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FLOWERS FOR THE LIVING

A BOOK OF SHORT STORIES

BY

NELLIE L. McCLUNG

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FLOWERS FOR THE LIVING

Mary Coulter, who works by the day and has little time for reading, had never heard of Mary Webb's poem about

the woman who had craved flowers all her life and never had had them, and yet when she died her coffin was lined with pink rosebuds, and stately white lilies stood like guardian angels among the tapers; and blue forget-me-nots, and lilies of the valley mingled with carnations and canterbury bells and narcissus and iris to form wreaths and pillows and shields and crosses and broken columns and what-nots, covering her coffin three times over, and overflowing the altar and chancel of the church while she lay, still and cold and dead, among all this belated loveliness, with a Mona Lisa smile on her face, not knowing a word about it, and certainly not caring!

But though Mary Coulter had not heard of the poem, she did not need any one to show her the tragedy of the flowers that came too late as she sat that chill November morning at her friend's funeral and looked at the roses and carnations and smilax and fern that made beautiful the cheap coffin wherein rested the mortal remains of Martha Minnis, whose tired hands had come to rest at last on the white silk front of her best black dress.

From where she sat, on the front row of seats, with the bereaved husband and son, Mary Coulter could see the mountains away to the west, darkly blue and mysterious, with their crown of snow running up into the clouds... She and Martha had been saving for two years for a week at Banff ... but when poor young Billy Minnis got into trouble ... it had to be put off ... and now Martha had gone on without her... The flowers in their beauty and profusion fascinated her. She had been afraid there might not be any flowers at all with so many people out of work, so she had put two days' wages into a dozen sprays of gladioli... She had wanted roses, but she found she could get more for her money in these showy blossoms that now stood beside the altar-rail in high vases, brazenly beautiful in their crimson and gold and purple... She needn't have worried about there not being flowers, for Martha's employers in Mayfair Crescent had all remembered her, and here were dozens of roses, stocks and snapdragons, and even chrysanthemums, feathery and shaggy, with satin streamers and bows of tulle as soft as the mist that rises from the river at sundown... Mary Coulter had not seen so many flowers for a long time, and yet from the heart of every lovely blossom there came an ache into her own as she thought of what even one flower would have meant to the dead woman when she lay in her own little bleak house, down by the tracks, fighting her losing battle. How those crimson snapdragons, set in the scented white stocks, would have brightened that gray little room, with its smoked plaster walls and patternless linoleum ... and the roses—if they could have been set in a gem-jar beside her bed they might have saved her...

Flowers meant more to Martha Minnis than to anyone she ever knew. She remembered the foliage plant she had nursed back to life, and a poor scabby thing it was, that someone had thrown out; but Martha had given it new earth and lamp-black and castor oil, and had washed its misshapen leaves and coaxed it back to beauty. Poor Martha! She had done her best for everyone, and it was an awful blow to her when she realized she might die ... and leave Billy and poor old Tim. And how she had fought for life!

"It's no time for me to up and die, and me with a good job five days a week, and poor Billy in trouble again, and my man home from the brush camp all crippled up with rheumatism... I say it's no time for me to die... I can stand the pain ... if it don't choke me."... These were the last words she had said, for a fit of coughing came on her just then, drowned by the roar of a long freight train that hurtled past her house ... and Martha Minnis's hold on life loosened and broke!

Mary Coulter's breath caught in a sob when she thought of it, and the woman beside her looked at her sideways and with disapproval. It was Miss Proxy, who had a room third door down the hall. Miss Proxy made flowers for a millinery store, and held herself high above the people who work by the day at unskilled labor.... Mary Coulter straightened her shoulders and fixed her mind on the crimson roses... They soon would be withering into dust on the clay of the hillside ... so she would feed her eyes on them while she could. She would try to listen to the minister, too, for he was telling about the hills of God, where the flowers never fade ... but she did wish he would not call Martha "the deceased." Martha Minnis was her name, and a good one at that. It should last her at least until the ground closed over her!

