neat maid who had filled her water pitcher and brought her fresh towels and waited respectfully for further orders, she drew a long quivering breath of—was it relief? At last she was alone! The tension of holding herself in rigid check, so that the world would not look at her nor think about her, could be laid aside for a few hours. She could think, she could plan, without the terror of feeling that curious eyes were watching her. Yet,—could she think? could she plan? Was it really she—Constance Kenyon,—no, Constance Curtiss—No! oh no, a thousand times no! Never that name! she had no right to it. Was it only this morning? Was it not at least a hundred years ago when she was young and happy that she had said that name over to herself, to get used to it, always with a smile and a blush? Oh! what would become of her! Would she go insane? Had she perhaps gone insane al-

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ready? Was that why she was keeping so quiet and speaking so low and properly, instead of screaming out her misery to a gaping world? She clasped her hands in so tight a grip that the nails cut into the delicate flesh, but she did not feel them. She walked the little room up and down, up and down, with swift noiseless tread, and clutched at the ribbon at her throat as if it was suffocating her. She stopped and stood quite still in the middle of the room, something very like physical terror in her suffering eyes; terror of herself. *Was* she going to scream, after all, despite all the awful restraint she had put upon herself throughout that journey? Or was it faintness that was overcoming her? If she should lose consciousness here and now, would they find her? And if they did, would they find in some way that she belonged to him—no, that she had thought that she belonged to him? Perhaps the strange feeling meant death; and at the thought a momentary gleam of hope lighted up her despair, — if she could but die!

Yet she knew that she would not die, she was strong and well; up to this day she had rejoiced in her perfect health and splendid constitution. She would live, probably, to be an old, old, *old* woman! That awful clutch of misery seized her throat again, and then she spoke, "O God!" she said, "O God!" and fell down on her knees.

XIII.

"The Anchor Held."

THERE are probably few people, comparatively, who have spent entire nights on their knees before God. The Master did, at crisis periods in His earthly life; there have been servants of His who have followed His lead even in this, when they reached some solemn milestone in their life's journey. Such a time had assuredly come to Constance Kenyon. When she fell upon her knees, it was with a feeling that she must find help somewhere or give over the struggle. As she knelt, there seemed to sound about her like a strain of music certain words familiar since her childhood. She had sung them often in the choir at Deepwater, she had chanted them at the bedside of her dying aunt, who had begged to hear the sweet, strong words once again, "God is our Refuge and Strength; a very present help in trouble." It was the first part of the strain that had helped the dying saint; human strength had failed her; she needed to be reminded of the Strength that

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is everlasting. It was the last part of the verse that touched Constance's need, "A very *present* help in trouble." Was ever sorer need for help? Yet could her tempest-tossed soul ever hope to claim those next words as the language of her experience? "Therefore will not we fear though the earth do change."

All night she spent there, close under the overshadowing wing.

Not consciously praying all the while; some of the time she cried—and this was what she had thought she could never do again—a great rush of tears that eased the stricture at her heart and quieted the throbbing of her brain. Long afterward she told, or tried to tell, a little about this solemn and ever remembered night to one who, she felt, had a right to hear; but the attempt was vain. There are some experiences that cannot be put into words. "After all, I can only tell you," she said, with grateful tears shining in her eyes, "that the anchor *beld*. That word came to me also, 'An anchor to the soul, sure and steadfast.'"

It is good to have anchors for souls stored up in one's memory, to be laid hold of when the storms come.

This tempest-tossed soul before daybreak entered still waters. Life's joys had suffered wreck, but God remained, and His peace overshadowed her. She rose up when the new day

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came fully, and bathed her face, and arranged her disordered hair and dress, and ate some mouthfuls of the neat breakfast that had been prepared for her, and thanked so kindly the little maid who attended her that *she* told the cook that “that was a sweet lady as ever was, and she guessed she had come from where ‘somebody had just died’!”

. After the breakfast, Constance proceeded to carry out the plans that had been formed in part while on her knees. She would go on, by train, to some city a few hundred miles from her own home; far enough away so that chance knowledge of her doings would not be likely to float back to disturb any of those who had cared for her, and there she would begin life anew. She would work at some decent employment and support herself, as she used to want to do. Long before this she had settled it that the employment should not be teaching. In some of her many discussions with Richard she had laid down her law.

“No, Richard, I shall never earn my living in that way. I believe in teachers who are called to the work; who are sure that their best efforts for the world’s good can be made in that direction; and who have been trained through long years of conscientious preparation to do their work in the best ways. Now you know I have had no such training, and besides,

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I do not feel the least desire to teach. If I did it at all it would be simply because I did not know of any other way to earn my living, and I should despise a teacher who had that only for his motive."

"How many teachers do you suppose have very much loftier aims than that?" would Richard the sceptical inquire.

His cousin would laugh and say that she hoped hundreds had; but if such were not the case, she would never swell the number of sordid souls who simply taught to live. That she believed in her high standard she proved by not so much as considering the position of teacher when she planned to become self-supporting. She had no fears of the future in this direction. She had often affirmed that she should feel humiliated for her sex if a woman young and in good health, with a fair proportion of education and common sense, could not support herself in any town of reasonable size that she might select; and when the testing hour came, her theories stood quietly beside her waiting to be carried out.

Her first needs were clothing and a trunk in which to pack it. She determined to buy her railroad ticket to the first city that she recognized on the time table, and make her purchases there. She would not begin her new life by appearing among strangers with whom

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she meant to live, until she had supplied herself with all the necessities that belong to decent living.

Not once in arranging these plans had it occurred to her to so order them that searchers after her would be thrown off the track and baffled. No thought of being searched for entered her mind. Why should any one search? It was all very plain to her; she had thought it out afresh during that solemn night vigil. Instinctively she had arranged a chain of circumstances that seemed to make Mr. Curtiss's sin less glaring, at least as regarded herself. And yet “arranged” is not the word; she was not conscious of having made any effort to shield him. Certain portions of the tragedy seemed to flash before her as certainty. Mr. Curtiss had not — of course he had not — known that his wife was living, when he sought and won *her* for himself.

He had deserted his wife, — yes, and his boy! it was monstrous! she would not attempt to condone it, yet she told herself that he might have had fearful provocation, such as she could not even imagine; but — *he had done it!* Afterward he must have had, or thought that he had, good reason for believing her dead. And the boy? It was possible — before morning she said it was probable — that he had also believed him to be with his mother.

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This being settled, when they two should confront him at his hotel and prove themselves to be still in the flesh, what was there left for him to do but acknowledge and care for his wife and son? What was there for her to do but to go away as fast and as far as she could, and leave him to attend to this awful duty?

It was all so plain to her; she had no thought of making tragedy for herself; it had been made for her; she must only try to help right it in the least terrible way. Her friends at home, her uncle and Richard, would understand that there was nothing for her, of course, but to stand out of the way of honor and decency. They would understand also, and instinctively she gave the new aunt credit for helping them to see this point clearly, that altogether the wisest plan for her was to go directly so far away that they could not conveniently come to her: nay, to so arrange it that they would have the best of excuses for not trying to come to her. It would certainly be clear to them all that absolute silence between them for a time, at least, would be the least painful course. Could she be expected to go back to Deepwater and try to live the old life over again, only forty miles away from that home, and that man, and that woman! Her whole womanhood rose up in revolt. She almost thanked God on her knees that this part of the martyrdom was

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unnecessary and would but make added pain for others. No duty called her back. Neither uncle nor cousin needed her ministry. So far as her past life was concerned, she was free to slip into oblivion. At first she told herself that by and by she would write to her uncle and let him know that she was not in need, and that God lived, still. Afterward she made herself feel that silence for — she could not tell how many years — would be better. They could trust her. Her uncle and cousin would know that she had done only what she ought to do; they would feel sure that she had resources within her equal to her own support, and they would understand why she could not come back to them, and could not write.

Her very quiet and altogether sensible plans were carried out. She chose a city that she knew by name, as intelligent people know by name many places about which they know nothing else, and taking an early train reached there by noon. She bought a trunk at the first store she passed after leaving the station. They were making a specialty of trunks that morning, and this one was displayed on the sidewalk as a "bargain." She had it sent to a hotel that she had heard the conductor of her train recommend to a woman who said that she was alone and wanted a quiet, comfortable place. She preceded her trunk to the place and engaged a room, explain-

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ing that she was in town to do shopping, and had bought a packing trunk in which to carry away her purchases. It chanced that she had selected a city that was a shopping centre for a large outlying region, and a hotel where nothing was more common than the receiving of many packages from leading business houses for transient guests.

This one went out as soon as she had duly established herself, and spent the afternoon in making her purchases. She bought only necessities, looked at from her standpoint. She made no effort to explain to herself why the few ready-made dresses that she bought were black; but she had regard to what she might try to do for a living, when she selected material for aprons in sufficient quantity to be made to cover her dress from head to foot.

By night her purchases had arrived, and she spent the evening in packing her trunk. She had gone through the day without sense of fatigue, upheld by the necessity that was upon her for maintaining a rigid quiet, and doing and saying nothing to excite suspicions which might develop somehow sometime into a painful tale that would travel back to Deepwater and elsewhere. She dreaded the night and the sense of being alone again where restraint would not be necessary. She shrank from her own misery and wished not to look at it, and was

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afraid that she would. But it came to pass that physical weariness claimed her and overpowered all other feelings; she was totally unused to nights of vigil such as the last had been. She dropped to sleep the moment her head was laid on the pillow and slept the sleep of exhaustion until morning. By nine of the clock next morning she was well on her journey. One moment of dismay she had had at the hotel.

"You will please register," the clerk had said when she called for a room. A sudden terror had seized upon her. What was her name? Then it appeared that the pen had been mislaid, and the clerk searched for it among the papers and could not find it and opened his desk for another. This gave her time to take hurried counsel with herself. Could she write the old name, "Constance Kenyon"? Her old self was dead. She could no more be Constance Kenyon of Deepwater ever again than she could be Mrs. Charles Gordon Curtiss. Then there flashed upon her a memory. Her name had never been Kenyon; it was Stuart. She bore her mother's full name, — Constance Elinor Stuart. It is true that she had not written it nor heard it nor thought of it for years, but she had a right to that name. The pen was passed to her with a word of apology, and she wrote with swift

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fingers, "Ellen Stuart, Indianapolis." It was the city that she believed she had decided upon for her new home. As a matter of fact, certain lines that she had read in the morning paper, as she stood waiting to pay her bill, changed her intentions, and she planned her journey for Chicago, instead.

She had expected to give days of weary search for rooms suited to her half-formed plans; but she found on the morning after her arrival a place that had apparently been waiting for her, — a modest house in a quiet street where all the appointments were respectable. It was already placarded with a doctor's, a dentist's, and a dressmaker's sign; so Constance hoped that another which she might wish to add would meet with no objectors. It proved to be almost an apartment house on a small scale. A widow and her schoolgirl daughters had rented it in the hope of paying the rent and adding something to their small income by sub-letting. Two rooms were still vacant, a pleasant sunny one on the third floor back, and what Constance called a closet; but the landlady considered it a room, and pointed in triumph to the window that witnessed for her. The rent startled Constance and made her realize that she could not get to work too soon; yet she knew enough of city prices to doubt whether she could do better, so she

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engaged the rooms for a month's trial. The matter of references brought a faint glow to her pale face; here was something that she had not thought about! She resolved to speak simple truth, so far as she spoke at all and trust for results.

"I can give no references, Mrs. Bristow. I am a stranger in the city and an orphan without brothers or sisters, and far away from all who have known me. I have left the home I had, in order to support myself. I feel certain that I can do it, but you must take my respectability on trust if you take me."

Mrs. Bristow nodded sagely.

"I see, I guess. You've got relations of some kind that didn't want you to start out for yourself. They're poor and proud, ain't they?"

A faint smile hovered about Constance's mouth, and there was a slight flush on her face. How was she to answer this? But Mrs. Bristow was satisfied with her own interpretations and waited for no reply.

"You're from New England, ain't you? I am myself; I guess we'll try each other. You can pay me in advance, I suppose?"

No, she could pay but a week in advance, Constance said firmly.

She had money enough with her for the month's rent, but she did not wish to use it

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all in that way. She expected to earn more before the month was gone.

"Well," said the kindly New England woman, still looking thoughtfully at the younger one, "it's a risk, I s'pose; there's all kinds of folks in Chicago, but I believe I'll risk it. You've got to risk something if you live in this world. You look capable enough. What you going to do? If you mean to try for a place to teach, you might as well give up first as last. There's a dozen teachers standing around waiting for each possible chance. I've got a daughter who was a year and two months finding a place, and she was the best scholar in her class, too."

Constance had not been used to close questioning as to her movements, and the pink deepened a little on her face. She assured the anxious questioner that she had no intention of making a thirteenth at any of the waiting places for teachers, but she made no attempt to satisfy her curiosity.

"Well," said the widow again, after another reflective pause, "I'm sure I hope you'll find work if you want it. It ain't the easiest thing in the world to do, I can tell you, for a girl alone in a big city without references. I shouldn't like one of my girls to be doing it, and that's the truth. But then you say your mother ain't in this world to worry over it."

A mist floated for a moment before Con-

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stance's eyes. Mrs. Bristow was making her realize afresh her utter loneliness; but there was genuine sympathy in the good woman's voice, and her desolate heart caught at it. She resolved upon a degree of frankness.

XIV.

The Leaven Working.

"I WILL tell you, Mrs. Bristow, what I mean to try to do to earn my living; that is, so far as I have planned it. There are certain pieces of work that I know how to do, and if I can get a few housekeepers to give me a trial I believe I can create a market for my work. For instance, I can mend laces and neck wear generally and launder them. I can wash and stretch lace curtains so that they will look as though just from the store. Then I can make jellies and marmalades, and can fruits, and go through the entire round of pickling and preserving. Do you not think there are housekeepers in this city who would be willing to employ me by the day for such work?"

The housekeeper before her, with her thrifty New England education to aid her, had been listening with the keenest interest. The laces and neckwear had not appealed very sympathetically to her plain life. Under question she would have admitted that it was "nice" to

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be able to do them up, but a poor way to make a living. When, however, the formidable task of "doing over" lace curtains was presented to her mental vision, her eyes gained in interest, and by the time she had in imagination gone through the processes of canning and preserving, they were dilated with pleased wonder.

"Well now, if that ain't cute!" she said. "I call it a first-rate idea. You mean you'd hire out by the day, and go here and there and everywhere, and do up such work? Well now, I shouldn't wonder a bit if you'd have your hands running over full in canning and curtain time. But folks don't preserve, nor wash curtains much, winters," she added, with sudden thrifty caution. "What you going to do then? Do you calculate on earning enough to sit and fold your hands in the winter?"

Constance was ready for her. She had not studied plans through the weary hours of her journey without having furnished herself for all seasons.

"No," she said; "it is true that people do not can fruits in winter, but they eat cake and homemade candies and all sorts of little fancy dishes that are some trouble to make. Moreover, they sweep and dust a great deal at all seasons. In a few homes of moderate means, where no regular help is kept, I believe I could

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train them to expect me one day in the week to put in perfect order certain rooms. I have thought also that in some homes where but one maid is kept, and where the parlors are filled with pretty trifles that the maid does not know how to care for, I might create a need for my services. At least I intend to try what can be done in such directions after the fruit season is over."

"Well," said Mrs. Bristow for the dozenth time during that interview, "I believe you'll do! You've got the neatest lot of ideas I've met since I left New England, and that was when I was a girl. It is queer to me that nobody has thought of such a thing before; at least nobody round here has; maybe they've been doing it for years at home. But it will work here; I know it will. Why, I've got a crate of peaches in the house this minute that I've been dreading like the toothache. It's hard work to fuss over such things all alone, and do all the housework besides. The girls have to go so far to school that they don't get any time to help me. I believe I'd be willing to take some of my rent in getting them canned, if you really know how to do them up nice. What you going to charge?"

Constance, who knew it was the peaches and not her daughters that the worthy woman wished to have canned, named the sum she

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had thought of proposing for a half day's work in this direction. It was modest, being based on her knowledge of what unskilled labor commanded by the hour in Deepwater.

Mrs. Bristow nodded in approval.

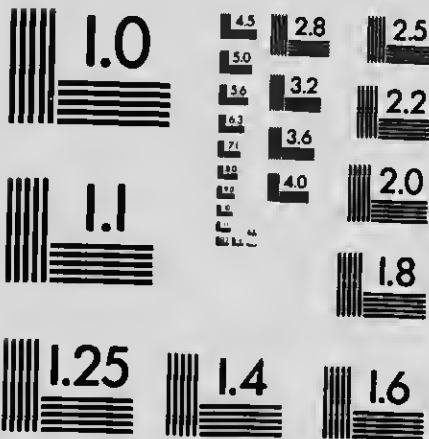
"That's good; you don't mean to kill yourself before you begin, I see, by charging awful prices. Well now, suppose we experiment on it right straight off? You may take the rooms without any references, and if brother Jim thinks when he comes that I'm a simpleton, why he may think so; *he* won't have to lose anything by it. I'd like real well to keep watch of it and see how you come out. And this afternoon, if you want to do it, you may go down to my kitchen and can those peaches; that will make a beginning; and if they suit I can speak for you to my neighbor Mrs. Jenkins, and my friend Mrs. Clarke. They both do lots of canning, and are always groaning over what a job it is."

In this way it came to pass that before the first week of her exile was completed, Ellen Stuart was fairly launched in her new work. Mrs. Bristow's peaches were such a complete success that that good woman delighted in sounding their praises, with immediate results. Moreover, her lodger further reduced her rent by "doing up" certain lace curtains that, to take Mrs. Bristow's word for it, were "just fall-



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ing to pieces before our eyes, and that girl darned them and washed them and rinsed them in starch water and stretched them till they looked as though I had put my hand in my pocket and paid for them out of the store, as I expected to ; she does beat all ! ”

Such testimony brought further opportunity to show her skill, and before the summer waned Ellen Stuart found herself obliged to give a portion of every evening to the writing of polite notes, to the effect that the pressure of work upon her was now so great that she could make no new engagements until later in the season. There had ceased to be any question even in the mind of Mrs. Bristow as to this young woman's ability to earn her living. She had distinctly “created a want.” The homely domestic lessons that the aunt who was now in heaven had carefully taught the child of her love were bearing interest.

There was a sense in which this strange new life was not an unhappy one. It may be questioned whether that word in its strict meaning can ever be applied to any person upon whom the peace of God has settled. It is certain that as the months passed Constance found her days more endurable than she had dared to hope. She kept herself exceedingly busy, working with a sort of fever of haste over her appointed tasks, and accomplishing

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more in a day than her employers had supposed possible. In this way she kept the physical always in a state of fatigue, so that when the day was done her body demanded rest.

Still, there were times when memory insisted upon having its way and taking her over every step of her recent sunlit and then storm-centred past; and she lay and thought, and *thought*, and moaned inwardly, until she was driven again and again to her Refuge. In this way she grew increasingly sure that the anchor held. Sometimes she found herself wondering if the blackness of darkness, so far as this world was concerned, was always necessary to a soul before it learned to hide completely. Certainly the religion of Jesus Christ had never been to her happy girlhood or her glad young womanhood what she had now found it to be. Still, that was natural; when one feels no need for refuge, why seek for it?

There were other signs of growth in her spiritual life. This young woman, who had believed herself done with human friendships, and almost with human interests, began to have a healthful interest in the lives of others, of a sort that was new to her. She began to realize that heretofore she had lived in her own safe choice circle with little thought for those outside of it. Not that she had been indifferent to

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human pain or sorrow. On the contrary, she had been distinctly recognized as her uncle's assistant in all his plans for relieving physical pain or discomfort, and many a sick-room had had abundant occasion to bless her. Still, her thought for others heretofore had found expression in furnishing a foot-rest for some weary limb or an extra pillow for a aching back, or a toothsome morsel for a fainting appetite, or a lovely picture for tired eyes to rest upon. All beautiful ministrations as far as they reached. It seemed strange to the prematurely grave woman who sat and thought about them that she had been content to reach no farther. There was that Mrs. Barnes in whom her uncle had been so interested, and for whom she had contrived the head-rest, with his assistance; Mrs. Barnes slipped out of life one day, despite all the skilled care bestowed upon her. The watchful physician had known that this was the way it must end, and Constance had known it also, yet never had she, while brushing the invalid's long hair, trying in this way to rest the weary head, said one word about the One who could pillow her head on His breast and give to her eternal rest. Mrs. Barnes was a member of the church, and Constance, when she heard one morning that the tired little woman had gone away, remembered that, and was glad. So unused was she to

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ministry of this kind that it did not even occur to her to regret that she had never tried to soothe the weary one with words of the Master's very own, and to remind her, when the pain was wearing, of the "rest that remaineth."

The truth is, Constance Kenyon had lived her quarter century of happy helpful life, without ever having spoken directly to a single soul, outside that narrow home circle of friends, about that other world toward which all were journeying. It seemed almost incredible to her now that such was the case; the relative importance of the two worlds had changed so utterly in her view. Yet at the time it had seemed natural enough. It was not the custom in Deepwater to be communicative on such subjects. The circle in which she had always moved belonged distinctly to the old-fashioned aristocratic world. Not the world of society exactly, though there was much of that in their lives; yet they lived above its common whirl and rush. They were refined, cultured, intellectual, in their tastes. They read books and magazines and discussed zestfully together current literature. They were music-loving people and lecture-going people—yes, and religious people, with decided views. They distinctly frowned upon many of the modern customs of the fashionable world as altogether beneath rational religious beings. They attended gen-

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erally the mid-week service in the old First Church, which was almost an aristocracy by itself, so time-honored were its ways, and so distinguished were many who had belonged to its past. They even ordered their social life with a view to keeping their engagements out of collision with this mid-week service as much as they conveniently could, and prided themselves upon so doing; and in many other respects were models of propriety.

Without any question they were Christians, many of them. Living their old-fashioned lives of introspection and secrecy; being indeed as carefully secret about anything that had to do with their inner experiences as the stratum of society below them believed that it must be about love and marriage.

Constance's beloved aunt had spent all her life in such an atmosphere as this, and had been a shy, quiet woman, not given to doing startling things in any direction. Yet she had managed to impress her own household to an unusual degree with a sense of the reality of her religious life; and Constance, thinking it all over in the light of her recent knowledge, felt that she had come to understand what the lingering wistfulness of tone and manner meant in some of her uncle's patients when, having done her best for them, they would say, "After all, Miss Constance, there is nobody in

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the world quite like your dear aunt." Constance was sure now that her aunt by those suffering bed-sides must have overcome her natural timidity and the force of long habit, and whispered of One who could hold their hands and pillow their heads and give them His rest. And then it seemed to her amazing that she had never thought to do so. Her environment would in part account for it. The Christian Endeavor movement that had been slow in reaching Deepwater, and even when it came had not been taken hold of with the power that had characterized it in many places, had not touched Constance at all. She was a young woman of twenty before she even heard much of the movement; and the young people of the First Church who finally took shy and questioning hold of it were distinctly younger than herself, and she gave them little heed. This she knew would account for much of her apathy, but not for all of it. The foundation reason was, and with grave wide-open eyes she distinctly saw it, that she had never loved God "with all her soul and with all her heart and with all her strength." Her Aunt Margaret had, she was sure of it. And that was what had made the marked difference in her sweet, quiet, busy life from that of other busy people. It was a life that had always been something of a mystery to Constance, now she knew that its

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secret springs had to an unusual degree taken hold upon God. There was abundant proof of this. She thought of the doctor's "Jimmie," an uncouth country boy who had come to hold his horses for him and run of errands and do a thousand little things that the busy doctor needed to have done. How that boy had developed in his new atmosphere! Constance had been away at school and had not herself watched the change from day to day, as the neighbors had, but she had heard much about it. What a surprising thing it was that Jimmie, who "came of a bad set," whose father was a drunkard, whose grandfather had been an atheist of the most offensive sort — that Jimmie, the neglected, ignorant boy who had never been even to Sabbath-school, should take to books as he did; and of all books should become fond of his Bible that the doctor's wife gave him, and should read it to such purpose that one day he wanted to unite with the church! and passed a good examination before the astonished officers of the church. It seemed to the good people who knew his inheritance and former environment little short of a miracle. For that matter, it was a miracle.

From that time on Jimmie moved steadily forward; faithful to all his duties, ready day or night to serve the doctor, ready to lay down his life at any time for the doctor's wife.

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People noticed and smiled over his devotion to her; but they said it wasn't at all strange; probably Mrs. Kenyon was the first woman who had ever been good to him. Jimmie was in college now, and Dr. Kenyon meant to assist him through the theological seminary. In a few more years Jimmie would be preaching; and Constance, looking back over his way, knew that it was her aunt who would preach the everlasting gospel, using Jimmie's lips that she had herself trained to speak for Jesus Christ.