For two years following the death of Martha Minnis it was Mary Coulter who scrubbed and made sandwiches and polished floors for the five ladies of Mayfair Crescent, and she knew she was giving satisfaction from the fact that she was retained. Maids came and went, gardeners flourished and faded, but Mary Coulter continued steadfastly on her schedule. She was not praised, neither was she blamed, and in her little world, bounded on all sides by other women's houses and other women's affairs, no news certainly was good news. She would have loved to receive a word of appreciation—it would have lightened her load and rested her feet—but her employers were busy women, concerned with bridge and golf, trips abroad, and alterations in their houses, visits to specialists and dressmakers, variations in styles, and in blood-pressure, calories, vitamins and complexes, and they couldn't be expected to know that the dirt-

destroying, quick-moving Mary might be craving a friendly word with them.

Another gray day in November came in with deep leaden clouds and a moaning wind, and Mary Coulter, rising from her bed with a throbbing headache, found she was too dizzy to stand. She went wretchedly back to bed and a panic seized her... She wondered if she were going to die like Martha Minnis. She looked around her plain little bare room. There was not a thing in it that seemed to coax her to live. And would she, like Martha, be heaped up with crimson roses when she could no longer see or smell them?

She sat up in bed, holding her head with both hands, and she decided to do something... She reached for her writing pad and pen and began to write. It was an ordeal for Mary to write a letter—her hand was more at home with a scrubbing-brush or a dish-towel than a pen—but it was now or never!

"Flowers Limited:

"Dear Sirs," she wrote, "I aint feelin so good this morning and I know if I dont get better I'll be gettin worse maybe you remember my friend Mrs. Minnis that died about two years ago and how all the ladies she worked for in Mayfare Cresent sent her flowers and bewties to Well I work for the same five women and have for two years and I beleve they would do as good for me as they done for her so heres what I want you to do Send me a dozen crimson roses with lots of green fern and if I do die and they come in to buy flowers for me show them the bill of these and tell them I said for them to pay it and let it go at that Tell them it was roses I wanted and roses I got and thank them for me and tell them I sure am much obliged and liked the roses. Tell them it was real good of them to be goin to send me flowers. Excuse mistakes I cant keep down even a drink of water so you see I aint feelin so good.

"MARY COULTER,
"5 Kent Building

"P.S.—They all deal with you Ive opened dozens of your boxes.

"P.S.—I forgot to tell you if I live I will pay for the roses but just as I am now I guess you'll have to look to them... I aint feelin good But anyway youll get your money. Its as broad as its long."

Next morning two boxes came from "Flowers Limited" to Miss Mary Coulter, Kent Building, and the three milk-bottles she had made ready each had four crimson roses towering on their long stems. In the second box there came one great white chrysanthemum, petalled so closely it felt like the plump breast of some gorgeous bird. In this box came a letter from the manager.

"Dear Miss Coulter," it said, "we are in receipt of your esteemed order, and take much pleasure in filling it, and we are asking you to accept this Snow Queen chrysanthemum with our best wishes for a speedy recovery. We also wish to thank you for the excellent idea your letter contained, and we will, with your kind permission, make use of this in our Christmas advertising.

"Cordially yours,
"FLOWERS LIMITED,
"Per E. F. M."

Mary Coulter felt a sudden warming of her heart. Her head swam a little, but she read the letter again, aloud, following the words with her right forefinger. Then she lay down with the big chrysanthemum beside her on the pillow. Its coolness comforted her ... and the words of the letter sang in her ears ... "your speedy recovery," "your excellent

idea," "your kind permission."

"I hope I ain't goin' to die," she murmured; "it's too nice a world to leave."

When Mary wakened the room was dark save for the light which came in from the wavering street lamp. Her pillow had fallen to the floor, and her head was below the level of the long-stemmed roses that soared over her in their queenly beauty, their perfume filling the room with intoxicating sweetness. Her headache was gone now, and she felt blissfully comfortable and at peace. She still held the chrysanthemum in her hands. There was a glamorous unreality about it all, and a delirious sense of lightness.

"I'm a goner!" whispered Mary Coulter to herself, awed and thrilled by the thought. "I did die, then, sure enough ... well, well.... Here to-day and away to-morrow ... ain't it the truth? As a flower of the field so we perish! And this is the funeral, and a pretty grand one, I should say, by the smell of the flowers. I hope Miss Proxy is here to see it all, the old trollop... She always high-hatted me good and plenty... Her and her paper-flowers ... well, she'll see I died respected, even if I did work by the day... And if the ladies are here, in their big cars, like they came for Martha Minnis, won't that burn her up!..."

Just at that moment, shivering the stillness of the night, came the swelling siren of a fire-engine, discordant and terrifying. It roared past the Kent Building, shaking the window of her room with its deafening thunder. Mary Coulter sat up in a fright.