The result of all this looking back and thinking back while at the same time she studied her guide-book as it had never been studied in the old days, led Constance to understand that a life hid with Christ in God meant a great deal more than it seemed to mean to many people, meant more, far more, than it had ever before meant to her. She found that the kingdom of heaven was "like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal until the whole was leavened." That described her aunt's life, but came nowhere in touch with her own. When had she tried to hide the leaven of the gospel? She had been interested in, absorbed in herself! When she read of the rich man's servants who had received each his pound, and one of them had hidden his in a napkin, her conscience told her

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that in action if not in thought she had been like that wicked servant. This did not do her justice, but she believed that it did; and she believed that she owed it to the God who had been true to her, although she was so false to the trusts he had imposed, to order all her future very differently.

XV.

"The Stately Lady."

THE newly awakened woman realized that opportunities for service were abundant. There, for instance, was the woman who had received her into her house upon trust; without references, and with very little money. A woman who had been uniformly kind to her, and was not only interested in her experiment, but elated over its success. Mrs. Bristow, she had reason to fear, was a stranger to the blessing of daily living in the presence of the Lord. She was a thoroughly honest, upright woman who ordered her household with integrity; she had a kind heart and a ready hand for the needs of others. She was one who attended church once on Sunday unless she had overworked on Saturday, or the day proved too warm or too cold or too damp; she liked to have her daughters array themselves in their finest, of a bright Sabbath morning, and "go off to church with the best of them," but it was to be feared that she lived as prayerless a daily life as though she had

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never heard of God, and used her handsome Bible only to dust it. What could Constance do for Mrs. Bristow and her daughters? She was thinking about them, she was praying for them, she was watching her opportunity; that was much.

There were others; among them a young fellow of sixteen who had inherited a delicate constitution and a troublesome cough, and was ill half of the time and recklessly indifferent to his health the other half. Constance had become an important factor in his home, especially during his frequent illnesses, and had opportunity to see him almost daily. It was during a canning experience of some of the late fruits that she first heard much about him. His mother and the cook were consulting as to what they should try next to tempt Fred's uncertain appetite. Constance, as she skilfully filled her last jar, asked if he liked a concoction known as orange cream, and explained that she had often prepared it for the patients of a physician. The mother had never heard of it, and questioned with such interest that it seemed almost necessary to offer to experiment upon Fred. The experiment proved a success, and the pleased mother lost no time in learning about other dishes; with the result that Constance almost added a new branch to her department of work, and became in certain circles

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an authority on dainty dishes for invalids. Not for nothing had she spent years in attending upon and often anticipating Dr. Kenyon's wants for his sick people.

Fred, having partaken several times of the new dainties prepared expressly for him, developed a wish to see their creator, and as every wish he ever had in his life had been gratified, so far as possible, of course this one was. It took him less than an hour to discover that Constance could both talk and read; and before the two weeks of this particular imprisonment passed they had become excellent friends.

"It is such a comfort to have a reader for Fred whom one can pay by the hour," his mother said with a sigh of relief as she recounted to a caller the new occupation of Ellen Stuart. "Fred delights in hearing her; he says she reads more understandingly than we do; fancy it! And she talks the book over with him afterward in a way that he enjoys. She really seems to have an excellent education for a working girl. Fred says she knows more about books and authors than he does; but then, he is always partial to the people whom he happens to fancy."

While the mother thus lightly dismissed her from her thoughts, Constance was revolving in her mind problems of vital interest to the frail careless boy who would be almost certain sooner

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or later to contract a cold that would close his short life here. After that, what? Would she be one of those held responsible for the sort of answer to be made to that question?

Out of her interest in Fred Emerson grew experiences of a different character. When the pleasant weather of the late autumn changed into the rain and sleet, and general disagreeableness which characterized that winter, the very serious illness that his family had been dreading, and that he apparently had been courting, came upon poor Fred; and for days together Constance, who was almost installed in the family as invalid cook and general attendant, feared that her opportunity for this one was over. Youth triumphed once more, however, and there came a day when Fred, lying white and fretful among his pillows, was pronounced out of immediate danger. From this moment his demands upon Constance were numberless. She was compelled to keep other engagements delayed by his illness, and he chose to consider himself ill used thereby. At last he begged so earnestly for just a little of her time after the day's duties were over, that she yielded and promised to spend part of the evening with him. There had been a difficulty in the way, and to the mother's urging, Constance had explained that she had heretofore made a point of reaching her home before dark, as she did

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not care to be on the streets alone afterward. Mrs. Emerson assured her that John, the coachman, could go home with her if she was really afraid to go alone. To her sister-in-law she remarked that she should not think a working girl ought to mind being on the streets alone. How could she expect to be always through with her work before dark? “Of course I intend to pay her for every hour that she spends with Fred,” she added in an injured tone, “and one would think that she might be glad of the opportunity for earning more money in so agreeable a manner, instead of having to be distinctly urged to stay. I wish Fred wasn’t so foolish about her reading. It seems too absurd to have to plan for an escort for his nurse! that is simply what she is to him. I do hope that Ellen Stuart is not going to spoil her really excellent work by putting on fine-lady airs.”

The sister-in-law, however, proved to be an unreasonable creature and took Constance’s part, declaring that she should by no means like to have a daughter of hers, especially if she were young and handsome, walk those West Side streets alone; and she did not suppose it made any particular difference with one’s feelings in such respects whether one worked for a living or did nothing.

It was this state of things that brought Mrs.

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Emerson to the library one evening with perplexity on her face and irritability in her tones.

"I am sure I don't know how to arrange it. Here is Ellen Stuart announcing that she must go home now, and John won't be back until midnight. I didn't know that Mr. Emerson was going to use the carriage to-night; and I couldn't have disappointed poor Fred, if I had. It is simply ridiculous that she can't go alone, as other girls in her station do. Would you tell her that she must, or else stay all night?"

She spoke to the sister-in-law, but Mr. Henry Emerson, lounging in an easy-chair with the latest magazine in his hand, glanced up from it to ask:—

"What is all this, mother? Is it the stately lady who does your kitchen fancy work who demands an escort home? You ought to have ordered the carriage! However, I can see her safely across town to-night. I have an errand of my own somewhere in that vicinity."

"How very good of you!" said the relieved mother, looking admiringly at her six feet of handsome son. "I was really troubled, for you have named her well; she can be a 'stately lady,' I assure you, when she chooses. 'I do not intend to be on the streets alone after dark,' she told me, with as much dignity as though she had complete command of her time

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and could order her goings to suit her fancy. I felt like telling her that she could seek employment elsewhere if she could not suit her hours to mine, but Fred has taken such a ridiculous fancy to her that I did not like to lose her just now.

“She has read him to sleep, don’t you think! and he has been so restless and nervous all the afternoon that I was afraid he would not get to sleep to-night. Her voice certainly has a soothing effect upon him. But it seems too bad, Henry, that you should have to go away over there for nothing.”

Mr. Henry Emerson yawned politely behind his carefully kept hand.

“Never mind, mother; I’ll toss that in as my contribution toward the expenses of Fred’s circus that he got up for the holidays. Where is the timid young woman? Tell her she may entrust her precious self to me to be duly delivered.”

Constance, waiting in the hall for John, was surprised and annoyed to find that it was Mr. Henry Emerson who was to go with her. Her knowledge of him was very limited. She knew that he had charge of one of his father’s manufactories in a suburb of the city, and that he was supposed to spend most of his nights there, being at home only for the Sabbath. Still, on one pretext or another he was often at

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home, and during Fred's serious illness they had passed each other frequently in the halls or on the stairs. Once he had insisted upon taking a tray from her hands and carrying it, in a manner that was offensive to her without her being able to tell just why. Certainly she had no desire to take a walk across town with this elegant gentleman. As she took her seat in the car she told herself that she must arrange so that this need never occur again; he had probably felt compelled to offer her the courtesy, out of regard for his mother's word; but if John was not to be depended upon, Fred must do without her in the evening. She promptly passed up her fare before Mr. Emerson could give it attention, but refrained from paying his, as she had intended doing for John.

"Why did you do that?" he asked, bending over her, the crowded condition of the car having compelled him to stand. "Don't you know that gentlemen who attend ladies expect to pay their fare?"

Again both tone and manner were distinctly disagreeable. Constance was glad that fresh accessions at that moment made it necessary for her companion to move farther away from her, and that any attempt at conversation was unnecessary. If she could but think of some way to avoid that long walk across town. As

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soon as they left the car she made haste to forestall any word of her attendant.

“I am sorry to have troubled you to this extent, Mr. Emerson. If I had not supposed that John could take me home, I should, of course, have made other arrangements.”

“Then shall I tell you that I am glad John was otherwise engaged? I am going to confess to having been jealous of Fred for some time, because of his monopoly of you. In your zeal for the sick, you should not entirely overlook people who are well. Don't you know that?”

His manner was familiarity itself; and besides, had that offensive *something* about it to which Constance had not yet given a name. Indignation held her speechless for a moment; then she determined to ignore his words entirely.

“Is there not some other route from Clarke Place that by taking two lines of cars, or even three, one could reach the West Side?” she asked. “I have thought that perhaps the cars going down Randolph Street connected at some point with a cross line.”

“No,” he said, “there is no way of reaching your street from our part of the town without taking a somewhat lonesome walk; but I assure you, Ellen, that that need not trouble you. Instead of its being a burden to me to

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take care of you, I welcome the opportunity; you shall have no lonely walks if I can help it."

This was unbearable! "Ellen" indeed! how dare he? Yet even then she tried to be reasonable. Perhaps from his standpoint he meant only to be kind and try to put her at ease in his company. The problem of why young women who choose other people's kitchens for some of their work must forego the privilege of being addressed as other women are, was one that had confronted her before. She had started and changed color and almost dropped the starch she was carrying, the first time that Mrs. Emerson called her "Ellen." Since then she had grown used to it. Since people were so sure that if you did certain kinds of work for them they had a right to the free use of your Christian name, why let them use it; the matter was not worthy a second thought for one who had heavier burdens to bear. It was in this way that she thought she had dismissed it. Fred, the sixteen year old invalid, in his physical weakness and imperiousness might shout "Ellen" after her a dozen times in an hour, and she merely smiled and petted him the more. But Mr. Henry Emerson, a *gentleman*, so called, and a stranger — that was another matter. Moreover, what did he mean by assuming the care of her? Did he

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imagine that she would ever be caught in like need again?

"You have forgotten my name," she said with dignity. "It is Stuart."

"Oh! *Miss Stuart.*" He laughed as he spoke the words with a very slight emphasis on the "*Miss.*" "I beg your pardon. I had forgotten all but '*Ellen.*' Why do you wish to hold me at arm's length in this fashion, when I hear Fred calling you '*Ellen.*' with perfect impunity? You don't understand what I am trying to tell you. I am not a good little boy who came away over here to please his mother. I came because I wanted to enjoy a walk with you. I have a presentiment that you and I are going to be very good friends; and I am telling you that, in order to have the pleasure of a chat with you, every evening if you choose, I will arrange to come back to town instead of staying out at the mills, as I have been doing frequently. The pleasure that I am sure I shall have in your society will compensate me for any little sacrifice I may have to make in order to do it. What more do you want? Take care! my dear girl, if you would take my arm on these dimly lighted streets you would be saved from such accidents."

Constance in her indignation had overlooked a slight descent in the walk, and had stumbled

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and nearly fallen. Mr. Emerson had grasped her arm and saved her from the fall; then he tried to draw her hand through his arm, but she drew herself away from his touch and spoke her angry words.

"I am not aware, Mr. Emerson, that I have said or done anything which should offer you a pretext for insulting me. I must ask you to leave me at once. My fear of being alone on the street has gone. I decidedly prefer it to remaining another moment in the company of one who has forgotten that he is a gentleman."

There was an instant change in Mr. Emerson's manner.

"I beg ten thousand pardons," he said quickly. "You mistake my meaning, utterly. I wished only to appear friendly and make you feel at ease. I know, of course, that you are very different from other girls who have been in my mother's employ; yet I thought — or — that is — what I mean is simply that I wish to be your friend, and to be of service to you in any way that I can. I may have blundered in the method of conveying it, but surely you will believe me when I say that nothing was farther from my thoughts than rudeness."

Constance had walked on rapidly while she spoke her indignant words, and he was taking strides to keep up with her. Evidently she must endure his presence for the remainder of

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the way. Perhaps he was really sincere, and having been trained to one code of proprieties for women whom he met in society, and another for working women, was not quite so much to blame as had appeared on the surface. Certainly he had changed his manner of treatment now. He began to talk quietly about the buildings they were passing, giving her little items of interest concerning public men who were connected with them, and so shaping his talk that she could remain entirely silent without appearing rude.

XVI.

"Poor Child!"

AS they reached the corner of the street on which she lived, Constance made another effort to dismiss her escort. She assured him that her boarding house was but a few doors away, that the street was quiet and well lighted, and it was unnecessary for him to take another step in her behalf. Instead of heeding her he began, in an earnest and perfectly respectful manner, his protest.

"Miss Stuart, let me beg you once more to forgive my mistake. I see that you have not yet done so. I want to prove to you how sincere is my regret for having caused you unintentional pain. You know my standing, of course, and that of my family. I am going to ask you to look upon me as a deeply interested friend. I want to call upon you, and to show you the attention which a lady in a strange city should receive. It is absurd for a person like you to shut herself away from the world because she chances to be financially unfortunate. Pardon me for imagining that this is the

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explanation of your present position. I plainly see that you were not trained to such a life, and are out of your sphere. It was amazing stupidity in me not to have understood from the very first, but you need not be afraid that I shall err again. No, not yet, please,” he added eagerly, as Constance would have spoken, “let me explain further. I assure you that I am in deeper earnest than you probably think possible. I want to be your *friend*. I want the right to take care of you; to give my evenings to your service. I cannot have you walking these streets alone; you do not know how unfitting it is for one like you. I have been spending most of my evenings in the country, but there is no earthly occasion for doing so. I could be in town every night if there were sufficient inducement. May I serve you in this, and in every other way that you would permit a trusted friend to do?”

“No,” said Constance. “Thank you for the kindness — since you intend kindness — but your sacrifice is quite unnecessary. I am both able and willing to take care of myself. It is not my habit nor my intention to be on the streets alone; after this evening’s experience I shall be doubly careful. It was to accommodate your mother that I waived my rule and remained late this evening; I shall not do so again.”

He made a gesture almost of despair.

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"You are still angry with me!" he said reproachfully, "because of a foolish attempt upon my part to make you feel at ease and understand that I was not burdened but glad to be with you. Is that kind? Is it right? How shall I make you understand that I am not seeking opportunities to do my duty? I tell you I want to be recognized as your *friend*. Your persistent coldness and misunderstanding compel me to go farther than conventionality would probably approve during a first interview, but I am prepared to do so; I want to single you out from among women as my very special friend. What more can I say?"

"Nothing," said Constance, whose voice grew colder as his increased in earnestness. "You have already said too much. You choose your friends too suddenly. No, I will not hear more. I must decline positively the honor you seem to intend me. I am not offended — at least I will try not to be, after your explanation. I think I can make allowances, and understand how hard it is for you to believe that a working woman should be treated with ordinary civility. We will pass all that. If you mean courtesy now, I ought to thank you for the intention, while I assure you that it is lost upon me. I am not in society in any sense of the word, nor do I expect or desire to be."

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He was not to be shaken off.

"But, Miss Stuart," he began eagerly, "this is absurd. At your age and with your face it will be impossible to live in this world and be a recluse. Men have keener eyes than you imagine. They will seek you out and find ways of annoying you. Believe me, you need a friend, and I —" The sentence was interrupted by an exclamation very like dismay. Constance had dashed up the steps of a house that he was passing, and as he halted, the light from a gas jet near at hand fell full upon the number over the door. It was that which seemed to have caused his exclamation.

"Is this — this cannot be your number!" he said, in evident excitement. "What street is this? How very extraordinary! Are you sure you are not mistaken?"

But Constance was too intent upon parting company with him to give much heed to his words. She pulled at the bell in a way to astonish the good woman inside, and was in a panic to have the door open for her. She need not have been in such frantic haste; her escort seemed suddenly to have become equally anxious to get away from her. He muttered something, she did not know what, about seeing her again, and sped across the street and down the street before Mrs. Bristow had succeeded in slipping her bolt.

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"Why, dear me!" she said, "is it you? I thought it was a fireman, or something. How you did ring! Was you scared? Did you come alone? Your cheeks look as if they were burning, but you don't look exactly scared. I was real worried about you. I told the girls that maybe we'd better walk out a ways and see if we didn't meet you; but Alice thought it would be foolish. Alice is here; she came a couple of hours ago to stay all day to-morrow. One of the trustees is dead, and that gives her a whole day's vacation. Isn't that nice? I don't mean it's nice that the poor man is dead, — though maybe he is glad of that, — but public school teachers get dreadful few holidays. Did anything really happen to scare you, Ellen?"

It was Constance's first chance to speak.

"I am not frightened," she said, "but I do not like being so late. I shall not stay into the evening again. I am glad you are to have Alice for an extra day. Where is she?"

"Why, she went upstairs a bit ago, just a few minutes before you rang."

At that moment the girl appeared, slowly descending the stairs — Mrs. Bristow's eldest daughter, and the pride of her heart. Not only was she an extremely pretty girl, with a grace of motion and ease of manner like those who have inherited from generations of culture, but she had been the "smartest" scholar in her class at

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High school, as her mother never wearied of explaining, and was now making a phenomenal success in a suburban school that had heretofore been the terror of women teachers, and the scene of disgrace with several. She came home on Saturday nights and returned to school on Monday mornings, and that was all that Mrs. Bristow had of her. She had given up without a murmur the long Saturdays in which she had looked forward to having her daughter with her, because Alice was taking music and French lessons of famous teachers who went out to the suburbs on Saturdays, the one in the morning and the other in the afternoon, and this mother meant that her darling should have "the best that was going."

"Here is Ellen," she explained to the tall graceful girl who came downstairs with slow dignity.

"Did you hear her ring? My! but I was scared! I thought something had happened. She has been scared herself, I guess, though she won't own it. She ain't used to walking the streets alone nights, any more than my girls are." Mrs. Bristow prided herself upon taking as good care of her girls as people could with whom time and money were plenty.

There was a sudden flash in Alice's eyes such as Constance had never seen there before, as she repeated her mother's word contemptuously.

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“‘Scared!’ I guess you are mistaken this time, mother. Ellen wasn’t alone; I saw her when she first turned the corner, and knew her in a minute. The street just around here is as light as day. I suppose you had a very pleasant walk?”

Her voice was strangely suggestive and disagreeable. Constance was annoyed with herself for flushing deeply under the girl’s gaze; she felt that it had been sufficient to suffer insult and torture on the way home, without offering herself as food for coarse curiosity. Besides, she was disappointed in Alice; the girl had seemed kind, and refined in manner, heretofore. She turned from her, ignoring her remark, and addressed herself to the mother.

“I was not alone, Mrs. Bristow. Mrs. Emerson, who asked me to remain late to attend upon the invalid, was to have sent the coachman home with me; but he did not return in time, and Mr. Emerson came.”

“‘Mr. Emerson’! what, the old gentleman?”

It was Alice who hastened to explain.

“Oh no, mother, not the old gentleman at all; it was Mr. Henry himself, as large as life.”

Constance turned from them both in a fever of shame and perplexity, and ran upstairs. Once in her own room she had to go over her recent bewildering experience in detail. It seemed incredible that she who had held herself so high

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and strong heretofore should have had such words spoken to her as had been spoken that evening.

She had always taken the position that no self-respecting young woman need fear being treated other than respectfully by men; that girls probably had themselves to thank for carelessness when any man attempted familiarity. Yet the only excuse that she had given Mr. Emerson was the fact that she had chosen to make herself useful, on occasion, in his mother's kitchen, and accept payment in money. This, it seemed, not only shut her out from Mrs. Emerson's parlor as a caller, which she had expected, but made the son feel privileged to call her "Ellen" and treat her with a familiarity that could have been justified only by long and intimate acquaintance. She felt that such a state of things was a disgrace to American civilization. Two threads of perplexity mingled with her indignation and pain. First, how was she to meet the problem which this night's experience suggested? Mr. Henry Emerson, despite all his attempts at explanation, and making what allowance she could for his environment, had been unquestionably and unpardonably rude to her. But, if he had not been, or if she should meet other men who were on a level with her supposed social position, and who honestly desired to be friendly

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with her and to meet her socially, how was she to receive their kindnesses? Or rather, how was she to explain that she could not receive them? Attentions, even of the most ordinary sort from young men, she could not accept; she was a married woman. Her face did not glow under the power of that thought; it paled. In the eyes of the world she was not married, and she had no right to the married name; yet to her inner life it was the same as though she had. She had been married and widowed, she told herself, with a widowhood the bitterness of which those who had been desolated only by death could never understand. It had all come to her in one day of time, as other people counted; but for herself an eternity had passed over her. She was no longer a young, joyous woman, with life and its beautiful possibilities stretching before her. So far as certain experiences were concerned, she was old. Nevertheless, there was a life to be lived here, and she did not mean to shrink from it; she meant to be brave and true, and to demonstrate that the religion of Jesus Christ was of sufficient strength to bear any weight; but in order to do this she need not accept the attentions and take pleasure in the scenes that other women of her age would naturally accept and enjoy. God did not ask this of her; she was thankful that she felt sure of it. How, then, was she to

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ward off such attention? If other men, not like Mr. Emerson, offered her honest kindnesses, how was she to receive them? There were evidently problems in this new life of hers that she had not yet solved, nor even thought about heretofore! For a time they weighed her down. The often-quoted truth that “no man liveth to himself” came to her with a different meaning from heretofore; it seemed that no one was allowed to live for himself, even in a reasonable and unselfish sense. It puzzled her afterward to understand why so small a matter as that, compared with what she had already endured, should have had power to so distress her; but it is a fact that she shed some bitter tears before she reached the resting place of those who cast all burdens, great or small, upon Him who has invited such confidence.

The other perplexity that kept itself in haunting undertone was: “What is the matter with Alice Bristow? Why did she look at me so coldly, and speak to me with almost a sneer?”

Before the next evening those questions had been answered for her. She had returned early from her day’s appointment and was considering whether or not she should go down and offer to help Alice with a dress that was being remodelled, when Mrs. Bristow tapped at her door, work in hand, and announced herself puzzled over some portion of the said dress.

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"Alice and the girls have gone out for a walk," she explained. "I made Alice go, poor child! She was that tired and nervous that I saw she was only doing work to be ripped out afterward, and I promised if she would go, to get this sleeve to set right before she got back. I don't know what is the matter with the thing; she's witched it, somehow. I didn't tell her, but thinks I to myself, 'The very minute you get out of sight, my lady, I'll take it up to Ellen, and I won't be afraid to venture an old-fashioned shilling that she can help me out.'"

"That is very easily done," said Constance, as she gave the offending sleeve careful attention. "You have started the sleeve for the wrong arm, Mrs. Bristow; all it wants is to change places with the other one, and it will settle into shape."

"Well, now, if I ain't beat!" declared the good woman. "Yes, that's so, as sure as time! I see it myself, as plain as day, now you've pointed it out. And there Alice has been fussing at it, and fussing at it, till she didn't know whether to cry or to fly at it and tear it all to pieces, poor thing!"

Something in her tone made Constance aware that the last two words applied to Alice, and not to the sleeve; also that her mother was anxious about her, and wanted to be asked to become confidential.

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“Let me baste the sleeves in for you, Mrs. Bristow,” she said; “and if there is any other way in which I can help this dress along I shall be glad to do so. I have a leisure hour, and I was thinking of coming down to offer my services to Alice.”

“Well, now, I call that kind!” said Mrs. Bristow, whose sentences always began with one or both of those words. “I’ll just run down and get the skirt, and get you to show me how to fix the pleats and start the trimming, if you will. Alice has bothered over it all a good deal; and she doesn’t know how she wants it, or how it ought to be. She’s that upset and nervous to-day that she don’t get on as well as usual, poor child!”

“Isn’t Alice feeling well to-day?” Constance saw that a question from her was being waited for.

“Well, she is and she *isn’t*. She’d be well enough if — She has things to bother her; for that matter, they bother me, I guess, more than they do her; she’s trusting in her disposition, and most of the time she thinks things are all right, or will get so; but I don’t know.”

This was not especially enlightening in its character. Constance felt that she could only sew steadily on, and wait.

XVII.

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MRS. Bristow sewed, too, in silence for some minutes, and then nervously ripped out her stitches, her face wearing all the time such a look of genuine anxiety that Constance longed to comfort her, yet felt that she did not know how to advance without intrusion.