"Mother o' God!" she cried, "where have I got to?"

She switched on the light above her bed and looked about her.

The dresser, the gas-stove, the black-armed rocking-chair, with its log-cabin cushion stood before her in unmistakable corporeality.

"I am here," she said, "in my own room ... alive ... and glad of it ... alive ... and well. I am not dead. No corp ever wanted a bit of pork sausage as I do this minute. I am not even sick. The flowers have cured me ... and I'll pay for them and not begrudge it. They're good medicine ... and easy to take, and no one will ever know where they came from..."

THE OLD DOCTOR

The old doctor, on his way home from Iron Springs, suddenly remembered the Pilgrims. He must run in and check them over, now that he happened to be in their neighborhood. There was sure to be something he could do for them, for the Pilgrim family lived in an atmosphere of sin, sickness and death. For ten years now, ever since the Pilgrim family had come to the vicinity of Mandonville, Dr. Laidlaw had ministered to them. He had ushered seven tiny Pilgrims into the world, and carried all but one of these through many infantile diseases; he had poulticed and lanced and dressed various portions of their anatomy, and set wrists and legs without number, for they were a brittle lot and fell downstairs, out of hay-mows, and into wells, and were stepped on and run over with alarming frequency.

When Mrs. Laidlaw accepted an invitation for herself and the doctor she often made their acceptance conditional on the good health of the Pilgrims. Even at church it was not an unusual sight to see an usher tiptoe up the aisle, guided by the doctor's bald head, and the congregation were pretty sure it betokened an upheaval of some kind at the home of John Pilgrim, though most of the alarms now came at night since they got their telephone.

And in all these ten years Dr. Laidlaw had not received a cent for his services, the elder Pilgrim believing that a doctor's services were included in his title of citizenship.

When the doctor, driving his chestnut mare, was about a mile from the house, he overtook Johnny Pilgrim, the eldest

son, returning from school. Johnny was a pallid lad of eleven, who had recently come through an attack of tonsillitis followed by mumps.

Johnny was glad of the ride, but was surprised to see his old friend, Dr. Laidlaw.

"I guess you wondered why we haven't been sendin' for you," he began at once. "We're takin' off Dr. Slandt now. He's the new doctor in town, you know."

Yes, Dr. Laidlaw knew.

"He's an awful smart doctor, and drives a car, and can get here so quick. He came out in half an hour when the cow stepped on Ma's foot! Dad said it would have took you two hours, and when we want a doctor we want him in a hurry."

Johnny was evidently quoting.

"And Pa said we had patronized you for ten years, and now it was only fair to give the new man a chanct."

"Fair enough," the old doctor agreed, with his whimsical smile.

"And when Marjorie had her finger broke from fallin' off the wagon-rack he came right out; and Ma says he talks a lot more than you, and she likes him fine; and, Doctor, he says Jimmie wouldn't need to have died if he had been here, and Ma cried about that and was pretty sore at you."

The doctor's face was grave, with all the lines showing now.

"What was it you could have done, Doctor, for Jimmy that you didn't do?"

"Nothing," said the doctor simply.

"Well, Mrs. Smith was over at our place, and she heard what the young doctor said, and she said it stands to reason a young doctor just out of college has all the new ways; and when she got her carbuncle" (Johnny was proud of his new word) "she phoned for him, and he said it was good she did, for half a day more and she'd 'a been gone... And the Spencers are goin' to get him, too, if anythin' happens. Gosh, I guess you won't be so busy now. We was your best customers about!"

"Don't say 'we was', Johnny; say 'we were'," corrected the doctor.

As they neared the house Johnny grew uneasy. The doctor relieved his anxiety by saying:

"I won't be going in today, Johnny. Tell your mother I am glad the family is being so well looked after... But, tell me, what is wrong with your foot? I noticed you were limping."

"It's just a sore like I get when the weather gets colder."

"Put your foot up here on my knee," said the doctor, opening the little valise.

When the sore had been treated he gave Johnny a little bottle, a box of salve and a roll of gauze. "Wash your heel clean every night with some of this in the water," he said, "then put on the salve and roll it up. And, Johnny, cut out the salt pork and chewing tobacco; drink milk and eat vegetables."

Johnny ran into the house and the doctor drove on, his shoulders sagging a little. Just at that moment Dr. Laidlaw looked his age.