"I've made up my mind," said the mother, at last, "to ask you a question. You're considerably older than Alice, and I dare say you've seen more of the world than either she or me has. I don't know what she would say if she knew I was going to talk to you about it, but there!—" an unusually vigorous jerk of her thread emphasized the fact that an unalterable decision had been reached.

"I want to know what you would say if a man had paid you a good deal of attention for more than a year—going with you wherever he could get a chance, and sending you flowers and things, everlastingly, besides calling you his 'dear girl,' and saying you and he were made

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for each other, and he couldn't get along without you, and things of that kind, and yet never came right out plain and square and asked you to marry him; and never came to see your mother, nor came to your own house to visit you, but just hung around where you boarded. What would you think of such a man?"

"It sounds," said Constance, quickly, "very much as though I ought to think that he was a villain."

"Well," said Mrs. Bristow, biting off her thread in nervous haste, "there's times when I'm most afraid that that is just what is the matter; only Alice feels so sure that it isn't. She isn't one to run after men, Alice isn't; she has a whole lot of self-respect and right feelings, and she'd have to be come after real plain before she would pay any attention to it. He's been plain enough as far as actions go, the land knows! and the question is, Why does he do so if he isn't in earnest? And if he is in earnest, why doesn't he ask her if she will marry him, and come and see me, and have the day set, and have things honest and above board, like respectable people, such as we've been all our lives? I've said for weeks, yes, for months, that it was high time it came to that; and I've waited and waited, till it doesn't seem to me that I can stand things as they are much longer. It isn't as though she had

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a father to look after her, Ellen; there's only me, you know; and I promised her father when he was dying that I'd be father and mother both to them, but there! a woman can't do what a man can, and there's no use in talking. If Alice's father were alive I know, just as well as I want to know, that no young man could have hung around her in this way for so long; he'd have done something — but I'm sure I don't know what."

Constance was silent for very dismay. With prophetic eye she foresaw sorrow and pain for the poor mother, and for the fair young woman, who was trusting to fond words and loving attentions, instead of to the plain, outspoken plans that honest men are eager to have arranged.

"I can certainly sympathize with your anxieties," she said at last, feeling that she was being waited for. "I think if I were a mother, placed in like circumstances, I should send for the young man to come and see me; and I should know from his own lips just what confidence was to be placed in him. There are wicked men in the world, Mrs. Bristow, false men in every sense of the word; and mothers owe it to their fatherless children to err on the side of over-care, if necessary, instead of on the side of over-trustfulness." She wondered that she was able to keep her voice steady while speaking those

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words. Had she not terrible occasion for her opinion of men?

"I know it," said Mrs. Bristow, dropping all pretence of work, and letting the keenness of her anxiety be seen in her face; "I feel it all through me that something's wrong, and I have felt it for a good while. But Alice feels awfully about my taking any step. She says I will spoil her life if I do; that he would have a right to be angry because he was not trusted. 'Mother,' she says, 'if you could see him and hear him talk, you would know it was all right, just as I do.' 'Then why don't I have a chance to see him and hear him talk?' I ask her. Isn't that my right? Ain't I the child's mother, and all she's got, and wouldn't I give my life for her, any time? I'm a decent woman, and come of a respectable family, that have always kept themselves respectable; he needn't be ashamed to come to see us, if we are poor. Alice thinks he is condescending so dreadfully to choose her. 'He could have any one, mother,' she says; 'any lady in the city would be proud to be noticed by him, and he has turned from them all and picked out poor little me!' She thinks that is wonderful; but I can't, for the life of me, think that there is anything so strange about it. I may be a silly mother, but I've got eyes, and I don't see many girls anywhere that are prettier than my Alice, or

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that could be finer-looking ladies if they had the chance. And she's educated, too. She was the best scholar in her class. And see how she manages that school out there, that some men, even, have failed in! He tells her it is too hard for her, and he won't have her wearing her strength out on such work. Why doesn't he stop it, then? or act as though he wanted to, in a sensible way?"

"Is he a rich man?" asked Constance, whose heart had been growing heavier for Alice with every added sentence of the mother's.

"O my, yes! 'rich'? Rich as Jews, they are. There is nothing of that kind to hinder. If there was, and he'd say so like a man, Alice would be willing to wait for him, and do her share of the getting ready, and I'd be willing to have her. I've wished many a time it was like that; it would seem more natural. Why, you know how they toss money about? Dear me! you don't know who I mean, do you? Dear, dear! Alice would be raving if she knew I told you, but I'm going to do it. You won't let on that I said a word, will you? I shall just tell you his name, and ask you what you think."

"Mrs. Bristow," said Constance, the color flowing into her pale face, "do you think you ought to give Alice's secret to me against her will? If I could help her in any way I do

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not need to tell you how gladly I would do it; but if she shrinks from me, and would be hurt by my knowledge of her affairs, do you think you ought to say more?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Bristow, sturdily, "I do. I've got to have a talk with somebody, or go crazy; I'm that troubled that I can't sleep nights. And to-day I can see as plain as daylight that she is worrying, herself. It seems strange, even to her, that he would come away over here last night and not make any sign, when he knew she was at home. She would give her two eyes, I believe, to know what he said to you about the street and the house. She thinks, you see, that he doesn't like to come to this part of the town to call on her, for fear folks will go to talking about it, because none of his acquaintances live over here. But I tell her that he's got to come, sooner or later, if he wants her; and I don't see what he gains by hanging off. It's a perfectly respectable part of the town, anyway; and just as nice people live around here as live anywhere. I think myself that that is the silliest kind of excuse. I told Alice maybe he came over last night to see how we looked here, and whether he could stand it. Well, now you know who it is, don't you, without my telling it."

"Mrs. Bristow, you can't mean —"

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"Yes, I do; I mean Henry Emerson, and nobody else. He's been after my Alice ever since he went out there to superintend his father's mill. He stays there nights, and pretty near every evening of his life, when he ain't in town at some party or other, he contrives to spend with Alice. He takes her out walking and riding, and if there are any doings out there, he is sure to go with her; and the mill girls are beginning to point him out as her 'beau,' you know. There are plenty of things about it that are trying to a girl like Alice. She won't own it, but I can see she feels it, that he never brings her to things in town — concerts, you know, and lectures. He did ask her once to go to the theatre, but she wouldn't go. She knows I don't like her going to the theatre, and she's a good girl, Alice is. She don't mean to give me a minute's trouble; but I wish to the land, sometimes, that she had never set eyes on Henry Emerson. Don't it look queer to you that he doesn't want her with him at any doings in town? Of course he couldn't take her to parties and such places without an invitation; but she'd begin to have invitations, I s'pose, if he'd treat her right. He goes himself to all the grand parties and receptions. Alice says it is a 'duty that he owes to society'! She gets that kind of talk from him. I say there's

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beginning to be a duty that he owes to me ; now don't you think so ? ”

Consternation held Constance's lips closed. What was she to say, what ought she to say, to Alice's mother about Henry Emerson, the man who but the evening before had offered himself as her “very special friend” !

Her first impulse was to give Mrs. Bristow a history of the hour that she had spent in his company, and let her judge for herself of his worthiness. Her second thought was, that in Alice Bristow's present frame of mind this might do harm rather than good. The young man's influence over her might be such that she would believe him against all the world, and an attempt to undermine that influence might lead to the very ruin that she feared. She must wait for wisdom.

“I do not know quite what I think,” she said at last, as the mother waited in keen anxiety for her word ; “I mean I do not know what to advise — not yet. We must be careful ; there is a possibility of doing harm rather than good. Let me think about it, Mrs. Bristow, and pray.” There was a slight hesitancy over that last word ; Constance was not yet accustomed to speaking out her thought upon that theme. Even with regard to so natural and reasonable a matter as seeking advice from the Source of all wisdom, her education had been

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not to speak of it. Her unexpected reference had immediate effect upon the troubled mother. The anxious look on her face gave place to one that expressed almost awe.

"Do you pray about such things?" she asked, with a wistful note in her voice that went to Constance's heart. "It must be nice to feel that you can."

"Casting all your care upon Him," quoted Constance, with marked emphasis on the "all."

The story to which she had listened had, in one sense, a curious effect upon Constance herself. Her whole life, heretofore, had trained her to respond promptly to the needs of others whenever they touched her closely enough to claim her attention. This girl, therefore, young, pretty, and innocent, trusting where many would be suspicious, ready to give her wealth of love into the keeping of a man entirely unworthy of her, because she believed that he was honestly asking for that love, appealed powerfully to the older woman. Had her own fiery trial, she asked herself, been in part for this reason; that she might put forth a hand to save another woman, perhaps from depths far lower than sacrifice and sorrow? Had she possibly come — not to her kingdom but to her cross, "for such a time as this"? The thought gave her strength; lifted her, for perhaps the first time since her crucifixion, above her own cross, and

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enabled her to get for the moment a glimpse of the cross that had been borne for her.

"If any man serve me, let him follow me."

The words sounded in her heart like a call to duty. Had he permitted her to follow in closer line than many women need, that she might be his agent in saving this young soul? On her knees that night she gave herself solemnly to the work; and the sense of humiliation that Henry Emerson's treatment of her had induced, passed. It had come to her that she might in this way have been permitted a glimpse of his true character for a purpose.

Just what she could do was not clear to her in detail, but the first step was. She must win Alice Bristow's love and trust. She must set herself very carefully to the task, and overlook entirely any coldnesses or sarcasms that the troubled girl might bestow upon her. Heretofore she had seen but little of Alice, and had been content with giving her a passing word and smile when they chanced to meet on Sundays. She realized that she had not included Alice in the interest that she felt for the mother and the two younger girls; for the reason, probably, that their lives during the week did not touch. But she set herself to work with an earnest purpose to change all this.

She counselled the mother — whether wisely or unwisely, she could not be sure, — that she

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take no positive step such as would be likely to anger Alice just yet. There followed weeks of patient effort on the part of this watcher for a soul. Effort that she could not help questioning doubtfully as her anxiety increased. Progress was certainly made, so far as winning Alice's love to herself was concerned, but if that was to be all, what did it matter? Alice was sweet and bright, and evidently happy. She returned from school on that first Saturday after Constance's memorable walk, with the anxious look gone from her eyes, and in all the winsomeness of her unusually attractive girlhood.

"He's coaxed her up," the mother confided to Constance. "He had her out with him twice this week, and made her think that everything was lovely. He can make her believe that black is white if he wants to. I never saw anything like it! Not that she tells me much about it; she knows that I don't take as much stock in him as she does, and she won't talk about him, — only a word here and there.

"One of these days, mother, you'll understand him," she says, and I ask her if she is sure that I'm going to live long enough! He hasn't said a word yet about getting married; that I know, or I should hear it quick enough. But I know, too, that he talks all the time in

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a way to make her feel that that is what he means."

All this only served to increase Constance's anxiety, and make her fear that she ought not to have counselled the mother to patience.

Next, it came to pass that Mr. Emerson was sent abroad on a business trip that would occupy at least six weeks. Mrs. Bristow drew a sigh of relief when she heard of this, and Constance hailed it as an opportunity which she by no means let slip. The absence extended over ten weeks instead of six, and by the time Mr. Emerson returned, Constance felt that she possessed Alice Bristow's love in an unusual degree, and her confidence in all directions save one. She would not talk to her about Mr. Emerson.

It is true that Constance could not help admiring her for this reticence, while at the same time she sighed over it as an indication that the girl's nature was deeper than she had supposed; and knew that her depth of pain, if pain must come, would be correspondingly greater.

XVIII.

What if—?

THERE were times when Constance wondered if they were not possibly mistaken in Mr. Emerson's character. He might be a trifle with other women, especially with women whom he considered much lower in the social scale than himself, and yet be honestly fascinated with this pretty flower that had apparently bloomed away above her sphere. Was it not possible that he meant to offer honorable marriage to the child? If so, what then? The closer Constance's heart drew to the heart of the fair young girl, the more distinctly did she turn from the thought of such a marriage; yet, under such circumstances, ought she to try to interfere? But, on the other hand, if he meant to be sincere and honorable, why did the man "hang back," as Mrs. Bristow graphically expressed it? Was he trying to win the girl so completely that she would be willing to practically disown mother and sisters for his sake? Did he mean, sometime, to remove her from all her present surroundings and make the fine

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lady of her which Constance felt that the child could, under tuition, become? Such a course she believed would be quite worthy of the man, if, indeed, he meant anything so honorable as that. Her circle of questions continually brought her back to that haunting "if."

She could not be sure that he wrote to Alice during his absence; the girl laughingly evaded all her mother's attempts to learn the truth. She had discovered for herself that the two whom she loved—her mother and Constance—distrusted her friend, therefore they should not hear about him from her.

"She gets letters from him, though, you may depend," sighed the troubled mother. "Alice thinks she hides things from me, but land! it ain't easy to hide from mothers. I can see by the look in her eyes when she comes home, that she has word from him, and that he is coaxing her up to believe that he is the best and the greatest man in the world. She's making big plans, too; she told Kate the other day that sometime she should have a piano that would be worth playing on. She told her to study away and do all she could with that 'old tin pan'—that's what she calls our piano, which is a very respectable one, I think—that one of these days she might be studying music in Berlin. He stuffs her full of all such notions, you may depend. Alice was never one to build

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castles in the air; she thinks she's got foundations, poor child!"

Yet Constance could see that, at times, the mother's heart was taking hold of her own faint hope that the man was sincere in his words to her child, and would make life rose color for her, at least, however completely he ignored the rest of them. She even made her pitiful and solemn sacrifices in solitude, and said one day to Constance, beginning suddenly out of her thoughts, when not a word on the subject had passed between them that day:—

"I can give her up to him, if that is what he is determined to have. She's been the very heart of me, almost, ever since her father died, but for that very reason I can't stand in her way. If it's me he's ashamed of, I'd be willing to keep out of sight all the rest of my days, and keep the girls away, too, for that matter, if he'll only do the right thing by her."

It was then that Constance felt sure that if he did not mean "the right thing" no punishment which could be administered in this life would meet his deserts.

In due time he returned, and the first Saturday that Alice came home after that, her eyes fairly shone with satisfied joy. She wore a tiny lace-pin almost too small to attract the attention of other than anxious eyes; it was hiding in the lace at her throat, yet small as it

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was, there blazed in its centre a real diamond. "It is 'most too small to be seen," said the mother, doubtfully; "but yet it's there." Alice laughed.

"'Precious things are done up in small parcels,' you know, mother," she said lightly, and placed her hand over the tiny diamond, as if instinctively to hide it from curious gaze.

"Do you suppose he'd give her a diamond if he didn't mean the real thing?" whispered the mother that evening to Constance.

It was on the following week that Fred Emerson had one of his ill turns, and Constance was offered more than treble her usual price if she would give up her other work and read to and amuse him. She refused to do this, but promised to try to secure an hour each afternoon for the spoiled boy's sake. On her second afternoon she met Henry Emerson in Fred's room. He greeted her as though they had never met before, and spent nearly the entire hour with them, apparently listening to the reading. He had not had so enjoyable a time in months, he said; it was unusual to hear an unprofessional reader enter into the meaning of an author so thoroughly. Fred joined him heartily, and begged Constance to try to come earlier the next day, it was so tiresome to be kept waiting for her. His brother attended her to the street door, quite as he

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might have done any guest of his mother, talking to her only about Fred's condition. Yet she went home annoyed and puzzled. On the next afternoon Mr. Emerson was again installed in the invalid's room.

"He's been reading to me," Fred explained; "he's a good reader, too; the only trouble is a fellow can never get hold of him. I don't believe he has spent half an hour with me before, in five years. I didn't let him touch our book, Ellen; nobody but you can read that."

Constance made an earnest plea to be excused, as other duties were awaiting her, and Mr. Emerson could fill her place; but Fred was irritable over the suggestion, frankly declaring that he had had all he wanted of Henry for one day. That gentleman ended the matter by springing to his feet, watch in hand, and declaring that he must be off at once to a business engagement.

Yet he was in the hall when Constance came downstairs, and walked with her to the car not only, but took a seat beside her. On the way down town he talked incessantly, not claiming replies from her, but evidently exerting himself to interest her, and treating her with the utmost courtesy. Meantime, she was revolving in her mind whether she should presently say to him that she was very fond indeed of the girl he had chosen, and that she had a most

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estimable mother. She wondered if he understood the degree of intimacy there was between Alice and herself. Might he not possibly be trying to win her as an ally in some plan of his? In great perplexity as to what course it would be wise to take, she was still revolving it for the first few minutes after they had left the car and she had become aware that he meant to walk across town with her. She was recalled to the immediate situation by his change of voice.

"I have taken the liberty, Miss Stuart, to join you uninvited, because I felt that I must have a word with you alone, and I did not know any other way in which to secure it. You remember too well, I am afraid, my first unfortunate attempt to make your intimate acquaintance. I have grown wiser since then, I hope, but I have not for a single moment relinquished my desire, I might almost say my determination, to become your friend. I appreciate the position in which you are placed, much better than you think I do, and believe me, I can penetrate your disguise. Moreover, I am entirely willing to trust you. If you do not care to explain to me why you are hiding away from your proper place in the world, it shall remain your secret as long as you will. But I shall take the utmost pleasure in replacing you where you belong. Can

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you not believe that I mean this with all my heart, and stand ready to make my words good in the most practical possible way?"

"Mr. Emerson," said Constance, with difficulty controlling her indignation sufficiently to speak, "I will not stop to ask what right you have to infer that I am in disguise, or that I stand in need of assistance from any man. I will simply ask you at once if you are not aware that I belong at present to the same household and am the very intimate friend of Alice Bristow?"

"Alice Bristow!" he repeated, his voice expressing unbounded astonishment. "Well, what then? What can your being a friend of that pretty child whom I myself know, and like, have to do with your acceptance of such friendship and care as I offer you? Is it possible that you still do not understand my meaning?"

"Ellen! Ellen Stuart!" called a girlish voice from the upper window of a house they were passing. "Can't you stop a few minutes? Mamie isn't so well, and she's been crying for you all the afternoon. I promised to watch when you went by, and tell you she wanted you."

Without a word to her companion, Constance turned, ran up the steps, and disappeared within the house.

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How shall the whirl of pain and shame and bewilderment be described, in which she found herself, when two hours afterward she was at last alone in her own room, at liberty to think?

Could that insufferable man actually be sincere in what he had said to her? Had poor Alice Bristow, with her small knowledge of the world and her loving, trusting heart, been deceived into thinking that because a man spoke kindly to her, and took her occasionally to places of entertainment, he was in love with her? It seemed utterly unlike the girl's character as she had learned it from the mother, or as she had herself studied it for weeks. And yet, if he understood the situation, the man could not be such a fool as to think he could deceive her, too! It must be that he was himself deceived as to the extent of the mischief he had done. She curled her lip in scorn over his reference to Alice. In the light of her first experience with him she could fancy how he had tried to treat the "little girl" whom he knew and "liked." But that Alice would permit such treatment, save as she believed it to come from one who loved her and honorably sought her love in return, she could not think. She was in a maze of anxiety and distress. What could she hope to do for Alice now? What ought to be said to the poor mother?

And then the Christian woman went through

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that humiliating stage of questioning, whereby we exhibit so often our distrust of the divine Hand that leads. Why was she not shown what and how to do? She had prayed to be guided—what had she accomplished? Here she was, completely hedged in! no movement that she could devise but seemed likely to do more harm than good. Not for worlds would she have put the thought into language—and there are thousands of Christians like her—but unspoken, and almost unrebuked, lay the thought that she might as well not have prayed; and that matters had now reached such a pass that to help was impossible. It is faith like this that the Leader has to accept from many of His followers!

It was Saturday evening, and Alice's sweet, bright face was probably already in the home circle. Constance shrank from going down to her and meeting her kisses and happy words. She felt almost like a traitor herself. What strange words had but now been spoken to her by the man who Alice evidently felt was bound by strongest bonds to herself! She shrank from meeting the anxious eyes of the mother—eyes that seemed to ask her each time that she came back from a trip into the world, "Do you know yet what to advise me to do?"

There came a tap at her door, and Mrs. Bristow's voice was heard outside.

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"Ellen! Are you here? Kate said you had come in, but I thought she was mistaken. I wish you would come and look at Alice, she seems real sick. She came home an hour earlier than usual with a terrible headache, and went straight to bed. She's been asleep almost ever since, and she's got fever, I think. I guess I better have the doctor come right in, don't you think so?"

While she talked, the two women were moving down the hall toward Alice's room.

As Constance bent over the uneasy sleeper and marked, with eyes that had been trained by experience as her uncle's attendant, the indications of grave trouble, there flashed over her faithless heart the possibility that it was in this way her prayer was to be answered.

At least it was the beginning of a long and weary vigil. The doctor, for whose coming Constance immediately counselled, admitted at once the gravity of the situation, and turned the quiet little household, in the space of an hour's time, into an organized private hospital, whose inmates understood that a great battle was to be fought.

There was not an easy victory. Despite the most skilful efforts to break its power, the fever ran its course, and was followed by days and weeks of that hovering between life and death, when no human being can be sure which side

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will win. This, in turn, was followed by the almost more wearing experience of creeping slowly back to life again.

Through it all, Mrs. Bristow found time to say in a hundred varieties of ejaculatory sentences, that she didn't know what "she should have done without Ellen Stuart!" That young woman certainly proved a tower of strength. Without actually giving up her daily routine of regular work, she yet contrived by judicious management to take, each day and each night, her turn in caring for the patient. Not to speak of those nights of vigil and of fear when none of them thought of sleep; when the solemn opportunity for watching a soul change worlds seemed to be upon them; when the solemn question pressed itself home to at least one conscience, "When the time comes for me to meet her face to face again, what shall I say to the Judge as to my responsibility for the road she travelled?" It was the first time since the spiritual part of her nature had awakened and taken control that Constance had to meet that question. She stood appalled before it. She promised herself that, God helping her, she would never again confront it with such a sense of neglect as she now felt bearing down upon her. Other interests or anxieties sank into insignificance, and her prayers became one prolonged cry for Alice Bristow's life to be spared

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until there was for her — yes, and for Constance herself — another opportunity.

During that period when they were not sure whether the forces would rally again, or whether the weakened life would slip away, from sheer inability to bear the strain of living, Constance watched for and prayed for the chance to speak some tender little word that would turn the invalid's thoughts to the great Source of strength. Yet it was Alice who at last opened the way.

"I did not die," she said in a musing tone, one morning, when she and Constance were alone together. "You all thought I would, didn't you? I could see in mother's face that she thought so; and in yours, sometimes. If I had, Ellen, what would have become of me?"

"Don't think of that 'if' now, dear," said Constance, the coward, speaking quickly. She was afraid of agitating the girl, and so snapping the thread of strength that remained. But Alice turned upon her nurse eyes that seemed to have grown larger, since her face had become so thin, as she asked: —

"Why not, Ellen? Why shouldn't I have thought about it long ago, and been ready to answer that question? Girls often die, and I may slip away yet; I heard Mrs. Poole saying so this morning, when she was in the other

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room. I'm not a bit ready. I knew I wasn't when they thought I was going; but I was too weak then, to care. One ought to get ready before that awful weakness comes. Don't you think so?"

XIX.

A Climax.

“ONE ought to get ready to live,” said Constance, bending to kiss the thin white face. “When we are ready to live, Alice dear, the best and strongest life that there is to be lived here, we are at all times ready to die. I am glad of a chance to say that to you. I want you, darling, to get ready to live a beautiful life right here; then, when the time comes for you to change worlds, it will be like putting off a worn dress for a new and beautiful one and going right on with the real living.”

Alice looked at her wonderingly.

“Do you feel that way always?” she asked. “I don’t know but you do; you are different in some things from everybody else that I ever knew; perhaps that explains it; but— isn’t it strange that you never wanted to teach me to feel so?”

“I did,” said Constance, dropping on her knees beside the bed, “I did, and I do; but I was foolish and faithless and afraid. You and I

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will begin a new kind of living, together, Alice. We will take the Lord Jesus for our Strength, and be his in this world and the other. But do you know that you are not to talk another word just now? Your duty at this minute is to swallow these drops and shut your eyes and sleep."

The weary child smiled, and obeyed; and Constance remained on her knees praying for very joy.

In the days that followed she had, for the first time in her life, the exquisite joy of leading a soul by gentle steps along the oft-trodden path to the waiting Saviour. "My part was almost nothing," she said afterward to that one with whom she went over every detail of this portion of her life; "I seemed to myself to be just watching a bud unfold and blossom into the flower that it was intended to be." Yet she knew in her soul that the Master had given her this opportunity and this soul. Was it an earnest of what he had for her to do in the world, and was her baptism of suffering her necessary preparation?