Three months later.

It was eleven o'clock of a cold, black December night in the village of Mandonville. The few lights that were still burning on the front street had moved upstairs and now gleamed dully through frosted panes. Jim Bruce, proprietor of the one drug-store, was locking up for the night, and listened for a moment to the shrill wind from the north assaulting his front window with particles of ice that rang like steel blades. Just then a heavy knock sounded on the door.

"Doctor Laidlaw!" Jim exclaimed as he admitted the muffled figure of the old man. "Come in. Surely you are not off to the country a night like this?"

"It's the Pilgrims," said the old doctor apologetically. "I've been out in the south country all day and had just gone to bed. It's old John himself; he fell on the ice around the well, and thinks he has fractured his hip. Give me two rolls of adhesive tape and a bottle of chloroform."

"Well, they are Dr. Slandt's patients," said the druggist. "I hate to see you go—after all they've said. Why didn't they call Slandt?"

"They did."

"Well?"

"He wouldn't go. They haven't paid him for the last trip!"

"Did they ever pay you?"

"Never,—but that's nothing."

"Old John will keep till morning. You don't owe it to any of that gang to drive fourteen miles a night like this—here, I'll phone them."

"No, Jim, no; thank you just the same. You see, I must go—I can't refuse. It's a call, you see, Jim, from someone in pain. I am a man under bonds."

The druggist carried out the parcels and tucked the robes in around the old man. The chestnut mare tossed her head against the wind and rattled her bit angrily. The doctor spoke a word to her and darkness swallowed them.

"A pair of thoroughbreds," said the druggist softly to the unlistening street.

LIFE IS THE ROBBER

It was Don Byrne who said he never lacked the inspiration to write, for if the fires burned low he only needed to listen to the conversation of the maids in the kitchen below his study, and from them he was always sure to get a lead into the realm of romance—"for," he said, "the Irish peasantry speak pure poetry."

I thought of this to-day and wished I might be privileged to tap some such refreshing stream, for I found I had entered upon a dry spell, and for the moment could see nothing in life that was worth recording.... Having to preserve two crates of peaches was withering my soul. Not that I dislike preserving, but when it comes to the place where tops have to be fitted on the jars, I feel so inadequate. In the making of fruit-jars there surely has been too much individuality, and I think I have every kind that ever was made. They grow more bewildering every year. Crossword puzzles are therefore no treat to me, nor do I get any thrill in finding the faces of the philosopher's seven lovely daughters artfully hidden in their old man's whiskers.

But I wander. In the midst of my lowness of mind I thought of Mrs. Bemister, who has given me inspiration more than once when my own feeble candle had guttered down into darkness. Mrs. Bemister is always at home. The world comes to her. She lives in a stone house set in an old-fashioned garden. Her house is never locked, and the unemployed know their way to her back door. She came to the stone house soon after the war, and lives there alone with a dog and a cat for company. She builds bird-houses in the winter, and has great companies of birds in her high elms, that come to her when she calls them; and, being a bird-like little thing herself, she may some day spread her wings and fly away over the tree-tops with them.

But I hope not—at least not for a long, long time—for she has a way of interpreting life that comforts like Pippa's tinkling little song.

"Why don't you come oftener?" she greeted me hospitably. "You are such an eloquent listener, and that is a greater gift than the gift of speech. Come in and forget whatever it is that worries you. I want to talk with you. But first I will feed you and myself. The clink of a spoon on a saucer and the smell of coffee and cinnamon toast loosen my tongue. Sit here and watch the toast and I will do the rest."

She gave me a seat at a table placed in the bow window overlooking a bed of roses. The table was already set with blue teacups, an old-man and old-lady cream-pitcher, and the sugar-bowl. She brought in a brown coffee pot from the kitchen, and, remembering my fondness for them, placed a dish of figs before me.

"Listening is one of the best things you do, and I wish you would write something about it.... Do you know that the ability to listen, rapt and starry-eyed, is a woman's most popular gift in the eyes of men?"

"Haven't you noticed that brilliant men often marry women who are more or less dumb, or at least who appear to be. Helpless women usually marry well, too, for men love to do things for women. The modern girl is too smart, too capable, too self-reliant. That languid air of having never lifted anything heavier than a box of chocolates has won for many a girl perpetual care... You cannot blame women for being artful. They have to trim their sails to the wind, seeing they cannot change the wind, and they can't, for this is a man's world."