During this time there had been other experiences hard to endure. Throughout Alice's illness there had come, almost daily, rare fruits and flowers, brought always by a special messenger who said simply, "For Miss Stuart," and vanished before he could be questioned.

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Constance, annoyed beyond measure, began after a little to feel only too certain from whom they came; yet so skilfully was the sending managed, that she found no opportunity to decline them. She could only express her contempt of the exquisite floral treasures by leaving them to waste their sweetness in the kitchen day after day. If they had only been sent to Alice, how she would have enjoyed lingering among their blooms and carrying them to the girl with their lovely message. But they never were. Throughout those long weeks of grave apprehension, the man who in some way had certainly won the child's heart had made no sign that he cared for or knew of her existence. At first the mother had watched for word from him with a sort of solemn triumph.

"I guess when he hears how sick she is he will find that he can come even out to this common part of the town to call!" she would say confidently to Constance. Middle-aged woman though she was, and with some knowledge of the world, she yet seemed unable to conceive of such depths of wickedness as the deliberate wooing of her Alice for amusement only. When the days passed and no word came, she asked Constance anxiously if she did not suppose that "that man" was out of town. When she was assured with a brevity

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which spoke volumes that he was not, but had been seen that very day, the mother's grave triumph gave place to scorn. But even yet she did not understand.

"If he was that mean," she said, "that he could not come over there to see her when she was sick, and maybe dying, she did not see how she was ever going to get herself willing to having Alice marry him and go away somewhere where she couldn't look after her." And Constance, who had steadily refused Mrs. Emerson's urgent calls for service, and who had that day crossed the street three times and entered stores where she had no errand, in order to avoid the man who she could not help seeing was trying to get speech with her, felt once more bowed to the earth with a sense of shame, and knew not what to do. For a time, she could do nothing.

There came, one day, a climax in the shape of a note, unsigned yet so manifestly from the man who had persisted in trying to force himself upon her notice, that she could not but be sure the time had come for definite action of some sort. Once more it was Alice who opened the way.

It was a summer morning, for the spring had passed quite away while Alice lay unconscious of time. Midsummer indeed was upon them, and they had occasion every day for

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thanksgiving that the season had been so exceptionally cool and pleasant, even in the great city. Since the school year had closed, Alice's gain had been more rapid. The mother's theory was that the girl had really believed at first that she should get well enough to go back for the examinations and closing exercises, and her feverish desire to do so had helped to retard her progress. "Now that the fuss is all over and she can't go to work again till fall, don't you see how she is improving?" And then the mother would lower her voice to a whisper, although at the time she and Constance would be downstairs, and add:—

"I believe in my heart that the child pined to get back there where she could see him! And I s'pose that was natural enough, too. But now that she knows he must have gone away for the summer, she has kind of given up seeing him till fall, and it makes her feel better." It was the first time that she had referred to her daughter's friend in several weeks, her outspoken anxieties having given way at last to severe silence. Constance had hoped that the mother's eyes, at least, were being opened to the true state of things, and saw with dismay that they were not; and did not dare, just then, to say to her that the man she meant had not been out of town for a week at a time since Alice was taken ill.

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And yet she ought to tell her. How was it all to end?

Upstairs Alice, in the daintiest of white morning dresses looking herself not unlike the flower that was tucked into the ribbon at her waist, was seated in an easy-chair, a bit of work, with which she had been toying for the first time, lying idly in her lap. She had walked that morning almost the distance of a short square without undue fatigue, and had smiled brightly upon Constance when she asked anxiously about the result, assuring her that her occupation as head nurse was slipping away from her, for her patient was getting "real well and strong."

As Constance looked in with a delicate blanc-mange that she had made for the midday meal, she was struck with a look of quiet determination that seemed to have settled on the girl's fair face. Some question had evidently been before her for consideration, and a decision had been reached.

"Are you ready for dessert?" Constance asked gayly. "Do you eat all your soup?"

"Every drop. My appetite has come back, and so has my strength. I feel quite like myself to-day. It seems nice to have you here, Ellen, in the middle of the day; and this blanc-mange is delicious. Can you stay with me a little while? I want to talk. I have been

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thinking very seriously about some things, and there are questions that I want to ask. I would rather ask them of you than of mother, because poor mother has had so much to trouble her. I know, Ellen, that you will tell me just the truth."

And then Constance felt a sinking of heart, and a tremendous sense of responsibility. What was coming? and what ought she to say? The truth, of course, but — there are different ways of putting truth. Or, should she refuse to speak truth just yet, and ward off inquiries a little longer? She could do it. Her influence with Alice was almost unbounded now; but would it be well? The child was gaining with great steadiness, and was looking as she said "like herself," rather like a fair sweet picture of herself; but the quiet self-control and self-poise that had been marked in one so young had returned to her. She had taken on a sort of mental strength that very morning, during Constance's absence of an hour, that would hold her steadily to the decision she had reached. She might allow it to be put aside for another day or two perhaps out of deference to Constance as her nurse and friend, but all the same she would very soon reach the heart of the subject which she evidently meant to discuss. Would not delay only sap the strength instead of helping her?

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These questions hurried swiftly through Constance's mind and brought her to the words that she made as light as possible.

"I can stay a few minutes with you, dear. What momentous questions are to be discussed? Not the spring sewing that your mother worried over, and that need not be done, now that the spring is gone. And you are all ready for midsummer. You are to be kept in white, do you know it? Your mother and I have decided that, because it becomes you so."

For answer, Alice smiled upon her, a tender appreciative smile, and said:—

"Ellen, do you know whether or not Mr. Henry Emerson is in town yet?"

"Yes," said Constance, busying herself with the dishes on the tray; "he is in town. I saw him yesterday driving past Mrs. Salter's about noon. I was there, helping the Salters close their house, you remember. My dear, do you mean to tell me that you are not going to eat the whole of this blanc-mange when I made it myself, and scalded my hand in doing it, all for you?"

"Poor hand! it is used to being hurt in my service, I am afraid. I wonder what I can ever do for it in return? Ellen, did Mr. Emerson call here while I was sick?"

"No, darling, he has not been here at any time."

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"Nor sent any word? any message for me, or about me? I know you will be quite sure of what you say, and I know you will tell me nothing but the truth."

Poor Constance! the quiver in the child's voice, controlled as it was, struck at her heart. She felt as though she was about to thrust stabs into a gaping wound. She had to turn her face away from those waiting eyes, but she made her words distinct.

"There has been no message either for you or about you, dear, from him; though he is almost the only one who knows you who has not inquired and offered kindnesses."

The wound was open now, certainly; at any cost the truth must be told. What next? She could not decide; she must wait.

"Ellen," said the girl, after some minutes of silence that seemed to Constance like hours, "you do not know as I do how strange that is; how very strange! I do not understand it!"

No, poor darling, she didn't. She trusted him. Constance knew now what she must do; the child *must* understand.

"Alice dear," she said, infinite tenderness and yet determination in her voice, "may I ask you a few questions, now? Did he — do you think he understood that he had a right to come to your mother's house to inquire for you when

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you were ill? I mean, that he had special rights, beyond those of mere acquaintances?"

"Oh, yes," said Alice, simply, "he had every right. Mother does not like him very well, because she does not know him; but she has never kept him from coming here to see me. It was his pride did that; pride, and a shrinking from having me talked about in this neighborhood before he was ready for talk, you know. He felt that, keenly, I am sure; but I thought when I was so very sick that —" She did not complete her sentence.

Constance had one more question to ask.

"Darling, did he ever write to you? That is — do you know his handwriting?"

"Oh, yes," said Alice, "yes, indeed! he has written notes to me frequently; and letters, sometimes. And he has copied a number of choice bits for me. Oh, I would know his hand anywhere; he is a beautiful writer. I wonder why you asked that? Oh, do you mean —" She sat erect, looking radiant. "Ellen, have you a note for me that you think may be from him?"

"No," said Constance, quickly. "No, darling, I haven't. And I am going to hurt you now; but you will understand, won't you, that it is because I must? Do you know this writing? And will you read this letter? It is addressed to me, you see, and I received it yesterday."

A Climax.

She noticed the look almost of hunger in the child's eyes, as she grasped at the letter addressed in a familiar hand ; it was, as she had said, "beautiful writing."

It began abruptly without preliminaries of any sort.

"You are cruel ; you are hard ! I would not have believed that you could be as cruel as you have been to me: Because in my eagerness to know — yes, and to love you, I will not mince words now — I made a mistake and treated you with a freedom that your pride resented, you cannot forgive me ! Such treatment is unparalleled. I cannot believe that you understand me. Your reference, the last time I tried to talk to you, to that silly child with whom I have played, sometimes, shows me that you do not. Within a few days it has occurred to me that perhaps the little girl actually believes, because I have petted her and told her I was fond of her, as one might tell a pet kitten, of course, that I am serious, and has been filling your ears with preposterous ideas. Yet I should think you could know that it would be impossible for me to be seriously interested in a girl like Alice Bristow. The thought is too absurd to put into words ! If you had given me the slightest opportunity I would have told you long ago that I am interested in you alone of all the world, and that I stand ready to give you not

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only my love, but my name and all that it involves, no matter what your past may be. How human being could well do more than that is beyond my imagination. May I not now claim at least your courtesy, instead of the absolute scorn with which you have been repaying all my efforts to see you of late? I need sign no name, you will know from whom this comes, and I need not try to tell you how eagerly I shall await an answer."

"He stands ready to give me his name," Constance had sneered when she read that sentence, "and yet is too complete a coward to dare to sign it to this letter! Does the villain think that I am the sort of woman who would trust *him*?"

Paler, if possible, than the girl who read, she stood watching, waiting, her heart torn with conflicting questions.

Had she been too cruel? Had she overestimated the child's strength? Might not the suddenness of the blow cause a relapse? Was there some less cruel way in which she could have unmasked wickedness?

The letter was read, and read again, slowly, as though every word in it was being weighed. Watching her eyes it seemed to Constance that they were going a third time over the cruel lines. Suddenly Alice dropped the paper and closed her eyes.

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Constance took two steps and was beside her.

"Darling!" she said, bathing the white forehead from the bottle she had snatched as she passed.

"No," said Alice, "I am not faint; I am not going to faint. Ellen, would you mind leaving me for a few minutes quite alone?"

Constance turned and without a word went swiftly and softly into the next room.

XX.

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MR. GORDON CURTISS sat at his office desk, a pile of unopened letters before him. People said of him that he had grown old during the past year; there were those who did not hesitate to affirm that he looked ten years older than he had the June before. Yet thoughtful people all agreed that there had been other changes as well. He was quieter in speech and manner than he used to be; less assertive, perhaps, more lenient to the opinions of others, more interested in the world outside of his own little world. These were changes that surprised many of his old friends. They had looked to see him grow passionate, intolerant, indifferent as to whom he pushed against in his eager haste to accomplish, and to show all those other signs of an overwrought nervous condition which circumstances had, in a sense, given him the right to exhibit. That he should, instead, grow calmer and more deeply interested in human life generally, was not only a surprise, but, to those

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who did not understand the source of his strength, it was a bewilderment.

A busy year it had been. Contrary to the fears of his law partners, Mr. Curtiss had kept firm hold upon his business and made progress in it, while, at the same time, he undoubtedly held it to a second, perhaps even to a third, place.

That he should drop all business plans suddenly and rush away at the call of some one who believed he had news of his wife, was to be expected; but that he should often sacrifice his own financial interests in order to take up some work for humanity — work that, so far as they could see, had nothing to do with the problem upon which he was ever engaged — was certainly a new phase of his character. All sorts of motives were attributed to him.

When he began to visit the "Breakfast Mission," the "Wanderers' Home," and kindred institutions, solemn whispers floated about as to whether it were possible that he had heard things to make him fear that his wife might have fallen very low indeed! But when it was discovered that he went quite as frequently to the "Orphan's Home" and to the "Boys' Reformatory," and finally, that he taught a class each Sabbath afternoon in the last-named institution, the world was puzzled. Charles Gordon Curtiss teaching a class of depraved

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youngsters in a Reformatory! What could he hope to accomplish by that? and what might he not do next?

There were a few who knew him well, and understood the new motive power that controlled his life, knew that he was walking daily in the footsteps of the Nazarene.

Certainly Gordon Curtiss had grown much during the year. The "following" had led him into strange roads, and given him experiences such as he had not before known were possible.

All his engagements, whether of business or of religious work, were conditional. Always he held himself in readiness to go, at an hour's notice, to the ends of the earth if need be, in response to a call from Dilsey, or from any of those who were in his employ, to continue that weary search. Though as the months passed and the officials trained to searching gave no hint of success, Mr. Curtiss grew to feeling that his workers had practically dwindled to one. Dilsey, as unsuccessful as the others, had within her an element of dogged perseverance, that gave him renewed courage as often as he came in contact with it. She would never give up the search, she assured him, "so long as she had breath in her body." Occasionally she encouraged him by a solemn announcement that she "felt in her bones she

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should find her." Mr. Curtiss always knew to which woman the pronoun referred.

Numerous had been the journeys that he had taken at Dilsey's call, and strange had been the experiences which her possible clues had opened to him. Once she wrote:—

"It isn't the same woman at all. This is a girl, real young, and in lots of trouble. She hasn't the same colored hair, or eyes, or anything, but her name is Pauline, and you told me to be on the watch for that."

Forlorn as such a hope was, Mr. Curtiss could not get the consent of himself to ignore this information—could not even decide to wait to write to Dilsey and secure all sorts of further particulars about the girl with the fateful name. Instead, he started that evening for the distant town where Dilsey had found employment, and looked into all the details for himself. They had nothing whatever to do with him or his, yet, when he knew the story, and looked at the hollow-eyed, frightened, misguided child whose feet had taken hold upon dangerous paths, he knew at once that if he was indeed following Jesus of Nazareth, he must not cross to the other side and leave her to her temptations and her sorrows. Yet what could he do? He spent half the night in studying the problem, and the other half in writing a long letter to Mrs. Ellis, who was

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visiting in a town not far distant. One result of this was, that when Mrs. Ellis came home, some weeks later, she had with her a large-eyed, frightened-looking girl who came to be known, in course of time, as "Pauline Harris, a friendless orphan whom Mrs. Ellis had picked up somewhere and befriended," and who was proving herself a "real treasure."

There are women who, had they known the child's bitter story, would have drawn away their skirts from contact with her, who yet said complainingly that they wished they could pick up "treasures" who would be as devoted to their interests as that little Pauline was to Mrs. Ellis. But they belonged chiefly to the class of women who nurse poodle dogs and embroider collars for them, and drive out in their carriages with their dogs occupying the extra seats, and they did not know what was being done in the world in the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

Other journeys, taken with even less forlorn hope to build upon, had resulted in the rescuing of other lives.

One young man, for instance, who had been heard in a half-drunken revelry to repeat several times the name "Constance," was reported to Mr. Curtiss by the open-eared Dilsey, who, for reasons known to herself, was serving as table waiter at the house where the reveller

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boarded. And Mr. Curtiss, who knew that the probabilities that that young man and his own Constance had ever come within the sound of each other's names, was very slight indeed, yet went at once, impelled by a force that he could not resist, in search of him; and thanked God afterward on his knees that he had thus been used as the hand to come between that young soul and ruin. The story is long, and the by-paths into which it led winding and intricate. It shall not be told here, only so far as to say that it took time and money and prayer and perseverance to accomplish the great result aimed for—but it was accomplished. Mr. Curtiss, when he told his friend and co-laborer Mrs. Ellis much of the story in detail, closed with the words, accompanied by the sort-of smile that always brought tears to her eyes to see, "There is another mother, now, praying for me and mine."

Strange experiences (at least they seemed strange to the newly enlisted worker) followed nearly all of Dilsey's calls, so that the earnest man grew not only more firmly resolved each time to follow up her slightest hint, but began to ask himself solemnly if it could be possible that without this violent wrenching away of all his plans and hopes, he would have been content to live his easy, happy life, unmindful of other lives filled to the brim with trouble and

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danger. Was that why the waves and billows had rolled over him? "He that loveth his life shall lose it." Was that what the words meant?

As he sat at his desk that morning, he was conscious of being more weary than usual. He had just passed through a hard week in court, and there was a young fellow in prison for whose acquittal he had wrestled and suffered defeat, and his heart was heavy. He turned over his letters wearily, feeling that perhaps he was not equal, just yet, to shouldering other burdens than his own. Wait! here was a letter from Dilsey. He seized upon it with the hunger and the hope that always rose in his heart at the sight of her peculiar hand. Her messages were always brief and to the point. They began without circumlocution of any sort, without even the customary opening address.

"I'm working in the hospital that has got its name at the top of this sheet of paper. There's a man here who was hurt in some fuss; he is out of his head, and has been, ever since they brought him here. I heard the doctor say that he was going to die. Last night the head nurse called me to keep watch beside him. I was there for two hours, and he kept muttering something the whole living

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time; the only word I could make out was 'Pauline.' Sometimes he would say that out real sharp and plain, as though he was calling somebody. I thought you would want to know it; so I am writing this for the morning mail. I just got off duty."

Mr. Curtiss read the lines rapidly, looked at his watch, looked at a railway time table fastened to the wall beside his desk; seized a sheet of paper and wrote rapidly a few lines thereon, then arose and opened the door to the inner office.

"Mr. Chase," he said, "I have been called away. I shall take the eleven-forty train. Tell Mr. Alfred Curtiss that he will have to look after the matter that I was to work up. The papers are in my desk, each one marked, and here is the key. A message sent to the address written here will reach me." He had copied the address found on Dilsey's letter head.

"Away there!" said Mr. Chase, glancing at the paper. "You will be gone for some time then?"

"That I cannot tell," said Mr. Curtiss. "I'll wire if detained. I haven't time for anything more; good morning."

"Another wild-goose chase!" said the gray-haired confidential clerk with a long-drawn sigh; but he said it to himself.

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Dilsey, in white gown and cap, looking the perfection of a nurse, saw Mr. Curtiss walking down the long hall before he had caught sight of her. She had been on the lookout for him since the first through train was due; she understood the man by whom she was employed.

"Yes, sir," she said, "he is alive, but that is about all. He doesn't talk any more. The doctor said he didn't believe he would notice anything again; but I shouldn't wonder if he would, for all that. They can't tell; I've seen them mistaken lots of times.

"No, sir, they don't know a thing about him; his pocket-book had a little money in it, but nothing else to show what his name was, or where he belonged. They told me all about it, and let me watch with him day and night, because I told them that he kept repeating the name of a woman I knew, and I wanted to be on hand if he said anything more. But he didn't, only once; he roused up from a stupor and looked right at me, and said, 'Aunt Marian,' in a kind of troubled way, as though he wanted me to tell him where she was; but he dropped right back to sleep again, and hasn't said another word."

Mr. Curtiss controlled the impulse to utter an exclamation. It might be, probably was, a mere coincidence; the name "Marian" was

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common enough, but it had been his mother's. He went through the proper forms, and secured permission to see the dying man on the plea that he might know something of him, and Dilsey presently led the way to his bedside. Mr. Curtiss bent over and studied the white face, strongly marked with lines of late living, and lifted with fingers that trembled visibly the masses of curly brown hair from his temple, revealing as he did so a long zigzag scar; then he spoke to the watching Dilsey:—

"I know him; he is my cousin. We thought he was long since dead." Of course, after that, no time was lost in presenting his claim to watch beside the dying, in the hope of a conscious moment.

"It isn't at all likely," said the house physician, "that he will recover consciousness. Oh, yes, of course, sometimes they do. We don't profess to be certain about those things; but I should say that there wasn't one chance in twenty in this case."

So the watcher established himself at a little distance from the bed, where no movement of the sleeper could escape his eye, and watched and waited through the long night. The utmost quiet reigned in the ward, and so far as outward appearance was concerned, the watcher might have been quietly sleeping; but in reality every sense was awake, and every nerve

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tense. There were times when, with all his self-control—and his life during the past year, at least, had been a continued education in self-control—it seemed impossible to keep himself from grasping the shoulder of that sleeping man, and shrieking into his dull ear: “Man, man! who is Pauline? You have no time to sleep, and you have no right to die until you answer questions locked up with life and death to others. Who is Pauline? And oh, above everything else, *Where* is Pauline?” For because this was his cousin, and because he had muttered the name “Pauline” in his delirium, a wild hope—or was it a wild fear—had taken hold of Mr. Curtiss’s heart. He was not sure what it was, only it seemed to him that that man must not die until he had questioned him. If a kind of frenzy of petition for one thing without an “if” is prayer, then Mr. Curtiss prayed.

Dilsey, who had kept untiring watch until the coming of this new watcher, had been relieved from duty that night; but in the gray of the morning she stole in, had a word with the attendant, and relieved him. Soon afterward she drew back from her watch over the dying man and motioned Mr. Curtiss forward. The man’s eyes were wide open, and their expression suggested sanity.

“Where am I?” he said, looking wonder-

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ingly at Dilsey; and then his eyes rested on Mr. Curtiss.

"You can't be Gordon!" he said.

"Yes," said Mr. Curtiss, in utmost quietness of tone and manner. "I am Gordon, and you are Charles; and I did not know until last night that you were living."

"I didn't think I was," said the sick man; "the last I remember, I thought I was killed. I am, I guess. Going to die, ain't I?"

His eyes rested inquiringly on Dilsey's face, and waiting for no reply he added, "It has come a little sooner than I thought." Then, "Gordon, do you know anything about Pauline?"

Mr. Curtiss placed an iron hand upon his nerves, and still spoke quietly.

"Only that you repeated her name in your delirium. Who is she, Charles, and where is she?"

"I wish I knew! She is my wife. She was in Florence — but she isn't now. I went there — I thought she might have gone home — I was going home."

He spoke in detached sentences, as though recalling with difficulty the steps by which he had come. Mr. Curtiss held himself to silence, hoping that by that means he might learn more. The man was so weak that a breath of excitement might hasten the end. He began again: —

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"There's a boy, too; named for me — and for you." With this last there was a pitiful attempt at a smile. Then, with a sudden increase of voice, as though he had summoned his forces for a tremendous effort, "Gordon, won't you find them?"

"I will give my life to the search!" said Gordon Curtiss, with a fervor that Dilsey, who heard every word, could understand. It was she who had some conception of the anguish that wrung his soul as he asked the question: —

"Charles, can't you give me *any* clew?"

"No," said the sick man, "I can't; not if she didn't go home. I kept hoping that. I deserted her. I've never — seen — the — boy. I —" his voice had grown fainter; suddenly it ceased.

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THE head nurse came forward, reproof in her voice.

"He ought not to have been allowed to talk so much. You must not try, sir, to get him to say anything more—not now. He is very weak."

There was no opportunity for trying. All day they watched and waited. Several times the sick man seemed to rally, and muttered sentences or phrases so disconnected and so indistinct that the nurse had it his mind was wandering. Once he opened his eyes and looked full at Mr. Curtiss, and the unsatisfied longing in the look left an impression that was never forgotten.

All night they waited, and the sick man lay and breathed, and that was all.

"He won't sense anything again, sir," the head nurse said to the watcher; and she meant to convey a kind of pity for him in her tone, if he really cared. "That was just a flicker

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of strength he had, this morning, before going out. If I were you, I would go to bed and try to get some rest."

But Mr. Curtiss never stirred from his post, and the nurse was right. Just as they were moving softly about, putting out the shaded lights because a new day was coming, Dilsey touched Mr. Curtiss's arm and murmured, "The breath has stopped."

"You knew him, did you?" asked the physician, as he stopped for a moment beside the clay. "What is his name?"

"Curtiss — Charles Gordon Curtiss; he is an own cousin of mine, sir, who has been lost sight of and supposed dead for years. I will take charge of all details, and pay all bills." As he spoke, Mr. Curtiss handed his business card to the physician.

"Why!" said Dilsey, "why —" and then she stopped. She had followed her employer to the hall, still in wide-eyed wonder, and waited beside him.

"Yes," he said, answering the question that respect for him prevented her putting, "we had the same name, Dilsey, throughout. I have not thought of him at all in connection with my trouble, because we believed that he died a violent death in California years ago. He broke away from us all and went out there when he was a boy, and we had every reason

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to believe that the young man we buried not long afterward was my cousin."

"But now —" said Dilsey, and stopped again, unable to express the rush of questions that came to her.

"Yes," he said, "now we understand something about it, at least. It was his wife who came to mine, doubtless, with her story, whatever it was. She may have had a deep-laid scheme of some sort that did not develop in the way she thought it would. If he could only have told me something more!"

"Now," muttered Dilsey, as the head nurse came to speak to Mr. Curtiss, and she had to turn away, "that Pauline has got to be found!"

There was a long, solemn journey homeward for Mr. Curtiss, accompanied by the clay tenement that his cousin had left. There had been telegrams sent, announcing his coming and that of his companion. Hearse and carriage and clergyman, and members of the great law firm of Curtiss, Curtiss and Gordon, met him at the train, and the funeral cortege moved with all outward circumstance to the burial place where the Curtisses of several generations were lying. Every mark of respect was accorded to that poor handful of dust which had borne the honored name. The local papers gave full accounts of it all next day, dwelling,

after the manner of local reporters, with conscious pride on the details, and declaring that "despite the long estrangement from his family, and the ignoring of all ties between them on the part of the deceased, his cousin, Charles Gordon Curtiss, our distinguished townsman, hastened to his bedside the moment that word was received of the accident which caused his death, and had lavished upon him all the attention that could have been given to a brother beloved. Also, he had himself seen to it that every minute detail connected with the last sad rites were of such character as became one who had borne the name of Curtiss."

And this was as much as the public knew about the connection of that buried clay with the tragedy of their townsman's life.

The evening following the funeral Mr. Curtiss went to Deepwater, and insisted upon an interview with Dr. Kenyon and his son. To them he explained in detail the story of his cousin's life, so far as he himself knew it.

Dr. Kenyon was prompt to hold out his hand to the wronged man, and to say with feeling:—

"I hope you can forgive me for adding to a burden which seems almost too heavy for a man to bear. God knows I am sorry for having stabbed at you instead of trying to comfort you."

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But Richard still held aloof.

"Why have we never before heard of this cousin of yours who bore your own full name?" he asked haughtily. "It would seem reasonable to me that a perfectly innocent person would at once have thought of a scapegrace cousin, if he had one who bore exactly the same name as himself, and would have imagined him as in some way connected with the mystery. How are we to know that this strange man was a Charles Gordon Curtiss?"

"Richard!" said his father, but Mr. Curtiss only smiled. He had borne so much that thrusts like these seemed pin pricks.

"Kenyon does right," he said, "to require all possible proof at my hands. My cousin, Mr. Kenyon, spent his boyhood at the old Curtiss homestead in town. He was well-known to many reputable citizens now living. It would be a very easy matter to inquire of almost any of the old families known to us both, and they would vouch for my truth in this respect. Moreover, it is quite well known among our old friends that the name is a family heirloom, handed down and down. All the brothers, for generations back, gave it to their eldest sons, and are doing so still; so that it is not in the least distinctive. As a matter of fact, there are four persons beside myself con-

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connected with our family, still living, who write their names Charles Gordon Curtiss. But they are either old men or children, and there were excellent reasons why they need not be thought of in connection with my trouble. For the one I have just buried, as I explained to you, we had every reason to believe that he died a violent death seven years ago. There was a terrible accident, and the bodies of the victims were mutilated, but it was fully believed that one was recognized as my cousin's. The proofs seemed reliable at the time, and his name and date of supposed death are carved on the family monument. I think I may be excused for not mentioning him or thinking of him as in any way connected with my own tragedy."

"Forgive me, Curtiss," said Richard the impulsive. "I have been awfully hard, I suppose; but my cousin is as dear to me as a sister could possibly have been, and —" he stopped suddenly, unable to add another word, and the two men clasped hands silently.

Not because the one who had distrusted him the most had finally relented, did Gordon Curtiss give his hand freely, and return the pressure of renewed friendship. He had been sorely hurt in the discovery that those who had known him long could count his word of so little worth; such injuries are hard for some men

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to forgive. Mr. Curtiss believed that he had forgiven; but he assured himself that he did not care for the friendship of one to whom friendship did not mean confidence; and that whatever happened in the future, his life could not touch Richard Kenyon's again. It was that tender word about his cousin, and the sudden rush of feeling that mention of her had evoked, which went to the other man's heart. Instinctively he felt that here was one who had borne and was bearing still, in faint measure, his own awful burden of pain. It was the pain that made Richard hard; here was a bond of union, and he clasped the offered hand heartily, and sunk his own injuries out of sight.

There were days and nights during this experience of his that stood out vividly in Gordon Curtiss's memory forever. Perhaps none more so than that second night that he had spent as a watcher at his cousin's bedside. He had sat there quietly enough to all observers; out of range of the light from night lamps, and shading his face with his hand from the gaze of curious attendants. Apparently he was an unmoved spectator, waiting, because it would be decorous to do so, for a possible gleam of further consciousness on the part of a life that was going out, and that was remotely connected with his own.

In reality, Gordon Curtiss lived his life over

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again while he waited beside that quiet bedside. He was a boy once more, and Charles Curtiss and he were together in the old homestead — his cousin, whose resemblance to himself physically had been the occasion of numberless misunderstandings and embarrassments. But with the physical the resemblance had ended. This Gordon Curtiss, or "Charles," as he had been called for distinction, had seemed destined almost from his babyhood to be his mother's sorrow. There had been no father living to help train his impetuous and naturally rebellious nature, and his mother had been both weak and fierce in her efforts. Mr. Curtiss had known very early in life that his own mother deeply deplored his aunt Catherine's management of her son, and tried to counteract its evils by tender ways of her own. But this had been a delicate and thankless task; the mother as well as the boy had resented what was called her interference, and before her nephew was ten years old the aunt had been compelled to abandon her hope of influencing him. The rapidity with which the poor handsome fool with a naturally brilliant mind went to his ruin had been the talk of outsiders all through Gordon Curtiss's young manhood. He knew that money had been left to his cousin, with the mother as sole guardian, and he knew that his aunt Catherine was said never

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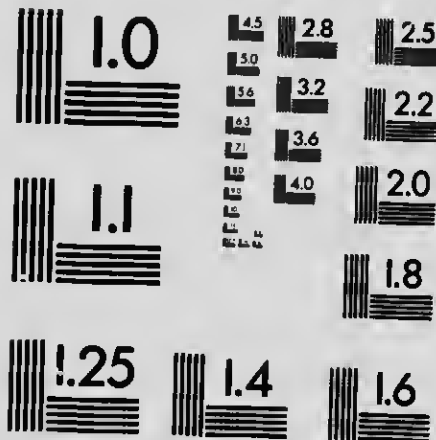
to have finally resisted her son's call for money, however stormily she might seem to be doing so for a time.

It came to be well known among the circle of relatives that the wayward boy had secured the most of his fortune under his own control before he was twenty, and then he had started suddenly for California, ostensibly on a pleasure trip, though the inner circle knew that the immediate cause of his going was that he had had a bitter quarrel with his mother. A year had intervened, during which he was not so much as heard from, and then had come what had been supposed to be the end — a terrible railroad accident, and the charred remains of victims, among whom some who were worthy of trust believed that they found young Curtiss. The coffin containing the unrecognizable dust had been brought home and buried with due honors, and the stricken mother had put on once more her mourning garb, and lived the remainder of her life alone. What had become of the handsome fortune that her son had carried away with him was never discovered, though the surviving Gordon Curtiss had made a journey to California a year or two later, in his aunt Catherine's behalf. It was generally believed that the money had been squandered, and if half the stories gathered in California as to its reckless use were true, his cousin felt that it



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was not difficult to understand how it had been disposed of. All things considered, it can hardly be thought surprising that this humiliating piece of family history was seldom referred to by the relatives, or that the newer friends of the family had not so much as heard of the existence of another Charles Gordon Curtiss belonging to the same generation.

All this story, and a hundred vivid chapters in it that have not been mentioned, passed before the mental vision of the silent watcher, who sat with shaded face and seemed to be sleeping. He remembered how his mother had mourned for "Charles." He could seem to hear her sad voice wondering if there had not been something more that she might have tried to do to win him if she had but realized the shortness of the time.

During the first part of the night Mr. Curtiss had been in the clutches of a wild desire to hear more from the dying man. He might rally—he might speak again; people near to death had remarkably clear insight sometimes; he might be able to speak some word that would help them in their terrible search. If there had been but time to tell him something of the awful necessity that was upon them to search, perhaps that would have helped him to think of some clew. Later, as the conviction settled upon the watcher that his cousin had

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spoken his last word on earth, and was no longer within the reach of human voices, the surges of a great remorse rolled over him. Why had he wasted those few precious minutes in efforts that were futile, when he might have used them to help a soul groping in darkness? How certainly his mother would have seized such opportunity! Nay, how certainly would the One whose example he had vowed to follow have waived all selfish interests and reached after a soul! It is a solemn thing for a sensitive, honorable nature to sit facing the memory of a responsibility that he has let slip, and realize that it has passed forever. But Mr. Curtiss was able, after a time, to put even his remorse aside and betake himself to prayer for the passing soul.

When Dilsey had touched his arm and murmured, "The breath has stopped," he had risen and bent over the motionless clay, and looked long and earnestly at the features that were already beginning to take on the dignity of death. He knew that he was looking at the remnant of a wasted life. Among the few words that the dying man had been able to speak, there stood out three that told, as well as a volume could have done, the story of that wrecked life. "I deserted her." That wretched "Pauline," whatever she was, had been a deserted wife. Yes, and there had been a boy,

Pauline.

a "namesake," and he too was deserted! Did they need to know anything more about those years during which he had been a blank to his family?

There was just one little gleam of hope. He had wanted to find them — his wife and boy; he had started in search of them, he was on his way home when the fatal accident occurred. Perhaps — n, perhaps! God was very merciful and very patient, and this man's mother and aunt had prayed for him for many years. If only he had asked him when he had a chance, "Charles, have you come home to Jesus Christ?"

Well, it was all over now. But the man who stood and watched the king called Death stamp the impress of immortality even on the deserted clay, made solemn pledge, not that he would be true to the trust imposed upon him by the dead, that was unnecessary, but that, God helping him, he would never again stand facing a lost opportunity.

XXII.

Crown Jewels.

IT was an August evening following upon a day of breathless heat. Cool breezes were sweeping up now from the lake, and in the neighborhood where the Bristows lived, doors and window-blinds had been set wide open to catch them all. The dwellers in the houses were largely on their small porches; some had even taken chairs and stools and gone down to the sidewalk; anything to get cool. The people in that neighborhood belonged chiefly to the class that cannot close their houses with the first breath of summer and flee to ocean or mountain resorts. Steady work and limited means held them, as a rule, at home. Mrs. Bristow and Constance, however, had planned a two weeks' vacation in the country. Alice and the youngest daughter, who was not quite well, had already gone, and were boarding in a comfortable farm-house but two miles removed from the lake; and situated, if Alice's eyes and feelings were to be trusted, "on such a splendid great hill that it simply could not be hot."

Pauline.

During the past winter, and the summer thus far, Constance's work had prospered. She had lived through another twenty-first of June with its haunting memories, and was well started on her third year of independent work. Those June anniversaries to which she had looked forward with a kind of terror had been mercifully taken care of for her. The first one had been so absorbed by anxious cares for Alice as to give her no time for going over her sorrow in detail; and the June just lived through had found her busied, heart and hand, in the sorrows of others; for their anxieties had ended in bereavement, and they were a family who had learned to lean upon Constance. God had not left her without witnesses to the worth of the life she was living. She had early found, what some Christian workers have yet to learn, that the road to hearts lies oftentimes by way of the most commonplace of domestic duties. She earned her living by sweeping and dusting and fruit-canning, and a dozen other homely back-door occupations; but she *lived* in order to show forth the strength and the beauty of a life "hid with Christ in God." She had plans for the coming winter that would be sure to absorb all the extra funds she could secure, and with these in mind she had watched with deepest interest the steadily increasing hoard that her bank account witnessed to.

Crown Jewels.

"I am really getting 'forehanded,'" she had said to herself but that morning, with a tender little laugh for the old-fashioned word that she used to hear. Still, despite her plans, and her rigid economies because of them, she felt that this little respite in the country for two weeks was perhaps needed. At least Mrs. Bristow needed it, and there was serious doubt of being able to persuade that good woman to go, unless her lodger went also. Certainly Constance could not longer feel that she was quite alone in the world. In the heart of the practical strong-souled New England woman had grown up such a vigorous regard for the young woman who had come to her a stranger, without references, as she had never before bestowed upon people not of her own kin. In truth, she had adopted the lonely young woman from another world than hers into her mother-heart. There was a sense, it is true, in which she leaned upon Constance, adored her, even revered her, but there was another sense in which she mothered her; watched over her health and her comfort, ordered her about in the matter of rubbers and extra wraps, and petted her in the way of little appetizing "treats," quite as she did her own children. In short, there were dozens of practical pleasant ways in which "Ellen Stuart" had been made to feel that she belonged to this warm-hearted family. It was

Pauline.

balm to the sore heart to realize this. Unlike as they were in many respects, far apart as some of their tastes were, she revelled in their love.

She stood, on this evening, framed in the doorway, and watched the tired people sitting about in various attitudes of abandonment to fatigue, and thought of contrasts. What a busy, work-a-day world this was into which she had come! How utterly unlike the world that she had known before. What, for instance, would the residents of Deepwater think of such a scene as this photographed in the brilliant moonlight? There was old father Grierson in his shirt sleeves, with a pipe in his mouth with which he was spoiling all the air that he could reach. Father Grierson was seventy-one; yet he had worked hard all day out in the burning sun, and doubtless expected to work hard to-morrow; and despite the pipe which she hated was a decent and self-respecting citizen who nodded to her his kindly "How d'y' do, Ellen?" as often as he chanced to meet her. And she would have gone to him, on occasion, for any kindness that lay in his power to bestow, as quickly as she would to any man she had ever known. Yet what would — her cousin Richard, for instance, feel like saying to a man of that stamp who should nod to her familiarly and call her by her Christian name? She always, even yet, made a

Crown Jewels.

mental blank before thinking definitely of any man who belonged to her past life, and drew her breath with a little pitiful catch as she reminded herself that one name was not to be thought about.

Then there was Mrs. Blakeman sitting on the step just above father Grierson; she had her sleeves still rolled to the elbow, and had probably just come from the kitchen where she had been washing the dishes that her seven "men boarders" had used at their late supper, and making arrangements for their very early breakfast. Constance had "done up" Mrs. Blakeman's best curtains for her but a few weeks before, and received her hearty commendation because they looked so "nice." Then, while the good woman counted out the money for which Constance waited, she had said:—

"Sit right down, Ellen, and have a dish of my 'poor man's pudding,' do! There's just enough left for you. I made it the way you told me, and the men all praised it to the skies."

And Constance had taken the offered seat and eaten the pudding from a saucer that was cracked and a spoon that had been plated many years ago, and had pronounced it as good as she could make herself. What would Richard Kenyon have thought of that? Two worlds she had known, this woman who was

twenty-seven, two distinct worlds, so radically unlike, that the inhabitants of the one ought not to be expected to understand the environments of the other. How many more worlds were there? She had herself worked hard that August day and was tired; yet the coolness and the moonlight were so entrancing that she could not leave them just yet. She had but just come home from a ministration in the house around the corner where there was illness. She could hear Mrs. Bristow moving about her kitchen whither she had probably gone with some housewifely thought for the next day's comfort. Kate, her second daughter, was helping her and chattering to her. By and by they would come to the door and look out for a minute on the moonlighted world; then Mrs. Bristow would say: "Well, Kate, you and I must get to bed; to-morrow is coming as fast as it can, and we must be up early and get a lot of work done before the heat is upon us. Are you ready to come, Ellen?" Then they would all go to the sitting room, and Mrs. Bristow would read a few verses out of what she now called "the Book," and they would kneel, and it would be the mother's turn to commend them all, "the dear ones here with me, and the dear ones in the country" to the Father's keeping. Yes, they had family worship now. Mrs. Bristow had

Crown Jewels.

found the way to the Father's ear, and had learned to bring her daily cares and crosses and comforts and leave them alike in His hands. Constance's heart was filled with grateful joy as often as she thought of that good woman's assured faith and steady progress in the Christian life.

There had been other experiences through the year, that had left her grateful. It was now some four months since Fred Emerson had gone where his wearisome cough would trouble him no more. A hard winter it had been, that last one of his short life. More and more he had chafed under the restraints that watchful physician and anxious mother had tried to put upon him. His frequent rebellions bringing always swift fruitage in days of pain and weakness, yet seemed to teach him nothing; until at last one fatal week of recklessness proved too much for his enfeebled constitution, and those who went in and out ministering to him, knew, long before he did, that poor Fred Emerson had done his worst for that long-suffering body.

What months were those during which he came slowly and rebelliously into the knowledge that he had taken his last walk through the busy streets, and that he must very soon be done with this world which had always seemed to him so rich and satisfying!

Pauline.

Constance, who, after Mr. Henry Emerson departed for a winter in Berlin, might almost have been said to live at the Emerson home, looked back upon her experience there as, in some respects, the most trying of any in this new life of hers. She wondered, sometimes, if there could be a single subject with regard to which she and Mrs. Emerson were not antagonistic. Yes, there was one. They both had deep and unfaltering interest in the invalid boy who was steadily slipping from their care; but their ways of showing that interest were antipodal. To add to the embarrassments, Fred, who had never been trained to exercise a moment's self-control, had hours when he would not listen to his mother — would not even suffer her presence in the room.

"I love her to distraction," he said once, apologetically to Constance, after he had spoken so sharply to his mother that she had gone away suddenly to hide the tears. "Of course I love her! no fellow ever had a better mother, and I know it; but she drives me crazy sometimes, for all that. Always wanting me to have another blanket over my feet, and to turn my eyes from the light, and have my head bathed with some muss or other, and cover my shoulder from the draught, when there isn't air enough to harm a mosquito! I tell you, I can't stand it! I'll commit suicide and finish

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this business up in a hurry, if something isn't done. Lock the door so nobody can come in, and then read the rest of that story. I've got to have something besides powders and cordials and blankets to think about. No, don't let the doctor in, nor anybody else. What good does the doctor do me, I should like to know? I'm tired of him and of all the rest of them; I wish they would all go off to Germany, as Henry has, and leave you and me to fight it out together. You'd take care of me, wouldn't you? Nice old Ellen! you never fuss and bother a fellow till he gets too ugly and cross to live; and you never cry, either. It's awful in me to make mother cry; I hate myself. After I've done it, if I could get up and kick myself downstairs I would in a minute. But what's a fellow going to do if this thing keeps on?"

And Constance, who knew that the poor mother was distinctly jealous of her, also knew that she had more influence over the spoiled boy than had any one else, and that the doctor instinctively turned to her when he issued his orders that the patient should be kept pleasantly interested and free from excitement, and felt that she must stand her ground and do what she could. Not much outside work of any sort was done during those closing months of Fred's life; for all practical purposes, she

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became his nurse. It was all over now. The boy, with his hand in his mother's and with her name as his last-murmured word, had gone his way; and the mother, with her head on Constance's shoulder, had sobbed out her gratitude for all that she had been to them in their trouble, especially for all that she had done for her darling boy. She had lavished gifts innumerable upon her, besides paying her royally in money; and she had not ceased to sound her praises to any who would listen. Thinking it over, Constance had wondered what that same grateful mother would have said had she known that her other son, who returned from Germany but the day before Fred went away, had made her a formal offer of his hand in marriage and been refused. Could the mother have been made to believe that any woman in her senses would have refused her eldest son? But, harder even than that, could she have been made to believe that he had offered marriage to a paid servant in her employ? Sometimes Constance could almost have smiled over the debt of gratitude that Mrs. Emerson owed her, if she had but known it. What a terrible blow it would have been if she, Ellen Stuart, sometime carpet sweeper, curtain washer, nurse, what not, had accepted the name of Emerson, and compelled them to receive her as an equal. For in all Mrs. Emerson's gratitude, she let it

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be distinctly felt that it was the condescending gratitude of a mistress toward a faithful hireling whose real payment had been in money.

Oh, but there were sweet and tender memories connected with this trying time! Once again she had tasted the joy like unto no other joy this side of heaven, — that of helping a soul to find its normal home in the heart of God.

"O Ellen!" Fred had said to her, and it had been but the morning before he went away, "when I get there I will tell Him all about it, 'Jesus Christ,' I will say, 'if it had not been for Ellen, I shouldn't have known much about you nor cared for you one bit!' And then I'll tell Him how you hung on to a fellow when he was cross and called you pokey, or when he was blue and pretended not to believe anything you said, or when he was downright ugly and wouldn't let you say another word; how you hung on, and didn't nag, and didn't cry, but just held on, and got hold of me somehow, at last. And then I'll say, 'You must get the loveliest kind of a crown ready for Ellen Stuart by the time she comes.'"

It was so strange, so quaint a word of gratitude, that she could not but smile over its memory; and it was so sincere that her heart was warm and tender, yes, and grateful, whenever she thought of it. She was walking

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through her furnace during all these wearing months and years, but surely "the form of the fourth" was with her!

Then there was Alice, her sweet fair flower over whom she had been so anxious lest she should droop under the weight of pain and shame that her misplaced confidence had brought upon her.

On that morning when Constance had been asked to leave her quite alone, and had gone away, she had waited in the next room in an agony of remorse and fear. Had she killed the poor little flower that had just begun to rally from the storm of illness? Oh, she had been cruel! She ought to have waited until there was greater physical strength to bear such a shock. If the child were to have a relapse now, as she was sure she would, and if she should die! oh, how could it ever be borne! She had walked the floor in agony; and had listened for sounds from the next room, and been sure that the girl would faint, would die! She had been simply borrowing trouble. The girl's sweet, brave heart, anchored as it was upon the Rock, did not fail in this emergency, did not even falter.

There was no relapse into illness, as Constance had feared, there was a scarcely perceptible halt in the march toward health.

It is true that the doctor had looked at her

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critically when he came that evening, and had said, "You have not gained as much to-day as you did yesterday," and her mother had asked her anxiously if she did not feel so well. But Alice had answered with a brave smile that she had been thinking hard and was a little tired; she should be better to-morrow. She had returned Constance's good-night kiss with even more than her usual tenderness, and murmured, "Don't be troubled about me; it will all be right."

In this way had the stricken turned comforter!

XXIII.

A New Burden.

THERE was one respect in which Alice Bristow astonished her friend. Leaning on Constance, as she undoubtedly did, in other matters, she insisted gently on keeping herself quite to herself with regard to that fiery trial of hers. She would not talk about it, nor about the one who had made her his victim. The morning after those hours in which she had asked to be left alone, she called for pencil and paper, and made no secret with Constance of the fact that she was writing to Mr. Emerson. Constance knew that her letter was long, but she had sealed and addressed it herself, simply handing it to Constance to post, and speaking no word, either then or afterward, with regard to its contents. It was some days afterward that Constance received a very dignified and explicit offer of marriage from Mr. Henry Emerson, with his full name signed to the letter. She had the pleasure of replying to this in such fashion as women rarely have occasion to use in return for a supposed honor conferred. Within two weeks of its sending,

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she heard incidentally that Mr. Henry Emerson had been suddenly compelled by an unexpected development of business matters to plan for a year's residence abroad; and she drew a long breath of relief very soon afterward when she became aware that he had sailed. The fair flower he had done what he could to blight would be safer, it seemed to her, when an ocean rolled between them. She had been entirely silent about her second letter; feeling that Alice had quite enough to endure without the knowledge that she, too, had been insulted. She dwelt tenderly on the thought of the care that the child must have exercised in writing her letter. Had she made plain Constance's share in the discovery, even a man of Mr. Emerson's effrontery would hardly have dared to approach *her* again so soon. But what a loyal heart it was, to suffer by itself, and refuse to use the name of another, even as a witness! Constance felt that she must respect the younger woman's ⁵ nity, and remain as silent as herself.

Once, however, Alice had broken through her gentle reserve. It was after she had become quite strong, so that her mother declared with pride that she began to look and act "just like herself." She lingered in Constance's room even after the good-nights had been exchanged, under pretext of looking at a fresh print pinned to the wall, and at last said:—

Pauline.

"I want to talk to you just a little bit, Ellen. I know you love me and trust me; but I have a feeling that I would like you to know that I have not been quite a fool. All that about being 'interested' in me as a child, and about showing me only kind attentions that I had misunderstood, is simply false. He said everything to me that could be said, except the one sentence that I see plainly enough now ought to have been spoken before I allowed many of the others. But indeed, Ellen, I did not feel it at the time. I trusted him so utterly, that I had not a doubt but that he had the best of reasons for not being able to speak to me formally just yet. He could hardly make it more plain, I thought; but I longed for the time when the formal words would prove to my mother what I believed I was sure of. After all, Ellen, I may as well take back that first sentence; I was a fool, I realize it as I try to explain my position. And I prided myself, too, on being different from many girls I know; more careful, more sure of what was meant. I had abundant proof, I told myself, and could afford to wait for mere forms. Yet I might have known all the time that a man who could not trust such a mother as mine, even sufficiently to call upon me in my own home, was wrong in some way. It seems strange that it should be so plain to me now! At the time I had not

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a fear as to the outcome. I was anxious on account of mother and the girls; but for myself, I could have waited a dozen years, and trusted him all the time. It was not until I grew very ill that I began to see with clearer eyes. When people come close to death, Ellen, perhaps they see right and wrong plainer than at any other time. And then — when I came to know Jesus Christ, I began to be sure that both our lives, his and mine, were wrong, somehow; and yet I did not imagine for a moment — that — not until I read your letter. O Ellen, think from what you have saved me! It seems to me that I owe everything to you."