I was about to raise a protest, but I remembered that I was there to listen.

"Life is a great old teacher," she went on, after a pause. "We are ever learning... 'The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed, lets in new light through chinks that time has made'... Women's hardest lesson is to give up their children. We hang on so. But the rule of life for mothers is this: 'Have them—love them—leave them!'"

"You've heard me speak of my son Rex, who fell at St. Eloi the day he was twenty-one. He is a great comfort to me, for you know a romantic, articulate sorrow is a great comfort to women as they get older... When I think of Rex I am still a young woman—the head of a house, the moving spirit of a family. I see myself as Rex saw me. He said he would never leave me, and he never has... George and Fred, my two older boys, are gone, but Rex is with me still. It is life that robs a mother, not death. George is a sombre judge, abstract and impersonal, and dry as his own lawbooks, married to a plaster-of-paris woman, who looks down on life from a lofty height. I went to stay a week, but I shortened my sentence and got out in four days on the ground of good behaviour, and Euphemia did show a little flicker of enthusiasm when she said 'good-bye'.... I couldn't see one trace of my George in the petrified man who bears his name. We did not have anything to say to each other. It wasn't George's fault, nor mine either. So you see it is George who is dead, not Rex.

"And then I went to see Charlie. Charlie is making more money than his wife can spend, but she is doing her best. They live a queer, shrill, hectic life, doing all the things I taught Charlie not to do, and doing them in a self-conscious way. Most of their remarks to me were prefaced by 'Now, Mother, I know you will be shocked,' and I was—shocked at the effect these things are having on them. They are not happy—they are irritable with each other, fretful and frayed... And this is Charlie, my red-headed, freckled boy, who loved to swim and hike, took part in debates, edited the school paper. Don't you see what I mean when I say Rex is the one who has not left me. I am much better off than many women—I still have one.

"I wouldn't let the boys know. They may feel badly, too.... I am sure they call me 'poor Mother!' I write dutiful letters, and they do, too, and no one can say I am unhappy. So long as seeds will grow for me, and birds will sing, and

friends will come in for tea, and I can say the twenty-third psalm, I will be happy. It's only youth who can be really unhappy—they resent it so when life disappoints them. But as we grow older we see it is the race that is to blame, not the individual. George is an excellent judge, no doubt, and Charlie is one of our successful young business men, and is sent as a delegate to conventions, heads subscriptions, and organizes tag-days. We have missed each other in the crowd some way. But, even so, we would be foolish to let that spoil the fair... Here, let me give you another cup of coffee. You've let that one grow cold."

THE PURPLE DRESS

Mrs. Bolton of Iron Springs, somewhat dazed by the activities of Saturday morning in the City, made herself as small as she could in the corner of the elevator, and even then she knew she was protruding well into the danger zone. A sizeable child of ten or eleven trod heftily on her corn; a hard-eyed tyke in a red beret butted into her elbow; another one lurched against her sore knee.

"I shouldn't have tried it today," she said to herself, "it's the Saturday before Christmas. It's the children's day, and fat old ladies with rheumatic tendencies should stay at home. But I'm here now, and I'll go through with it."

The junior congregation surged onto the second floor, where Santa Claus in his polar outfit, girt about with sleigh-bells, on a platform made of green boughs, talked to them through his mask.

The lady from Iron Springs caught a glimpse of him as the elevator ascended. "There's always something to be thankful for—now I do not have to be Santa Claus," she said.

But when she found herself on the neutral colored carpet of the Ladies' Ready-to-Wear, with her own squat figure meeting her every twenty feet as she travelled down the aisle flanked with mirrors, her courage drained away. The attenuated figures of the salesladies in their sheathe dresses as they milled about her emphasized her own bulk, and she sat down on one of the low settees, not knowing how she would ever get out of it, and for the moment not caring. One of the salesladies, in a lustreless black dress, approached her with no apparent motion. Mrs. Bolton had a feeling that the girl was fitted with castors.

"Can I assist Madame?" she asked, with a European accent.

Mrs. Bolton looked at her critically. She was not the type of saleslady she would have chosen. Her dark eyes looked out of a white mask of a face; her red mouth gleamed like a sword-cut.

"Somebody will have to," Mrs. Bolton gasped, out of breath, as she fanned herself with a white handkerchief. "I need clothes, and I am not going out of here without them, and I know I am a hard figure to fit, not having any."