She had forestalled every effort of Constance's to put a word into this talk; she even laid her hand with gentle playfulness, and yet with a background of dignity, over the elder woman's lips, once, when she would have spoken, and at this point she said: "Wait just a moment, dear, before you speak. It isn't that I am not willing to have you and mother know all that there is to know — he replied to my letter — he told me he regretted exceedingly that in my 'sweet childishness' I had misunderstood the 'playfulness' of a man who seemed to himself to be at least a quarter of a century older than I; that he could never forgive himself if he did not know that I was still such a child that my mistake would not

Pauline.

harm me, and a great deal more that was as false as it was foolish, and that did not leave one little corner in his character for me to respect. It isn't that I am clinging to any shred of hope that keeps me silent, I simply *can't* talk about it. I want to put it all out of my life as soon and as far as I can. It isn't wrong, is it, for me not to want to go into detail, and tell even mother how it all was, and the reasons I had for trusting him so utterly?"

"No," said Constance, confidently; "it is right for you to do exactly as you think best about it, and tell as much or as little as you choose. Your mother can trust you, she always has. As for me, dear—" and then she had smiled upon the child and bent and kissed her, and spoken with an earnestness that Alice did not forget—"I am older than you, Alice, and I have been through a furnace heated seven times hotter than your own, but you have helped me to-night; it is *right* to put some things out of our lives as far as we can, and not think about them."

Mrs. Bristow had had her hours of curiosity as well as anxiety, and had fled to Constance for solace. "I don't know how it is," she said one evening, half proudly, half complainingly, "but sometimes my Alice seems to me to be about a hundred years older than I am! I ain't afraid of her, exactly. Why, an angel

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from heaven couldn't be sweeter and humbler than she is to me; and she is as careful of me lately as if I was made of china, and she was afraid I'd get broke, but for all that, she has a way of shutting me up. I can't ask her how it is that that puppy doesn't write to her any more, nor send her any presents, nor have anything to do with her. I'd give my head to know how it all flatted out, but I can't get at it.

"It's all over with, mother," she says; "don't worry about it any more. You never trusted him much, and now you needn't, but there is nothing to look sober about. I'm your own little Alice, right here with you, not hurt at all; and I'm going to stay with you always." And then she kisses me, on my cheeks, and my nose, and my eyes, and all over my face, as if she were a kitten playing with me; and yet, though I know well enough that there's a lot more to it, I can't ask her a word! Isn't that queer?"

"No," said Constance, smiling, although the smile in her eyes hid tears, "not queer, but beautiful. It means, dear Mrs. Bristow, that you have an unusual daughter, and have a right to be proud of her. She is one of those rare girls who in their innocence touch pitch un-
awares, and yet are not defiled."

Mrs. Bristow only half understood the metaphor, but her eyes had dilated with honest pride. One sentence she had understood fully,

Pauline.

and felt that she could do justice to her "rights"; she was proud of her daughter.

And Alice had been true to her words; she had neither faded nor moped. A trifle quieter she was, perhaps, less gay at least than she had been. "Growing older," she told the girls who noticed it, and commented to her face, "and a little more dignified, as becomes older people, that is all."

But her mother was among the few who knew that it was by no means "all." The girl grew in many ways. Grew as those flowers grow whose secret roots have taken hold upon soil that has in it life-giving power.

All together, Constance felt that she could look back upon another year of living, and because of some results, say a solemn and heartfelt, "Thank God."

It was growing late for the hard-working people on their street. One after another they disappeared from porch and sidewalk, and lights twinkled in upper rooms for a little, then went out; and still Constance lingered in the doorway. The night was so lovely and so cool, and to-morrow would be so breathless, probably. How could she shut out the beauty and the calm, and go to bed and sleep? Mrs. Bristow was still in the kitchen; something unusual must have occurred to detain her for so long. Constance told herself that perhaps she ought to go

A New Burden.

and see if she could be helpful. Then, suddenly, she uttered an exclamation; it might have been of dismay, or almost of terror, and went quite out to the steps, and watched with eyes that were lent keenness by her fears, the form of a woman moving slowly, and with an air that somehow suggested stealthiness, along the deserted street. She was on the opposite side of the street, and was going toward the river; a small woman in black clothes that even by moonlight suggested shabbiness. Something in the form, in the movement, in the dress — what was it? *Something* brought to Constance's heart a memory; a vivid memory standing out like a great black boulder in the path of her past.

Her sun hat lay on the little table in the hall where she had tossed it when she came in wearily from her evening's vigil; she snatched at it, and closing the door behind her, went down the steps; and scarce realizing what she did, and not knowing what she meant to do, took swift steps after the small black figure. A few minutes of rapid walking brought her in line with the woman on the opposite side; and matching her pace to hers, she walked on, observing her closely. Suddenly she crossed the street and came close behind the woman, who turned nervously, an apprehensive, frightened look in her eyes; as one who wanted to shrink from observation, and yet felt sure that she had not.

Pauline.

The eyes of the two women met, and Constance spoke at once, low voiced, but decisive.

"Pauline, what are you doing here?"

The other gave a faint little cry, born both of surprise and terror.

"How do you know my name?" she asked, in a voice that was scarcely audible.

"I know it because you told it to me, once," said Constance, stepping to her side as she spoke. "I never saw you but once, but I could never forget you. You look even more as though you needed help than you did then. Where are you going, alone, at this time of night? Are you in trouble? Can I help you?"

For response the woman began to cry violently. Not aloud, but a low sobbing cry, as though she had schooled herself for years to violent grief without much outward demonstration. Constance tried to take her arm, but she shrank away.

"Don't!" she said, and again there was that strange mixture of fierce woman and frightened child in her tones, that Constance had remembered; "I know you; you are *that* woman! I haven't forgotten you, either; I never shall. I ruined your life, and did nothing for myself. You ought to hate me! Go away, please, and let me alone; don't touch me! I can do nothing more to harm you; I won't harm anybody. I am going where I can't."

A New Burden.

During this outburst Constance's heart seemed to her to have stopped beating; but she held firm control of her outward self.

"Poor woman!" she said; "you are still wild with trouble; let me help you. Where are you going? Where is your little boy?"

At the mention of her child the woman's bitter weeping began again; her weak frame shook with the violence of her grief, while, evidently under the force of habit, she tried to control herself so as to make no loud sounds. Constance quietly possessed herself of the small hand that was startlingly cold, despite the warmth of the night, and drew it through her arm, while she repeated her question. "Where is your little boy?"

"I left him in a safe place," the woman said at last, trying to control her sobs sufficiently to speak. "It is so warm that it cannot hurt him. They will be sure to find him to-night when they get home; or if not, the very first thing in the morning. And he is so dear and sweet and beautiful that they can't help loving him. They will be sure to take care of him; they haven't any boy of their own, and I am going where I shall never trouble any of them; they can have him for their very own — my beautiful boy!"

Constance dropped the arm she had drawn

Pauline.

through hers, and placing her own firm arm about the shrinking creature, turned her squarely around.

"You have deserted your baby!" she said, and her voice was stern. As she spoke, she moved the woman forward by the force of her strong will and arm.

"No," as the creature tried to break from her and move in the other direction. "You are not to go that way. You have left your little child to the mercy of strangers, and you were going to the river to drown yourself. Isn't that the case? Yes, I thought so!" as a shudder ran through the miserable mother's frame that shook her like a strong wind, and her weeping became more violent. "Listen to me. I am sorry for you; do not let me have to despise you. No woman worthy of the name ever deserts her child. Stop crying and listen to me. There are certain facts that I must know; I will not make you talk much. You stayed there, that day, and you saw him, and he refused to receive you and your child. Is that your story?"

But it had become impossible for the other to reply. Her violent weeping had brought on a paroxysm of coughing, so severe that it seemed to Constance it must wrench the breath entirely from the enfeebled body. They stopped in the street, waiting for the fierceness of the

A New Burden.

attack to pass, and Constance almost held the small frail creature in her arms.

"You need not talk," she said at last.

"Only, if I have been wrong in any of my suppositions, you may just say 'No'—that one word. It will not take much strength, and I will wait until some other time for your story, whatever it is."

She waited breathlessly, but the poor creature only leaned heavily against her and sobbed and moaned.

XXIV.

The Idol Crushed.

SOME minutes passed, that always seemed to Constance as though they had been hours. Then she spoke, quietly and firmly.

"Come, I think you can walk now. We are going back for the child. Where did you leave him? Poor unhappy mother, do not add to your misery by committing an awful sin. No, you shall not go that way! Don't you know, poor creature, that you are not ready to die? Besides, you have no right to die; not yet. You are to live and take care of your boy."

"I can't!" sobbed the small shrinking creature, "I can't do it. Oh, haven't I tried? I am too weak and sick to work; nobody will take us in, and sometimes he has been hungry, my baby! He cried to-night for more bread, and I had none for him. I cannot bear it any longer. If I were out of the way, he would find plenty of friends; people stop on the street to look at him, he is so handsome. It is the only thing I can do for him."

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"You are to take care of him," said Constance, firmly, moving forward as she spoke. "Take me to him; I will help you; he shall not cry again for bread. It is terrible that you were willing to leave him all alone on the cruel streets! I did not know a *mother* could do that!"

"I did not leave him on the streets," the mother moaned. "He is in a garden, asleep; it is a lovely garden, and he is wild over flowers. The woman who lives there admires him; she has spoken kindly to him more than once, and only yesterday she said she wished he was her little boy. She would be good to him I am sure, if I were out of the way. They were not at home to-night, but I thought they would be sure to come, after a while, and find him. But he might have waked up and been afraid. Oh! he might have tried to follow me and been hurt! I did not think of that."

She quickened her steps at the thought, breaking presently into almost a run, panting for breath as she went. Manifestly, she was still a child. Having deliberately planned to desert her boy and destroy herself for his sake, at the first suggestion that he might waken and be afraid, all her strength spent itself in an effort to get to him at once.

They passed Mrs. Bristow's door, and Constance looked at it with a strange feeling that

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it stood for a refuge which had been hers, and which had slipped away from her. Lights were twinkling in the mother's room upstairs. They had wearied of waiting for her, and gone to their safe, quiet rest, and she was out in the night, wrestling with temptation and sin!

The city clock was tolling midnight when she reached that door again. She had a firm arm about a shrinking woman, and grasped by the hand a large-eyed, wondering little boy. Mrs. Bristow's bell never rang with a more resolute peal than it did at that moment. In response, Mrs. Bristow's head appeared for a single second at the hall window, and then, very soon afterward, the bolt was slipped.

"Pity's sake, child! have you got home at last? I knew they must be worse over at Carter's, when you stayed so; I told Kate after I got to bed that I believed I ought to have run over there and seen if more help was needed. How is it? Can I do anything? Dear me! What's the matter?"

For Constance had arrested the voluble tongue that had begun before the bolt was fairly slipped, by gently pushing forward her charges into the hall, and she closed the street door before she replied.

"I found an old acquaintance on the street, Mrs. Bristow. She is homeless and in trouble. May I put her and her little boy into my room

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for the night, and to-morrow I will see what can be done?"

"Surely!" said Mrs. Bristow, all her heart in her eyes. "Homeless, is she? Poor thing! and the dear little boy! A fatherless child, I suppose? And they're hungry, as likely as not! Ellen, I'll run right down and warm some broth, and bring some milk and bread and things."

Her abounding hospitality was with difficulty held in check; and it was more than an hour later, when Constance — both of her charges sleeping, the one the healthful rest of childhood, the other the heavy sleep of overtaxed vitality — felt at liberty to steal away to Alice's vacant room, and dropping herself into the little sewing chair, clasp her fingers to her eyes, to shut out the still glowing moonlight, and think. Could she think? Would her nerves that for hours had been under such rigid control obey her still, or must she give way to passionate emotion of some sort? She withdrew her hands from her face, and clasped them in a passion of agony, then hurried them over her face again; she could not endure the moonlight. There were moonlight memories that stabbed her. She had just been stabbed afresh, the bitterest wound of her life; she knew it. She had been sure of it out there on the streets when she had made herself speak

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quietly to that half-mad creature, and control her. All the time, all these years, she had steadied her heart upon one belief, never after those first awful hours allowing it to be shaken. Gordon Curtiss had believed that he made her his wife; had believed that that other wife and her child were dead, and that he was free to put his sorrowful past away from him and begin life again. She had told herself that she *knew* this was so. Therefore when they had appeared to him that day as from a grave, and she had fled away to give him his chance, he had met the issue as a man who was true, and who meant at all cost to be true, would have to meet it; there was no other way. And he had gone on since, living his changed life as well as he could, living down the pain and the shame of it all, and showing a gaping world that whatever he might have been in the past, he was a man now; one who had sinned, perhaps, and suffered, but who had begun again; and was worthy to be trusted.

This picture she had hung firmly in the gallery of her memory, and through the long months had looked upon no other. Continually she had schooled herself to think of him as a married man who was living his honorable life and finding a measure of peace in the honor of it. She had not known until this night how she had hugged the picture to her heart.

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How she had assured herself a thousand times that, however black it looked, he had not meant it; not for her. And he had believed that the mistakes and the sins of his boyhood had a right to be things of the past, so long as his life then stood for truth and honor and righteousness. And the picture had been shattered into fragments! They had confronted him, his wife and child, — he must have known at the first glance that the child was his, — yet he had spurned them! Driven them out into the streets, to make their way through this terrible world alone. If he could do this, might he not have known all the time that he was speaking tender words to her, known even when he stood with her at the marriage altar, and in tones that she could not make herself forget, had vowed to love and cherish her, and her only, "until death did them part," that one who had a right to call herself his wife was waiting then for him to come!

It will be readily understood that to a woman like Constance there could be no heavier blow than this. She had been true to her inmost convictions when she told Dilsey that love between man and woman which was not founded upon respect was not worthy of the name. Consciously through these awful months she had clung to pieces of her idol, shattered though it was, and now they had crumbled

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into dust before her. There had been no honor, no truth to build upon.

It was a very quiet woman who came to Mrs. Bristow next morning while her charges were still sleeping. The pallor of her face and the heavy rings under her eyes startled and shocked that good woman.

"Pity's sake!" she said, "you look like death! I don't believe you slept a wink. I knew you wouldn't! If you had just let me fix up Alice's room for them—I could have done it in a jiffy—and then you wouldn't have been upset. I can't sleep in a strange room myself; I declare, it's too bad! And now I suppose they'll hinder you from getting started for the country to-day, and you oughtn't to be in this heat another twenty-four hours! Will they hinder you? Who are they, anyway, and what are you going to do with them?"

Such easy questions to ask! How were they to be answered?

"It is about that trip to the country that I want to talk," said Constance, ignoring the other questions. "I must give it up altogether, Mrs. Bristow. I have been thinking and planning half the night; it was that which kept me awake. This woman is one who, for many reasons, and especially for Christ's sake, I must help. She is quite alone in the world,

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an orphan who has been deserted by her husband — ”

“The wretch !” interpolated Mrs. Bristow.

“She is failing in health and strength, and has utterly failed in courage. I found her on the street last night just at the verge of desperation. I must stand between her and this hard world, Mrs. Bristow, and save her child ; there is no one else.”

“Dear, dear !” said Mrs. Bristow, “And that pretty child, too ; it is just a shame ! But what in the world can you do, Ellen ? I don’t see, I’m sure.”

“I do,” said Constance, quietly. “It is all planned. The hardest part is that I must leave you. I shall have to go to housekeeping. That is what I expected to do, you remember, when I first came to you, but I got to work so promptly, and you were so very good to me when I was at home, that I had given up all idea of it. Now I must find rooms where I can do light housekeeping, and where a child can be cared for properly, and then I think I can manage. I can teach her to look after the rooms and get their meals when I am away at work ; and I believe with economy that I can earn enough to keep us three. I have quite a little start, you know. But this vacation must, of course, be given up.”

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"There's something else must be given up, too," said Mrs. Bristow, with her most determined air. "Don't you go to talking about finding rooms! It's a great big thing to try to do, and an awful responsibility, with a boy, too, to look after! But then — if them that ought to shoulder the responsibility have shirked it, I don't see anything else but to pick it up, so long as it has tumbled right down at your feet. You used to know her when she was a girl, I s'pose? Well, there isn't one woman in a hundred would do such a thing, but then, you're that woman, and I reckon Susan Bristow is the one who can help you a little. It's all happening in just the nick of time. Don't you think, our dressmaker is going to get married! Isn't that news? I was just beat when she told me of it last night. I couldn't wait for a chance to tell you about it; and then to think that it was all driven out of my mind! Well, it's in her mind, anyway. I hope she won't repent it. Dear, dear! what a chance getting married is, to be sure! They each think they've got the only good man in the world, too. She wants to go right off, next week. It seems it's real sudden; that is, something has happened so that he can get married now, instead of waiting till next spring, as they had planned; and man-like, he wants her to rush right off without any wedding dresses nor any-

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thing! She said she would pay a month's rent because she hadn't given notice; but I don't suppose they have any too much money, and I told her if I could rent the rooms right off, she needn't pay any extra rent. So now I've done it, don't you see? You'll rent the two rooms, and set up your family as fine as a fiddle, and the girls and I will do what we can to spoil the boy for you."

It was then that Constance cried; the first tears she had shed since this new trouble came upon her.

"Poor child!" said the motherly voice, as its owner bent over to pat the wet cheek as though it had belonged to a child indeed, "you're all tuckered out, and I don't wonder. There is nothing that upsets a body like losing a night's rest. Well now, you just let me take hold and help about this whole thing. I like work first-rate, when I can see something to get hold of and know just what to do. Kate and Marian will be tickled to death over having a child in the house; and Alice, too, for that matter; she's dreadfully fond of children."

The good woman had her way, and carried out most of her plans to the letter. The only point to which Constance held steadily was that the trip to the country should not be given up, so far as the Bristows were concerned.

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Mrs. Bristow was for a time fully resolved that she would not "stir one step," but vigorous argument prevailed. Constance assured her that it would really be the kind way for them all. Left alone with her charges, she could get them accustomed to their new surroundings, and to feeling a little bit at home before coming in contact with strangers. Besides, it would be much better for — And then Constance came to a distinct pause, and considered, and began again. "It will be better for Mrs. Curtiss to have something to do from the very first. She has had heavy sorrow, and needs to have her thoughts occupied with necessary commonplaces, to keep her from brooding over her wrongs."

"Mrs. Curtiss," repeated the elder woman curiously; "Is that her name? And you say her husband deserted her? Poor thing!"

Constance hurried on. "If I am quite alone in the house, Mrs. Bristow, for a time, she will feel the need of rousing herself to help me, and in doing so, will help herself. Besides, don't you know you promised Alice? What will the dear girl think if her mother disappoints her?"

This was the argument which was potent. The mother had a feeling that no minor disappointments which could be averted ought to touch Alice's life; she had borne enough.

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"I am glad day and night," she once said to Constance, "that that puppy deserted my girl; I never could abide him, though I tried to excuse his doings for Alice's sake. But there! I believe a mother's instincts tell her who not to trust; and the days aren't long enough for me to be thankful in, that it has turned out as it has; but for all that, it was a hard blow to Alice; I'm sure I hope I can forgive him, as a Christian should, for what he has made her suffer."

By dint of many words and much exertion, Constance was able to watch Mrs. Bristow and Kate on the car that would connect with the train for which Alice would be waiting.

"I don't know what the child will say when she sees us coming without you!" shouted back Mrs. Bristow, as she ran for the car. Constance, watching from the doorway, saw that she caught it, and gave one regretful sigh for that rest in the country before she turned back to take up her new burden.

XXV.

Economy and Cake.

THERE are continual proofs all along our way, if our eyes were but trained to see them, of the wisdom and kindness of the Father in shading the future from our gaze. There were times during the remainder of that summer and the winter following when Constance admitted to herself that, had she known all about the weight she was shouldering that August morning, she might have cried out that it was too heavy for her, and let it slip.

The grown-up child who thus came under her care was certainly a charge sufficient to make strong hearts hesitate. Undisciplined she was in every sense of the word; grown to womanhood in years, and a very child in judgment, or in patience. Her whims and her fancies, and above all, her tempers, were sometimes more than it seemed that mortal patience could suffer. For that matter, they were. It was Divine patience that took up the burden

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and counselled His child, Constance, to be content with the lighter end. But for this she must have sunken.

Prominent in the lists of responsibilities came financial questions. To keep house for three, and pay rent for two good-sized rooms on the second floor, instead of renting a room and a closet on the third floor, and averaging one meal a day with a woman like Mrs. Bristow, taxed the reserve fund to its utmost and caused Constance hours of troubled calculation as to whether her earnings, provided she was always well and able to work, would meet the demands.

Mrs. Bristow was kindness personified. She not only insisted upon materially reducing the rent of the two rooms, but she "threw in," as she called it, a little hall bedroom which, when all chamber furniture was removed, made a respectable dining room and kitchen for the *very* light housekeeping that was to be undertaken. Constance was distressed at the good woman's sacrifice, but her arguments were scoffed at. The hall bedroom was too small for a sleeping room, anyhow, Mrs. Bristow said. She had always felt mean renting it and letting a great big man sleep in such a tucked-up place; but it would make quite a nice little dining room for three, unless, indeed, Constance would get over being "stubborn" and

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would come down and eat her meals with them, as she wanted her to, and as a civilized family should. But Constance remained "stubborn" to the end. She would not assume the financial responsibilities of dual housekeeping with Mrs. Bristow as provider. Besides, she knew how dear to her heart had been that faithful woman's scheme of keeping a home sacred to herself and her children. Constance had been away so much, and had become so entirely one with them, that she knew she was in no sense an intruder, but Pauline and the child would be different.

"No," she said firmly, "we will live under your roof, since you are good and will have it so, and we will be grateful every day of our lives for the large piece of 'home' that the arrangement gives us; but we will be a little family to ourselves. It will be better for the child, and for — for Pauline as well."

The use of her maiden name instead of the one belonging to a married woman had been Constance's first concession to what seemed to her like childish fright. The small creature had cowed and trembled, and cried out as if in pain, when Constance first addressed her as Mrs. Curtiss.

"Not that name!" she had moaned. "Oh, don't call me that! I shall die if you do! I don't want to hear it nor think about it."

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"Why not?" Constance had asked sternly.
"Haven't you a right to that name?"

"Oh, yes!" she said, shrinking and weeping. "I have, I have, indeed! It is as true as heaven that that name belongs to me; but, you see, I am afraid! There are others to whom it belongs, and some of them hate me—oh, I know they do! They would kill me if they could, and I am afraid!"

"That is nonsense," Constance had said, still sternly. "No one bearing that name wants you, or tries to find you. I should think you had at least proved that. Didn't you try?"

But the miserable little woman sank on the couch in an abject fit of sobbing and begging.

"Oh, you don't know, you don't know, I tell you! you weren't there. If you— Oh, if I have got to hear that name, it will kill me! I cannot bear it!"

And then Constance looked at her pitifully, with a strange tightening of the cords about her heart. What must that frail, childish creature have been made to suffer, on the morning when she was spurned afresh, to have made of her such a physical and mental wreck?

"Never mind," she had said, when the paroxysm of coughing had subsided that violent emotion was sure to induce,—and she spoke as she might have done to soothe a frightened

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child,—“never mind, then; I will call you Pauline if you wish. And in turn you are to remember that I am Ellen—Ellen Stuart; that is my maiden name, and I am *never* to be called by any other.”

At this announcement Pauline had stopped crying, and had gazed at her in what seemed to be wide-eyed fright; and Constance, troubled lest the creature's reason was going, had soothed and petted her into quiet, and hushed her to sleep as she would have done for a sick child, and had resolved thereafter to let all petty matters alone, and think of her charge as only an ill-treated child whom God had told her to care for in His stead.

Mrs. Bristow almost furnished the little hall room. It astonished Constance even to laughter to find how fertile the careful housekeeper was in discovering articles of furniture that had suddenly grown too large or too small for her own use. In truth, the younger woman had to watch and entreat, and sometimes to grow “stubborn” even to sternness, not to have the Bristow dining room and kitchen quite robbed of its conveniences for her sake.

By the time the summer had waned, and Alice had returned again to her school, and the world in general had taken on its after-summer attire and occupations, the curiously reconstructed home was in general working

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order. But before the new household the financial problem remained. Constance had planned that the newcomer should have the ordering of the meals and what preparation of them was necessary during her absence; but she learned early in the course of her experiment that she could not safely throw off even this responsibility. It was found that Pauline could make 'delicious cake and "lovely" desserts, and creams, and ices that would tempt the palate of an epicure. Moreover, they tempted her, or, at least, the making of them did, far too often for a slender purse. The first week that she took full charge, the bill for luxuries alone exceeded the sum that Constance had planned as sufficient for their entire food supply.

Pauline cried when this was pointed out to her, and declared that she had ordered just as little of everything as she possibly could; she had actually felt ashamed to tell the milkman that she wanted such a little bit of cream; and that her aunt, who was always "fussing over bills," never thought of a smaller order for fruit than she had given. Then, when Constance remained firm, she waxed sarcastic, and said that if she had understood that they were not to live, but just to starve respectably from day to day, she might perhaps have managed differently. If Ellen must have things done

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on such a fearfully small scale, she would better attend to it herself; she, Pauline, was not constituted so that she could. When she had money she spent it, and when she hadn't she went without. Those were the only ways she knew. Constance listened in astonishment. Here was a new phase of the child-woman's character, calling for patience in a direction that she had not expected. She gave the matter some hours of careful thought, not without more figuring and a small sacrifice or two that she had held in abeyance, then very kindly and firmly laid down her laws. She admitted that Pauline had evidently not been accustomed to planning in a house in which people were poor. She had spent much of her life in boarding, and had not in any case known what it cost simply to live. She, Ellen, knew; she had ordered her uncle's house for him years ago, and understood what she was talking about, and knew also to a penny just what they had to depend upon. They would try not to starve. "Charlie has sometimes cried for bread, you told me," she said. "God helping us, he shall never cry for bread again; but the cream, and the candies, and the luxuries generally, must be few and rare. I must do all the buying hereafter, and I must plan what we may have to eat. That is what I should have done in the first place, because of course I am the only one who

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knows just how much money there is to be spent. Besides, it will save you the calculations that you say you hate."

And then Pauline had cried again, in another mood, and told Constance that she was as good as an angel, and was doing, oh, so much more for her than she deserved. She ought to be pushed out into the street and left to starve; and if it were not for poor Charlie, she would not care. And this mood was almost harder for Constance than the other.

But there were other things that Pauline could do. She could broil a steak to a crisp, so that it was impossible for even Charlie's boyish appetite to relish it; and she could make vegetables sodden with improper cooking, and plan her fire so that her mutton was hopelessly raw one day, and hopelessly burned the next.

"On general principles," said Mrs. Bristow, who was looking on ill-pleased, "whatever that creature ought to have cold, she warms, and whatever ought to be piping hot, is as cold as a stone."

"That child," continued the notable housekeeper, pouring out the story of her anxieties to Alice when she came home on Friday evenings, "that child" — meaning always Constance — "is just about starved to death. She comes home at night all fagged out; she works later than she

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used to, and she's been working all the week where they don't care whether or not there is anything left for the 'help' to eat; and that creature will have a slop of scorched soup for her that is just milk warm; or a piece of warmed-over fish; if there is one thing more than another that I can't abide, it is warmed-over fish! Of course Ellen can't eat; she's lost, I don't know how many pounds, already; she'll be just a skeleton by spring. That creature don't know how to cook any more than my shoes know how to preach! I don't mean to stand this much longer; I mean to do something."

Before the holidays were upon them she had done it.

"What do you know how to do, anyway?" she had asked Pauline one day, when that "poor creature," which was Mrs. Bristow's commonest name for her, had been confiding the sorrows of her cut finger and burned wrist and heavy gems to what she hoped was a sympathetic ear. "You don't seem to me to be cut out for a cook, now that's a fact. I was wondering if there wasn't something you could do real well, and liked to do."

"Indeed there is!" said Pauline, with animation. "I don't believe anybody can make lovelier cake than I can; I know how to make fifteen different kinds, and they are all just lovely! I used to make my aunt's cake, always.

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But, O dear! It's of no use to make any here. Ellen hardly ever eats a piece, and she thinks I oughtn't to let Charlie eat it; and more than that, she thinks she can't afford to have it made. I don't see why not, I'm sure. Cake doesn't take much; just a little butter and sugar and a few eggs."

"Cake is very expensive stuff," said the experienced housekeeper, with decision. "We only have it occasionally, for a kind of treat. But there's lots of folks in this city who do have it all the time; and I was wondering— What if you and I should get up a little secret, and surprise Ellen all to pieces? Suppose you make some cake, and I'll sell it for you. Maybe you could make money enough to have your meat and your gems and all such things cooked for you. How should you like that?"

The mercurial little woman who had been crying but a few minutes before, clapped her hands for joy.

"Like it!" she said, "that isn't the word; I should love it. I've never told Ellen, and I wouldn't for the world, because she is just an angel, and what we should do without her, it frightens me to think; but for all that, I hate, hate, HATE cooking and dishwashing. I was never used to it, and I can't learn it."

Mrs. Bristow looked at the small, frail creature with compassion in her eyes. "You poor

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sickly, little, good-for-nothing thing!" she said to herself, "I don't suppose you've got the strength to do housework, even if you had the gumption, which you haven't."

Then she set her energies to work, with such success that by the close of that same week Pauline, as pleased as a child with a new toy, slipped into Constance's astonished hand three silver dollars that she had earned.

"And paid for the eggs and the sugar and things, besides," she explained gleefully. "Mrs. Bristow stood over me like an old ogre, and made me weigh every grain I used."

"Now, child," began Mrs. Bristow to Constance, when their charge and her little boy were safe in bed for the night, "it's time for you to listen to reason. Haven't I got eyes and a nose? And can't I see how your hard-earned money is being put into the fire and the garbage pail? The poor creature doesn't know how to cook, and you can't teach her. It ain't in her; and when it isn't in them, they can't learn. But she can make wonderful cake. Mrs. Morris Wheelock most went into hysterics over it, and wants some more right away, and so does Mrs. Carter Wheelock, across the street from her; and what those two women want, every blessed woman on that square intends to have. So it's as good as a settled route already.

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Now here's my plan. I can cook; you know that just as well as I do; and I'll cook up your things for you every day when I do mine. I just as soon do it as not, for neighborliness, but you are so dreadful independent that we'll be businesslike. You can pay me regular each week for doing your cooking, and washing up your dishes with mine; and she can help earn the money. She says she just loves to make cake, and I guess she does. It would have done you good to see what pleasure the poor thing took in foaming her eggs and creaming her butter and sugar. Well, now, isn't that a good plan? I think it is first-rate; and if you get stubborn and don't take to it, that poor creature and I will both be downright mad. Besides, there's Alice. 'Mother,' says she, when she was here last week, 'if you don't make Ellen do something different, I'm afraid she will get sick. She looks thinner and paler every time I come.'

Constance laughed, even while a gleam as of tears shone in her eyes. It was balm to her tired heart to feel that these dear friends were plotting for her. She had no idea of being "stubborn," she assured the anxious plotter. On the contrary, she was distinctly grateful. The scheme was worthy of the one who had thought of it, and her heart would thereby be relieved of a great anxiety, for indeed, with all

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her care, they were running a little behind in expenses, so much food had been spoiled. Also, she had become aware that the burden laid on Pauline was too heavy, and had not known what could be done.

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XXVI.

A "Neighbor."

THERE followed some weeks of as much comfort as could be had with a woman like Pauline as one of the family. It was probably a greater relief to Constance than she realized, that she was compelled to be much away. She had leisure afterward to understand how much of her own burden was shouldered by good Mrs. Bristow, who, now that she had the right of way into the little dining room at all hours, watched over the household with the eyes of an expert.

"And that Pauline will bear watching, any time," she confided to Kate. "She just can't help wasting; it's born in her."

Other traits than this were also "born in" the poor wreck of womanhood. Her mercurial disposition had perhaps saved her reason to her, but it made strange scenes that puzzled a woman like Mrs. Bristow. There were times when she would go wild with delight over some trivial matter, capering about the room and yielding to her glee with the abandonment of

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a merry child; and perhaps within the next five minutes she would give way to an equally uncontrollable burst of grief, with apparently as trivial a cause as before. She alternately played with her boy as if she were even younger than he, and fretted at his mistakes and lapses in behavior as an irritable older sister might have done. Or on comparatively slight provocation, she would be fiercely angry with him, and administer punishment out of all proportion to the fault. On one of these occasions the punishment was so severe that Mrs. Bristow, who was a woman of strong good sense, and who had resolved years before that happen what might, she would never interfere between other people and their children, broke her resolution, and sternly told the angry mother that if she struck her child again, she should be put in the other room and have the door locked upon her. Then there followed such a passionate outburst of weeping, not from the child, but on the part of the child-mother, that her little boy put away his sobs and came over and patted her face and caressed her hand, and said in tones of infinite tenderness, "Poor mamma, poor little mamma! don't cry! I will never be naughty any more."

As usual, the crying was followed by coughing; a paroxysm so severe and prolonged that Mrs. Bristow ran hither and thither for restora-

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tives and reliefs, and was in a fever of anxiety and remorse for the remainder of the day.

Poor Constance, when the scene was reported to her in graphic detail by the half-triumphant, half-penitent elder woman, could not help an outburst of laughter over some of the absurdities connected with the occasion, but in the quiet of her locked room a little later she did not laugh. Instead, her mouth was drawn in tense lines of pain. What a strange wife the untrained, undisciplined creature must have made! So utterly unlike — was it any wonder that — but there she stopped and told herself not to drop so low in the scale of being that she wanted to condone sin.

One gleam of comfort during those days that were in many respects soul-trying, the two elder women had. The boy, Charlie, if he could have been spoiled, certainly would have been by them both, so entirely had their hearts gone out to him. No more lovable specimen of childhood had ever come within their range. There were times when Mrs. Bristow admitted that even Alice, her first-born, was not always as good as Charlie. The child's singular beauty, that seemed to grow with his years, attracted even strangers to him; and his singularly lovable disposition was sure to win any who saw much of him. One of his most surprising characteristics was a marked power of self-control;

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a power that would have been surprising in one so young, even though carefully trained by the wisest of parents, and under the circumstances seemed nothing less than a marvel.

"There must have been some good grandmother, or maybe grandfather, that he copied in looks and disposition," Mrs. Bristow remarked once, when the boy's unusual traits were being discussed. "He isn't one mite like his mother in anything, that's certain; and it isn't likely that he is like his father—though since I have come to know that poor creature, I can't help thinking *he* might have had some excuse for slipping away, poor wretch! I don't mean that, either, not a word of it. Any father who would go away and leave a child like Charlie to the care of—well, to the care of anybody, isn't fit to live on this earth."

"He went away before Charlie was born," said Constance, quickly; and in a moment she was sorry she had revealed even so much. Why had she done it? Was it still sweet to her to hear some one try to find excuse for him?

But they did what they could, all of them, to atone to Charlie for the trials of his short life. He was steadily loyal to his mother, and developed with each passing day a singularly protective air toward her, as if he instinctively recognized her need of being cared for, instead

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of bestowing care; but his love for all the others was strongly marked. Alice Bristow and he were friends from the first moment of their meeting, and he sought Kate and the younger sister Marian as companions at every opportunity; still it was, after all, to Constance that he gave a chivalrous devotion that was as winning as it was unusual.

"You'll be taken care of, anyhow," said Mrs. Bristow to Constance, with a nod toward the boy, who was in sight but not within hearing. "You ought to have heard him tell, this morning, about what he is going to do for 'Aunt Ellen' when he gets to be a man. Nothing that this world can furnish are you to be without, if he can help it. 'And what about your mother?' I asked him. 'Oh, I'll take care of mamma, of course,' he said with that air of protection that he puts on, you know. 'And then, Mrs. Bristow, Aunt Ellen shall have a carriage all her own, just big enough for two people to ride in, and a pony—no, two ponies, because she might want to go very fast!' He'll do it, too; see if he doesn't. That boy is going to make a man to be proud of. I just like to think that you'll have him to take care of you after I'm gone."

Constance could not answer a word. She went over to Charlie, and putting her arms about him, kissed him with such clinging

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tenderness that, as he returned the caress, he said;—

"Aunt Ellen, do you love me more than ever to-day? So do I you; more and more every day. Isn't it funny?"

But she could not speak; this poor hungry lonely heart! Would the boy be hers some day, with no one to come between them? Would he love her and protect her and be TRUE everywhere and always? Was this to be God's gift to her out of the furnace?

All things considered, the winter passed rapidly; and there was a degree of comfort in the home. Pauline, busy with her cake, as ever an artist with his paints and brushes, was almost happy while it was in preparation, and was certainly a financial success. Pauline, who confessed that she had never cared for money merely as money, brought her gains each week to Constance, indifferent as to what became of them; and there was now each week a little to put aside "for a time of need," as Constance once vaguely expressed it, then exchanged apprehensive glances with Mrs. Bristow, and wondered if Pauline had heard. Did she know yet, she who talked so carelessly about death, often declaring that she wished she could die—did she begin in the least to realize that her time here was growing short, and that they were trying, these friends of hers, to put by

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money for the days when there would be no more cake-making, and when the expenses of serious illness would be upon them? Constance saw only too plainly that she did not, and was filled with pain and anxiety about it all. She had been permitted once, and again, and yet again, to win a soul for Christ. Twice she had heard those who were bidding good-by to earth say that because of her help they were sure they were going home; but this one, this strange childish woman with her fitful ways, and her passionate wilful heart, would hear very little about that Christ-centred life which Constance craved for her.

"Don't talk to me about such things!" she would say petulantly, "I never understood religion; and I'm sure I'm gloomy enough now, and have trouble enough, without having to hear of it. I shall have to die, of course, when the time comes, and goodness knows I have wished for it often enough! but why can't I be let alone until then? No, I don't want any religion to live by; I have trouble enough without it. I had an Aunt Maria once, who was very good. She said she lived her religion every day; and I just detested her. I remember telling mother that if Aunt Maria was going to heaven, I never wanted to!" Then she would laugh like a gleeful child over her folly; and succeed in putting the subject

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away so completely that no immediate return to it could be made. Yet there came to her days of gloom and hours of passionate abandonment to grief, like one in the throes of a great remorse or a great fear. Constance, studying these outbursts, decided that the cause was fear; that the poor woman realized that her disease was making progress, and that death, which she had so often and so wildly invoked, and yet had always feared and dreaded, was near at hand. It was true that her quiet life and regular and nourishing food, as well as her freedom from immediate anxiety with regard to her child, had helped to hold the disease in check; still, she must see for herself that it had only been checked, not cured, and that the end could not be far distant. Being childish and whimsical in all her reasonings, she might imagine that to talk about what she called "gloomy" subjects would hasten the end. If she could only in some way be made to understand that religion was an everyday matter, and had to do with *living*. Yet as the days passed, it seemed to Constance that she made no progress whatever toward what had now become her strongest desire. Pauline had hours, or rather moments, when she lavished upon her the strongest expressions of love and confidence; and perhaps in the next second would push her from her and break into pas-

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sionate and incoherent expressions of self-reproach and self-pity. Some experience of this sort was sure to follow any effort on Constance's part to lead her thoughts toward the claims of Christ upon herself. Mrs. Bristow had a theory of her own. "I believe," she would say with a shrewd look at Constance, "that that poor creature has got something on her mind that is tormenting her day and night. I've thought so a hundred times. If she could only bring herself to tell it all out straight, then I guess she could get the consent of her conscience to listen to something else."

All this puzzled and distressed Constance; but she felt powerless, and could only wait and watch and pray. It was well for her that she realized, at least to some extent, what tremendous forces in behalf of this frail woman she was able to set at work by the use of that one instrument, prayer.

Meantime, they were all looking forward to the coming of spring. It chanced that the winter was unusually severe and prolonged, which served to make them more eager for the first breath of spring.

"The poor creature is housed up so much," would Mrs. Bristow affirm after an unusually trying day, "no wonder she gets so nervous and pernickity. There hasn't been a living

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thing that suited her this day, except cake; it is wonderful how she takes to cake! But then, we always take to things that we can do a little better than anybody else. When she can get out and see the grass growing, and smell a flower now and then, she will feel better. And it will be better for Charlie, too, poor little man! She hadn't a mite of patience with him to-day, not a mite; and he was as good as gold, too."

But it came to pass that when spring appeared suddenly one morning, quite as though she had just thought of it the night before and resolved to rush, right in, behold, the poor weakling for whom they had desired her coming, drooped.

Suddenly her strength gave way, so that she was not only unable to make her beloved cakes, but turned against them, telling Constance to put the measuring cups and the baking tins and the egg-beater all away—she never wanted to see or hear of them again. That mood passed; and there came a breathless morning, wherein she cried to be permitted to make one more angel cake, and persisted, in the face of earnest entreaties to the contrary. The result was that her strength failed in a critical moment, and the cake was spoiled in the baking. Her passion of disappointment and chagrin over this trivial accident were so extreme as

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to induce an exhaustion that was prolonged and alarming. It was then that good mother Bristow, who had been alone with her patient all the morning, resolved to take matters in charge with a more determined hand. Constance had taken up her afternoon appointment, and had hurried home at noon because she had seen in the morning that Pauline was weaker than usual, and had given her afternoon to trying to undo the mischief that had been wrought in her absence; but the grown-up child had resented being cared for, and the afternoon had been very hard for both patient and nurse.

"Look here," Mrs. Bristow said, detaining Constance as she was hurrying from the late tea table back to her charge.

"Wait a minute. Kate is with the poor creature, you know. She can amuse her for a while, if anybody can; and I want to talk a little common sense to you. This kind of thing can't go on much longer, can it? You see, she thinks I'm only the woman of whom you rent rooms, and she naturally kind of resents my interference. I don't know as it is strange; but this isn't the first time she has had her own way, and taken the consequences. Isn't it time something was done?"

Constance owned that she had but that morning thought that her engagements must be given

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up for a time, and that she must give herself entirely to taking care of her charge.

"Well, you won't do it," said Mrs. Bristow, with firmness; "not if you are the sensible woman I think you are. You need the money you are earning, of course; and times are coming, pretty fast, I'm afraid, when we shall need a good deal. And it will be a good deal harder on you to stay at home than it will to be at work. Now I should like to ask you right out plain and square, one question, and you won't think I'm meddling, will you? Is this woman any of your kith and kin, or isn't she?"

A flush of pain and shame crept slowly over Constance's face, but she answered steadily in the negative.

"I thought as much. She is just a 'neighbor' that 'fell among thieves,' isn't she?"

"Well, now, I want to ask one question more. Ain't I a 'neighbor' too? What makes you think you've got to hold me at arm's length, and make me belong to the family of that worthless priest, or that miserable Levite, when I don't want to a bit?"

"My dear Mrs. Bristow!" said Constance, wondering, and compelled to laugh, "what can you mean? Is there anything more that you could have done to prove how hearty and unselfish and constant is your neighborliness?"

A "Neighbor."

"Yes," said the good woman, sturdily, "there is, a good deal more. Don't I know how you watch me all the time, and won't give me a chance to spend a penny of my own money, even for the boy? And don't you hurry home earlier than you want to, for fear I'm being hindered by looking after them a little? And don't you insist upon doing all the watching and trotting, after you get here? I don't like it; and I'm not going to stand it. I'm going to be a real out-and-out neighbor after this. We're poor, I know; but we aren't so poor as that! I've got a little money laid by that I've a right to use for them that 'fell among thieves,' and I want a chance to use it. And I've got a good deal of strength and considerable time on my hands that I want to use in the same way. What's to hinder your taking me into partnership in this business, and letting us share and share alike? I think Pauline has got where she would be willing to give right up for a while and not try to do anything for herself or her boy, if you'd just tell her that she needed the rest, and that you'd hired me to take care of her and look after him. That will make smooth sailing for us both, and I'll risk but I can keep things shipshape, and let you go on with your work for a little while."

XXVII.

Nurse Watkins.

THERE were very few times indeed, during those years of Constance's life, when she released her self-control and gave way to tears. Her wound was too deep, too sore, for many tears; but on rare occasions they came as a flood, and relieved the tension for a little while. On this May evening, when heart and body were alike tired, she let her head droop on Mrs. Bristow's ample shoulder and gave the tears their way,—the motherly woman patting and soothing her quite as she, on rare occasions, had a chance to do for the manly boy Charlie.

"There, there! poor tired child! don't cry. Mother didn't mean to be cross and scold; she was only trying to show you that you mustn't be selfish and stubborn, and do all the 'neighboring' yourself. Yes, you may cry if you want to. I guess it will rest you. A real downright cry once in a while, especially when folks are young, helps amazingly. You see you don't give the tears half a chance; you

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keep them choked up there in your heart until they burn you."

Constance's emotion ended in laughter; then she did what was almost as unusual with her as tears. She kissed Mrs. Bristow once and again, lingeringly, tenderly, as she said in a voice that was still not far from tears:—

"Thank you, dear friend. We will be 'neighbors' together, even more than we have been. I can accept at your hands, as freely as you give. And God bless you for all that you have been and are to me."

After that, for several weeks, life was less hard for them all. It was not until afterward that they realized one reason for this in Pauline's growing weakness. As Mrs. Bristow had surmised, she took kindly to the proposed rest; even to the giving up of all responsibility about her boy. It seemed natural for her to be waited upon, and her extreme feebleness certainly furnished legitimate excuse. She gave much less trouble than she had while attempting to exert herself, and would lie for hours in an apathetic state, staring apparently at space, and thinking her own thoughts. Gloomy thoughts they must chiefly have been, for her face was sad, and at times the lines about her mouth were hard. Too often these periods of silent introspection ended in passionate outbursts that seemed to be as much of anger as of grief.

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But Mrs. Bristow was learning to manage her charge, and treated her at all times now, not as a naughty, but as a tired child, who had had a great deal to trouble her, and needed to be rested and petted. By the time Constance returned at night the outbursts had generally spent themselves, and comparative calm reigned. The shrewd woman "at the helm" having nothing more to gain by detailing experiences, kept their trials as much as possible to herself, and gave Constance what rest she could.

But this state of things was not to last. As the season advanced, and the early, fitful days of May settled into steady balminess, and June was at the door, their patient, instead of improving, grew daily weaker. The doctor who had been "looking in occasionally" for several weeks, warned Mrs. Bristow one morning that if her lodger had any friends to be summoned, it ought to be done soon; she was liable to "slip away now," at any time. The news took Constance unawares at last; she had not realized that the "slipping away" would be so soon. She gave up all outside engagements at once, and remained with her charge. The need for constant attendance made this necessary, but there was also another reason. Pauline began to cling to her in a pitiful way, to cry feebly if she left the room for ever so short an absence. And yet, with strange contradiction, there were

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times when she seemed to be positively irritated by Constance's presence, and would beg her to go away — go to the farther side of the room, where she could not be seen from the bed; only to call her back with nervous haste as soon as this was done. Puzzled, and worried, and worn, Constance, at times, knew not what to do or think.

There were days when the invalid suffered much pain in addition to her extreme weakness. By degrees the hours became filled with continual efforts to relieve and soothe her, until both nurses were getting physically worn out, and Alice, on her home-coming one Friday evening, voiced the thought in their own hearts, that help must be secured. The neighbors were constant in their offers of assistance, but they were all poor and hard-working; needing their day's earnings and their regular rest.

"Yes," said Constance, in reply to Alice's urgings, "we must have a nurse. I have been holding back as long as possible, on account of the expense; but your mother, at least, must rest; and she cannot be persuaded to do so while I am alone."

"You must both rest," said Alice, tenderly. "And we can afford a nurse, Ellen; you forget that I am earning money, too. Will you talk with the doctor about it when he comes to-night?"

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But it came to pass that help of just the kind needed was not to be had on the moment, and they reached the late afternoon of an unusually warm and unusually trying day with the prospect of a hard night before them, and only themselves to depend upon. Earlier in the day Constance had escaped for a few minutes and gone to see a woman of whom she had thought, in the hope of securing her help, only to find that she was herself ill, and in need of care.

"I met a very wholesome and attractive-looking young woman on the way home," Constance said to Mrs. Bristow. "She seemed attracted to me, too; at least, she looked hard at me, and gave me the impression that I had seen her before somewhere. I was tempted to stop her, stranger though she was, and ask if she knew of any unemployed nurse. She turned, after a few minutes, and walked back this way, and certainly seemed interested in me. She must be a woman whom I have met at some of the houses."