Marie Roni—who had been Mary Roney before she became the head saleslady at Benton's—sniffed the breeze, and her trained senses told her that here was a lamb, a fat, juicy lamb, caught in a thicket.

"I know exactly what Madame would like," she said, in the voice she kept for her best customers.

"It does not matter about my liking it," said Mrs. Bolton. "If I like it the chances are it will be wrong. I like what I am wearing today, and yet I have no confidence in it. I want something that will keep me from looking absurd. I know I am fat and red-faced..."

Marie studied her for a moment.

"Madame will look very distinguished in a Paris model I have here, a wonderful slenderizing number."

She went to the case and removed a dull purple dress, a sleezy, expensive-looking thing with handwork in gold

lace.

Mrs. Bolton's eyes beamed! All her life she had wanted a purple dress, but she had been afraid of it. Someone had told her that purple is just the wrong color for anyone with a red face. Marie saw her face kindling and pressed the advantage.

"It is Madame's own dress," she cooed, "so distinguished, so different, so unique; direct from Paris; not one like it. See, it has poetry in its folds; it has movement and rhythm."

She held it in front of her own flat chest, letting the light ripple over its sheeny surface.

Mrs. Bolton caught her breath.

"It is a lovely dress. But think of me—can I wear a dress like this? Would it suit me?"

"Madame, I know. It is my business to know. I am here because I know. Come with me to the dressing-room. Even lovelier it will be when we have it away from the others."

Miss Roni had another reason for wishing to remove both Mrs. Bolton and the dress. Not far from where Mrs. Bolton sat stood the new girl, Miss Proctor. Though she had a customer of her own she was watching with troubled face the sale of the purple dress. The new girl, Miss Proctor, was an embarrassment to Miss Roni; she had queer, old-fashioned notions of telling the truth to customers even if she lost a sale, which was absurd. She had been head saleslady in a country town.

Mrs. Bolton, arrayed in the Paris model, emerged from the dressing-room. Marie led the way to a window, so the real beauty of the color might be seen. She was gurgling with delight. Mrs. Bolton, with her burning cheeks and mixed red and gray hair and billowy figure, was a grotesque sight. The ruffled bodice gave her the hip-line of a ham; and the shade of the dress burnished her high color into a hue which suggested apoplexy.

Miss Proctor was having a bad time. There was something about Mrs. Bolton, with her good-natured face and kindly eyes, that went to her heart. She knew exactly the sort of person Mrs. Bolton was... Why, it might be Mrs. Peters, at whose home she had boarded in the country ... who mothered her when she had her tonsils out; Mrs. Peters, who comforted everyone.

With a sudden impulse Miss Proctor went to the manager's office, and walked in without knocking.

"Mr. Ward," she said, "Marie is out there selling a dress to a nice old lady, a dress which is a crime. It is last year's stock, too, and will sell for half-price next week. It makes the woman look like a crazy valentine. Go out and call her off. It's a shame to impose on anyone, and it's poor business, too."

Mr. Ward looked up impatiently.

"I don't interfere with my sales-people, Miss Proctor. They are here to sell any way they can. Miss Roni has her own method—I can't interfere."

"Well, I can, and I will," said Miss Proctor.

When she reached the mirror where Mrs. Bolton was having one last look at the dress, Marie gave her a defiant look.

Mrs. Bolton turned and faced Marie, who was still exclaiming ecstatically. "Stop your chatter for a minute, young woman," she said, "I want to say something. I am at your mercy. When my daughter lived she dressed me well, but she's been gone three years. Now tell me this, as one woman to another, would you sell this dress to me if I were your mother?"

Marie was ready.

"I would, Madame, on my honor. I would be proud and happy to see my mother in so beautiful a gown."

Mrs. Bolton looked again in the glass, and caught there the eye of Miss Proctor, who stood behind Miss Roni. Something passed between them.

"Would you buy this dress if you were me?" she asked, turning around.

"I would not," said the girl from the country.

Marie in tears sought the manager's office. "Either that girl will leave this store or I will," she cried.

When the manager came over to deal sternly with Miss Proctor the old lady in the purple dress spoke first.

"Are you the manager? Yes. Well, I want a favor. I want you to lend me this young lady for the remainder of the day. I have a lot of things to buy, and I like her. She has an honest face, and won't try to convince me I look like the Queen of Sheba. You see, I am going on a trip around the world and I need some clothes, and they must be right. Can I have her?"

"Yes, indeed," said the manager, pleasantly. "I was just going to tell Miss Proctor that I thought a holiday would do her good."

He went back to where Marie was spoiling her complexion with passionate weeping.

"Miss Roni," he said, "here is something you might ponder with profit. You have heard it said that honesty is the best policy. Well, sometimes it is!"

HER HOUR OF DELIVERANCE

For the first time in her thirty-nine years Susie Proctor was free to do as she liked. And yet this gray December morning found her rising at the same time, looking at the same stern wallpaper with its unrelenting squares of red and gray and the same depressing print of the "Stag at Bay," as she waited for her turn in the same small bathroom, with its tin-tub and temperamental light which had to be coaxed into action. For the first time since she had come to the City and Mrs. Gould's "Respectable Boarding House For Business Women" she could look at the "Stag at Bay" without being depressed. It had been too symbolic of her own life as a saleswoman in a big store, where girls were dismissed without notice, and sometimes without cause, and where the hounds of unemployment and want were ever in pursuit.

Susie had not been as badly off as some of her companions, for she had come from the country, where every girl knows how to cook and wash and iron, and she knew she could go back to her own neighborhood and make her living. It was this thought that had comforted her in the numerous times when she and the Manager of the Department had differed... Looking back now, she wondered why she had not been dismissed. He seemed to dislike her so! He liked best the truly "feminine" type, who spied and tattled, and ran to him with all their griefs and gossip.

She went to the store as usual; punched the clock at eight-thirty, though the store did not open until nine o'clock, and rehearsed again the interview she was going to have with Mr. Edgar G. Ward.

She reassured herself by looking at the astounding entry in the bank-book of navy leatherette which she carried in her purse. Four figures! And these had changed the whole face of life! Just a year ago she had made an investment of two hundred and fifty dollars, her share of her father's estate, and this was the result, this amazing fortune.

And she had made the investment with less intelligence than she would use in buying a pair of shoes. A young man from her home, one of the men with whom she had worked in the country store, had come to see her. It was in the early

morning, with not a customer in sight. He had dropped in for a friendly call and told her about a certain oil-stock in which he had bought shares. She had no intention of risking her little bit of capital in any such gamble, and had just said so. The manager, seeing a chance to humiliate her, or so it seemed, came over and told her in a most insulting tone that she could not receive canvassers during shopping hours; and then it was that she called out to the embarrassed caller that she would take five hundred shares if he could get them for her! The stock had steadily climbed almost from the first day, and when it had reached nineteen dollars a share she had sold out.

Susie watched the elevators. Mr. Ward generally arrived about nine-thirty. She expected every minute to see him stalking up and down with his pudgy hands behind his back, looking sideways while pretending to examine a price mark. How she detested the unctuous tone of his voice when addressing a customer, knowing how quickly it could change to a snarl if one of the girls missed a sale. She had a few things she would tell him, and the telling would be sweet to her. Indeed the thought that such a day as this might come had made a luminous zone around the blackest hour. She hoped she wouldn't forget any of it. She would tell him what a cheap little chiseller he was—how he changed the rate of commission the day she sold the mink coat; how he sent her the meanest customers, and blamed her for not selling them; how he decided against her when there was any dispute—she was always wrong, no matter what the circumstances. And she would tell him, too, that he was ruining the girls' dispositions with his system of espionage... If he had not thrown her out by that time she would proceed to tell him some of the fundamentals of merchandising.

At ten o'clock he had not come, and Susie began to feel cheated. She wanted to be free to think of pleasanter, more wholesome, things. She wanted to go back to Mrs. Gould's and pack up. She wanted to get home to tell her mother, who was living unhappily with a married son. She wanted to bring her mother back with her to the City and buy her the lovely things she had craved all her life in vain!... She wanted to plan their life together! She wanted time to think of the shop she would have back home.... The women there knew her, trusted her, and would take what she chose for them in hats and dresses, and she would serve them well.

But the day was passing.

At noon she found the manager was at home with a cold; so she looked up his address in the phone book, got a taxi, and went to see him.

She had pictured him as a rich man, living in one of the stately homes on "the Hill." His lavender spats, black frockcoat and immaculate linen had spoken of luxury. But to her surprise the address took her across the river to the wrong side of the City. The big houses fell away, and smaller ones with chicken-houses took their place beside the road.