The door bell rang often that afternoon; the neighbors were very sympathetic and solicitous. Mrs. Bristow stood in the doorway with one of them when a trim young woman passed, walking very slowly. Mrs. Bristow's voice was clear and distinct, and this was what she was saying:—

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"I am sorry to say that Mrs. Curtiss isn't any better. She had a bad night, and she's had a bad day. Ellen is almost beat out; I dread the night for her."

The trim young woman had stopped to tie the lacing of her shoe that seemed to have got out of order. A few more questions and answers involving the repetition of Mrs. Curtiss's name, an earnestly expressed wish on the part of the neighbor that she could help them, and the assurance that she would in a minute, if her baby wasn't sick, and the interview ended. It was perhaps ten minutes before the bell rang again.

"Dear, dear!" said Mrs. Bristow, who was on her way upstairs, "a body would think that bell had twenty tongues to-day instead of one!" She answered it herself, and came face to face with the trim young woman whose shoe had arrested her in front of the door.

"Good evening, ma'am," she said briskly. "I heard that you had sickness here, and had been looking for help. I wonder if I couldn't be of use? I'm a nurse, ma'am, and just home from my last case. I'll be glad to come right in and help, if you are needing some one and if there is anything I can do."

"Well now!" said Mrs. Bristow, "I believe that is a Providence. We do need help, that's a fact. You just let me call Ellen Stu-

art; I shouldn't wonder if she would be glad enough to have you stay this very night, if you can. She needs rest about as bad as anybody ever did in this world."

Constance might herself have been a nurse, judging from her general appearance. Her dress was black, but she wore a white apron that completely covered it, and her hair was brushed plaihly back from a face that was pale and showed traces of much loss of sleep. In all respects she looked as unlike the Constance of the past as outward circumstances could make her. She instantly recognized the trim young woman as the one who had attracted her earlier in the day, and telegraphed this fact to Mrs. Bristow, who left Kate with the sleeping patient, while she came to add her word, if necessary, to the securing of immediate help.

"I don't care if she charges forty dollars a week," she had murmured to Kate. "I like her looks, and I believe we ought to have her. She won't be needed long."

But it chanced that terms and references were eminently satisfactory, and the nurse expressed her willingness to take charge that night.

"I have a very important errand that must be done right away, ma'am," she explained. "I'll go right out now and do it, and then I'll get my bag and come back here for the night. It won't take me an hour."

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Mrs. Bristow promptly offered her youngest daughter's services for the errand and the bag, but the nurse assured her that she must attend to the errand herself.

"Just let me take your street and number," she said, "so I'll be sure to make no mistake, and I'll get round here again before you know it."

As she spoke she produced from her pocket a pencil and a slip of paper, and wrote the address with exceeding care. Then Mrs. Bristow watched her taking businesslike strides toward the nearest car, and felt a strange letting up of the burden of responsibility that had been oppressing her.

"It's queer how you trust some folks, even if they are strangers!" she murmured to herself. "I know that woman will come back, and I know she'll be a blessing. I feel it all through me."

Half an hour later the new nurse presented herself at a district telegraph office, and a few minutes thereafter there clicked over the wires a message addressed to Mr. Charles Gordon Curtiss, which read as follows:—

"Come to the street and number signed to this, as soon as you can get here. Ask for Nurse Watkins.

"DILSEY."

Pauline.

By nine of the clock that evening, Mrs. Bristow's house had settled into quiet. Constance in her own room was sleeping the sleep of one exhausted and relieved from responsibility. Mrs. Bristow was snoring comfortably in her room, with little Charlie on a cot beside her. And in the sick-room Nurse Watkins sat erect and watchful by the bedside of a sleeping woman whose name she knew was Pauline.

During the next four days, that household learned to bless the name of Nurse Watkins.

"Ah, yes," the doctor had said, when Mrs. Bristow described her, "I know Nurse Watkins; she was with a patient of mine over on Spring Street, and proved herself a treasure. She went to the country with a sick woman, and I did not know she had returned. She isn't what is called a professional nurse, but for some cases she is even better. I do not know of any one who could meet your needs here so well as she can. I'm very glad you found her."

"The Lord found her," said Mrs. Bristow, reverently, "and sent her to us, I believe." As the days passed, she grew sure of it. Pauline also took to the new attendant; wanted her ministrations, liked to be left alone with her, and never shrank from her, as she still had at times a strange wild way of doing with Constance.

Nurse Watkins.

One wakeful night they talked together, the sick woman and Nurse Watkins; talked and talked! The nurse, instead of trying to quiet her patient, led her on; sometimes her words were like the ravings of one insane, and sometimes she cried and moaned. Once she said: "I can't do it, Nurse; I tell you I *can't*. You might tell her after I am gone. I've told it all to you; and it's only a little while now. She has been, oh, so good to me! like an angel; and I cannot have her hate me yet. I must have her by me to the end. Don't you know I must, Nurse? I cannot die without her holding my hand; and it is only such a little while! And you know she would hate me!"

"No, she wouldn't hate you!" said Nurse Watkins, quiet and cool. "She would stay by you just the same. She belongs to the Lord, and it is loving the Lord Jesus, and copying him all the time, that has made her good to you; she will always be good to you, and you won't get any peace or feel anything but afraid, till you tell her what you know you ought to."

And then, by and by, there was praying. Nurse Watkins had learned how to pray. She prayed a great deal during those hours; sometimes for the sick woman to follow, and sometimes for only God to hear. In this way passed those fateful nights in which Nurse

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Watkins took sole command and ordered the two other women to their beds.

"I'm used to it," she would say cheerfully. "I can sleep standing up, in the daytime, whenever there's chances; but you need your rest so as to be fresh for to-morrow. This dear lady wants to talk to you to-morrow; she has got something special that she wants to tell you."

And then Pauline would wail out, "Oh no, Nurse, don't say that! I can't!" And then the cool quiet hand of the nurse would come about her head and smooth back the rumpled hair, and rearrange the tossed pillows, and her voice would murmur low: "You will be a little stronger by and by, and God will help you to do what is right. He loves you, and is waiting to give you every bit of help you need."

On the fourth afternoon following the nurse's coming, Constance did not leave the sick-room for a moment. The nurse had warned her that the end was drawing near.

"I don't think she'll get through the night, ma'am. She may, but I don't think it. I should not be surprised if she went out with the day. If I were you, I would stay close by her, and encourage her to talk; it can't hurt her now, and I think it will help her. I don't believe she can die in peace until she tells you some things that she ought to have told long ago."

Nurse Watkins.

Constance looked at her with wide, startled eyes, and Nurse Watkins, who had learned a great deal since she became a nurse, added quietly : —

“ You see, ma’am, she has talked to me and told me things ; they always do to nurses, you know, if they take to them at all ; and there are things that you ought to know. I will tell you all about them if she doesn’t ; but I hope she will. That is what is holding her back from peace. She could rest herself on the Lord Jesus if it was off her mind ; but she can’t before, because she knows she isn’t doing right. So for her sake, you see, ma’am. She thinks you would be angry with her ; but I’ve told her the folly of that, and I really think she will talk to you before she goes ; she almost promised me. And you won’t mind my being in the room, ma’am ? for she says that I must hold her hand. She’s like a sick child, you see, and has taken a notion.”

XXVIII.

"At Last."

ONE other direction Nurse Watkins gave; this time to Mrs. Bristow.

"I'm expecting a call, ma'am, a very important one, and I must see the man myself. I feel pretty sure he can get here to-day, and I want to know, if it should be so that I couldn't leave her, will you let him come up into the hall, near the door, so I can see him and tell him what to do? It is very important indeed. I'll explain it all to you afterward, but I wouldn't have any mistake about it this time, for the world."

Mrs. Bristow promised readily, unquestioningly. Her thoughts were busy with the coming of that other silent guest into her household; besides, she had learned even in so short a time to do Nurse Watkins's bidding. And so they waited. The sick woman was quieter that day; quieter than she had ever been. She slept much, and grew steadily weaker. Once or twice the watchers bending over her thought that the breath had stopped, but Nurse

“At Last.”

Watkins shook her head, and watched the door leading into the hall; it stood open, as did all the doors, for better air. Toward the sun-setting the dying woman roused a little, opened her eyes, and fixed them steadily upon Constance, then reached out a small wasted hand to clasp hers.

“You won’t hate me?” she asked, each word being slow and distinct.

“Dear child!” said Constance, her eyes filling with tears. “Why should you think of such a thing for a moment? Don’t you know that I —”

“I know,” said the sick one, interrupting her words, “you have been good to me — no angel could be better; but you see, you do not know. *She* knows,” turning her eyes for a moment on Nurse Watkins’s face, “she knows all about it, and she says I must tell you; but — oh, I am afraid, even now! No one was ever good to Charlie and me, except you, and I thought you would not believe me; you would think I made it all up. Still, I am going to tell you now; I promised that I would. She says God wants me to. But you will stay by me every minute, won’t you, even after that? Are you sure you can?”

“Every minute!” said Constance, solemnly.

“Well, then —” she gave a kind of gasp as one whose breath was failing, and waited. The

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room was very still; but there was a little, a very little, stir in the hall. There had been a step on the stairs that Nurse Watkins had heard. She had her eyes on the doorway. Kate Bristow telegraphed them, and Nurse Watkins shook her head; she could not stir from her post; her fingers were watching the pulse of the dying. Then she, too, sent a telegram with her eyes to a man, a stranger, who stood very near the door; he was to wait there.

Suddenly the dying woman broke the silence, her words clear and almost loud, as though she had summoned all her powers for one last effort.

"He was the wrong man."

The great thuds that Constance's heart was giving, it seemed to her, must be heard by every one present, but she steadied her voice to utmost quiet and gentleness.

"Do you mean, dear, that you want me to know that you are not Mrs. Curtiss?"

"No!" said the dying, her voice fairly filling the room. "Not that! I am Mrs. Curtiss — Mrs. Charles Gordon Curtiss — God knows that that is true; and Nurse knows it; but — *it wasn't your husband!* I saw him that day; he didn't see me; I saw what an awful mistake I had made, and I ran away! I thought you would come back to him, that day, and everything would be right except for Charlie and me.

“At Last.”

It was a long, long time afterward that I found that you didn't go back. So long that I thought it would do no good then to tell anybody. And then — when you found me, that night, you know, and I saw that you didn't understand — I meant to tell you — but, oh, you were so good to Charlie and me. And I didn't know how we could live without you; and I knew you would hate me if I told the truth, and I was *afraid*. I didn't see how it could do you any good to know, after all these years, and — ” the voice stopped. Cold drops had gathered on her forehead, and her cold hand that Constance held was trembling.

“Speak to her,” said Nurse Watkins; and Constance, not less pale than the dying, bent over her, while she clasped the small cold hand in both of hers.

“Don't try to tell me any more, dear, you have not strength, and there is no need. God loves you, and forgives you, and will give you rest forever. Think of Him, now; think of the loving, waiting Jesus, and rest in His strength. And Pauline, I will take care of Charlie for you as long as I live, and love him for you, and he'll come up to heaven some day and be with you.”

She never forgot the look of love that overspread the dying face. But it was on Nurse Watkins that those great solemn eyes turned a

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last look as her voice gathered strength for one more word. "It is true, Nurse, what you said; the Lord Jesus is good. I can trust Him."

The room grew very still. The sun dropped low, and lower, and sank away; the soft summer twilight crept up and began to fill the air. Outside in the hall the stranger waited. He had changed his position once, so that his eyes could take in the form of Constance as she sat with her back to the door, her hand clasped in the grip of one that had taken its last hold of things earthly. Alice Bristow stole in, presently, leading Charlie by the hand. Only a little while before he had given his mother what he knew were good-by kisses. His beautiful eyes were dimmed with much weeping. Mrs. Bristow clasped her motherly arms about him, but after a minute he went softly away from her and got down on his knees and laid his head on Constance's lap, and her free hand moved with infinite tenderness of caress among his brown curls. And so they waited. If one could only picture thoughts! Oh the tide of pain and joy, of hope and grief, of gratitude and shame, that surged through Constance Curtiss's heart! He was true, *true*! He had been true, and good, and grand, from the very first, and through all this eternity of time! If, oh if, she had but trusted him! God forgive her! Could God ever forgive her for bowing

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that dear head to the dust in shame and agony? Could she dare, sometime, when they were old, and his pain had dulled, to seek him and, bowing at his feet, beg his forgiveness? Oh, if this poor soul had only told the truth, just simply the *truth*, from the very first! Stop! She must not think of that; she must not think at all. She must not faint; she must let this dying hand keep hold of something warm and human to the very last. She must pray, *pray!* and not for herself, but for the passing soul. “God in infinite mercy receive this poor wronged, sinning, suffering, sorrowing, repentant woman, and give her the rest and the strength that her child-heart needs. O God of patience everlasting, of grace infinite, revealed to us in Jesus Christ, hold us all.”

Nurse Watkins’s eyes had been on the dying; they turned at this moment and reached into the hall. They met the eyes of Gordon Curtiss, and signalled him forward. The passing soul was beyond all danger now of any earthly shock.

He came softly, once more, into the presence of death. The last time that he and Nurse Watkins had met had been on that morning, when she had stood with him beside the clay of his cousin Charles, and had murmured to him, “The breath has stopped.” Now, after a moment, she said, low toned, again for his ear:—

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"It is over."

Instantly he bent and took Constance Curtiss in his arms, and said: —

"My wife, my darling! At last!"

Two days afterward they went home; Mr. and Mrs. Curtiss, and little Charlie, holding close by the hand Nurse Watkins, whose special charge he had already become. For Nurse Watkins had suddenly lost her interest in hospitals, and hotels, and boarding-houses, and a roving life generally, and was quite ready to go "home." She was more than ready to promise to "live and move and have her being," hereafter, for Charlie's sake.

"You see, I've lived for them so long," she explained to the bewildered Mrs. Bristow, who wanted to hear volumes from this well-informed woman's lips; "I've had them on my mind day and night, as you may say, for such a great while, that I don't know as I could set myself to really doing anything that would keep me from thinking about them. The housework, and the mending, and the nursing, and one thing and another, that I've appeared to be doing all this time, were only kind of wedges, don't you see, to get me in where I wanted to be, for the sake of my real work. And now that that's done, at last, I feel kind of lost; or I would, if it wasn't for Charlie. I'm real glad he takes

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to me, and wants me along with him all the time, and that they do, too.

"Where have I been?" Dear me! All over the world, you may say. I crossed the ocean, once, if you'll believe it! Yes, I did, and was gone for near three months. He took a notion that maybe she had gone over there, where he used to be. I don't know why he thought so; I never did. I kind of felt in my bones, all the while, that she was in this country.

"Oh, no, ma'am, I can't say that I had any plan about my hunting; not that can be told, anyway. The only thing I was bound and determined to do was to find her; and I thought when I began that it would be easy work enough, but before I got half through, I had a good deal of respect for those detectives that failed.

"Why, the way I came on her track at last was just one of those little happenings that there's no accounting for, if folks don't believe in Providence and prayer and things of that kind. I had just got in from the country, where I'd been to nurse a woman through a fever, and the way I came to do that, was because I heard two women in a drug store where I'd gone after some arnica, talking about her, and they called her Mrs. Curtiss. Of course that set me off; I managed to find out where she lived, and I took the first train out there, to see if I could

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be of any help, as a nurse, you know. They were glad enough to get help, and I stayed and nursed her through. She was 'Mrs. Curtiss,' all right, but not my Mrs. Curtiss, I can tell you; wasn't a mite like her. Still, don't you know, I kept thinking that maybe, being the same name, she was connected with the family in some way, and might know something about things. It took me a week or two to make sure that she hadn't a thing to do with our Curtisses in any way, and I kind of chafed over the time I was wasting there; but she was an awful sick woman, and it didn't seem right to leave them, especially as they got to depending on me, so I stayed and saw her through. Stayed a whole week after I had said that I had got to go, because they felt so bad about it that I couldn't, somehow, get away. Now, see how things work; if I had come away a day earlier, I suppose I should have missed *her*! That very morning that I came in from the country, I followed a little scamp of a boy away out to this neighborhood, before I went to my rooms, or anywhere, because he said he had a grown-up sister Pauline who was dying of starvation! She wasn't dying at all; and for that matter, he hadn't any sister, anyway. The fact is, there wasn't a word of truth in any of his stories, and just as I was turning away, feeling mad, I came face to face with *her*!"

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"Not with Ellen!" exclaimed the excited audience.

"With Mrs. Curtiss, ma'am, Mrs. Charles Gordon Curtiss. They belong to the oldest family in our city, and the most respected, the Curtisses do. Yes, I came face to face with her, right there in the street, and knew her in an instant, for all she was in a kind of disguise, as you may say. I've got something about me that won't let me forget a face, and I knew I should remember her face, anyhow. She was coming out of a house three squares below here on the right-hand side —"

"Mrs. Bent's house," murmured Mrs. Bristow. "She went over there to see if she could get help; and to think that I begged her to let me go in her place while she lay down and rested a bit!"

"There!" said Nurse Watkins, in triumphant answer to this, "see how things work! Well, of course I followed her to this house, and then I hung about, keeping watch of it so that no one could go in or out without my knowing it, and trying to plan what to do next that wouldn't look too queer, and so spoil everything. I tried to get some word at the next house, but there didn't seem to be anybody at home; and I hadn't decided just what to do, when you came to the door yourself and helped me out. You talked about

"Mrs. Curtiss being so sick; and though I couldn't see how she could be walking the streets and yet be like what you was telling, thinks I to myself, any kind of sickness gives me a chance. So I waited till you got back in the house, and then a neighbor came home, and I asked some questions, and found you had been looking for help; that made the way clear enough, and I just rang the bell and sailed in. And if anybody can go through all that I have, and not believe in Providence that plans things for you, then I think it shows that they were born an idiot!"

When Nurse Watkins was much excited, her grammar was inclined to grow a trifle mixed.

"I think as much!" declared Mrs. Bristow, who lived during those two days in such a continual maze of bewilderment that, to use her own expression, she felt sometimes as though she were "walking on her head."

"You could have knocked me down with a feather!" she affirmed, "when that splendid-looking stranger put his arms around Ellen and called her his wife: You see, I thought all the time that he was waiting for you to come and help save somebody's life, and that he meant to snatch you away the minute that poor soul was gone. I never once thought of his knowing Ellen."

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"He knew Mrs. Curtiss, ma'am, of course, the second his eyes rested on her, in spite of that queer dress, which wasn't much like what she had been used to, I can tell you. You ought to have seen her when she was a bride!"

XXIX.

Home.

IN such ways did Nurse Watkins do what she could to keep the dignity of Mrs. Charles Gordon Curtiss before the bewildered minds of her auditors. Mrs. Bristol, however, after the first shock of amazement had passed, was generally able to aid and abet her. In truth, she rolled on her tongue as sweet morsels, Nurse Watkins's scraps of knowledge that witnessed to the future magnificence of her dear Ellen. Especially did she delight in talking it all over afterward, when her eyes had been still more widely opened. And in skilful ways known to herself, she managed that Mrs. Emerson and, above all, Mr. Henry Emerson, should have abundant knowledge in these directions. Some of her items were after this manner: —

“Yes, of course he is Charles Gordon Curtiss the lawyer. There was never but one black sheep in all that family, they say, and he was the one who made all the trouble, poor wretch! But this one belongs to the great law

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firm; and rich! O dear me! you should hear Nurse Watkins describe the house where Ellen is to live! My Alice will be able to tell you all about it; she is going to spend next winter with them. For that matter, I and the girls are going on with her, just for a little visit. I thought we'd better wait another year, but Ellen simply wouldn't hear to it. Yes, I know, travelling is rather expensive, but we don't need to worry about that. You see, Mr. Curtiss has got a notion that we were very good to his wife, instead of her being a blessing to us every minute, and he can't do enough to show his gratitude. It's ridiculous the way he goes on! What do you say to a check for a thousand dollars at one dash! That was exactly what he left in my hand when he told me good-by! It was wrapped in a scrap of paper that said on it, 'A slight token of gratitude, and an earnest of what I hope to do in the future to prove it.' I'm sure I don't know what he can do next! Money isn't of much consequence, of course, compared with other things; we all know that. But then, when you've got all the other things, and that too, it isn't to be despised. I won't deny that I'm glad my Alice, and the younger girls too, for that matter, are to have some of the advantages that grow out of it." In these ways did Mrs. Bristow successfully supplement Nurse

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Watkins's efforts to make known the proper society estimate in which her friends were held.

Pauline went home, too; travelling in state in her silver-bound satin-lined house that laid on its massive plate:—

"PAULINE, WIFE OF CHARLES GORDON CURTISS.

"Aged twenty-five years."

She had her rights at last. The Curtiss honors for its dead were all bestowed with most punctilious care, the surviving Gordon Curtiss and his wife having an almost superstitious longing to make, thus, what atonement they could to the poor wasted clay that they were bearing to its stately resting-place, for all that sin had made it suffer.

They went, after the solemn ceremonies were over, to the hotel where Constance had been taken as a bride; and to the very rooms so fraught with strange memories. And the first words that Constance said, after the door closed upon the retreating clerk, were, "Oh, poor Pauline!"

Nurse Watkins did not occupy her old room on the seventh floor back, but was established in one that opened from Mrs. Curtiss's dressing room, and Charlie's bed stood in a lace-curtained alcove, so near at hand that Nurse

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could put forth her hand at night and cover her charge.

The chambermaids and the elevator boys had all come in since Dilsey's reign, and were most respectful to Nurse Watkins, and careful of her comfort; but the clerk of the house smiled on her familiarly one morning, and said:—

"Well, Dilsey, I hear you have been living a three-volume novel! Are you going to write it out for us?"

"No," said Nurse Watkins, with lofty dignity; "I shall keep my stories for them to whom they belong."

They remained three days at the hotel, while Mrs. Reefer and her retinue of helpers were making ready the Curtiss homestead for its mistress; days which Mr. Curtiss devoted entirely to getting acquainted over again with his wife; and in which they told in minutest detail the story of their separate experiences — at least so far as it could be put into words — and one June day the Curtiss carriage drew up before the hotel, and little Charlie and Nurse Watkins and Mr. and Mrs. Charles Gordon Curtiss entered it and were driven home.

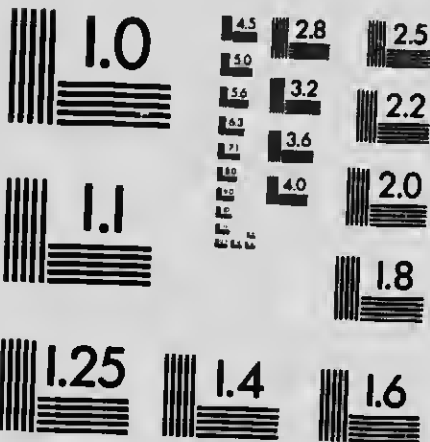
It was just as the sun was setting that Mr. Curtiss opened, for the first time in three years, the door of his wife's sitting room, and led her toward his mother's picture.

Mrs. Reefer had been true to the smallest



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Pauline.

details of arrangement. Everything, even the bit of yellowed muslin in the work basket with the needle thrust into it, and the gold thing waiting for its new owner's hand, were there. So also was his mother's Bible, opened to the remembered verse : —

“As for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Constance had heard all about it from her husband. How he had planned and arranged and perfected everything on that day three years before, and had knelt at his mother's chair and repeated solemnly the Bible words, and consecrated the home anew to his mother's God, and how he had turned back to look at his mother's pictured face with the glory of the sunset light overspreading it, and had said aloud, “When I come again, I will bring Constance,” and how impossible it had been for him to come again without her. As they stood there at last, together, is it any wonder that they saw all things through a mist of tears? Yet they were grateful tears. The first words that Mr. Curtiss spoke were an echo of inspiration realized once more in human experience, “He hath showed me his marvellous loving kindness.”

And then they knelt together beside his mother's chair, with his mother's kind eyes smiling down upon them.

When Gordon Curtiss had knelt there before

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and spoken solemn words of consecration, it had been but lip service, sentiment; to-day he came with his whole soul.

Both of them remembered in that solemn moment the boy Charlie and the strange way in which he had come into their lives, and the sacred trust that had thus been thrust upon them. Was not the Lord's hand in it all?

Is it strange that the prayer began: "To the Lord that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, that led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought and of the shadow of death — and brought us *home*, we dedicate this home anew to Thy service. We ask to be kept within these walls from word, or act, or thought that shall dishonor Thee. We give our home, our means, our time, our strength, *ourselves*, to Thee in everlasting, grateful service."

The last rays of the setting sun came again and lighted up the smiling picture, and wrapped the two kneeling figures in its glory, and they both knew and felt that in a peculiar and never-to-be-forgotten sense, they had at last reached *home*. And it was the twenty-first of June.