At one of these the car stopped, not an attractive one either, just an old house among the new ones. The gate hung crooked, and there were broken boards in the veranda. A worried looking woman, in a torn and spotted silk dress, opened the door uncertainly.

The hall table was littered with newspapers, and on the stairs the worn carpet had loosened on one step; and the bare boards were gray with dust. The house smelled drearily of badly cooked food, over-boiled coffee, and unwashed milk bottles.

The manager sat in the small living-room, in a huge black leather chair that listed forward, giving him the appearance of a man about to rise. Susie felt her courage leaving her. She found herself looking at an old man, a broken old man, unshaven, with his collar off!

"Oh, it is you, Miss Proctor!" he said in surprise. "Nothing wrong in the Department, I hope."

"Nothing," said Susie, "I am leaving—that is all." How flat it sounded now that it was said!

"You're lucky to be able to leave," he said wanly. "But I am sorry. You are one of the best girls I ever had—your customers come back, and your sales do not. But it's a dog's life. It has broken me.... I've given Benton's the best years of my life. I've hired and fired for them ... driven the girls like a slave-driver ... cheated them to keep expenses down ... and now the big boss is coming ... and he is weeding out all the men over sixty ... and I am to get the axe."

"I am sorry, Mr. Ward," said Susie Proctor. "I hope you are mistaken about this... I never thought of your leaving... It

would seem queer without you... I just came ... to say ... goodbye."

Mr. Ward was visibly affected.

"I didn't know any of the girls thought enough of me to even do that," he said. "They haven't had much reason ... but somebody was always driving me..."

Susie Proctor stood up and put out her hand.

"Nothing is ever quite as bad as it seems," she said. "Don't take it like this—make a fight for it. You are not beaten until you admit it."

THE DREAM

It was the last day of the Musical Festival, and the last contestant in the Young Soprano Class, a tall, fair girl, was singing—singing with a slight swinging of her lithe young body Denza's immortal song of invitation, "A May Morning." Five other contestants had sung it, and were now sitting in the front seat all dressed in white, and huddled together like birds in a storm, watching this last competitor. They all had done well, and they, as well as relatives and friends in the great audience, were tense with excitement.

Elsa Ronig apparently had no relatives in the audience, for when she came on the platform there was just a faint flutter of applause—the nominal greeting—but this Elsa did not notice. There had been a moment of delay as she stood ready to begin, and during the pause the audience broke into whispers.

"I know that girl," said a woman in the gallery. "Her mother worked for me once when she was a wee thing, and a good worker she was. Don't those foreigners beat all? Well, I certainly wish the kid luck, but she can hardly win from Dorothy Brower; but I'd like to see her get the medal."

It was easy for the woman to be generous; she was not a relative.

Said her friend: "I think these contests are rather dangerous. Now, suppose this girl should get the medal, what effect would it have on her? I claim there is no use educating any one above their class. I wonder is her mother here?"

"Not likely. When I last saw her she was cooking in a boarding-house in the east end."

Then the accompanist struck the opening chord, and Elsa was away. She saw nothing but the moving beauty of the May morning.

"A good voice, but untrained," said one relative to another, "there—she roughened that note and that's too hurried.... Oh, no doubt Dorothy will get it. Her performance was flawless...."

Elsa finished her song in a burst of rapture that brought applause from all but the very closest relatives.

Then came the grilling moment when the adjudicator walked toward the platform.

"While all the contestants have given a good performance," he said, after a few rambling preliminaries, "and have brought much sweetness and vivacity to the song, there was only one singer who moved me by her passionate earnestness. When I listened to her I forgot I had to criticise her. I only knew a young voice was calling me to come out and greet the morn. Now, I am a gouty old fellow, opposed to early rising, and I have seen enough sunrises and May hedges and that sort of thing, but I really wanted to go and see what this young person was so keen about. With the other singers the invitation was more or less a personal one, a lover's call; but with the winner of the competition the invitation was a universal one—it was the piercing call of youth to all the world, the eternal child plucking at the gray

skirts of life and crying, 'Come and play with me.' I admit there were technical errors—roughened notes, and such—but these are minor things. The purpose of the song was admirably achieved; and I have always favored the large intention of an unskilled artist above the trivial intention of the accomplished artist, and so I am awarding the highest honors to the last singer!"

There was a gasp of surprise from the audience, then a measure of applause from all over the auditorium. It came from the casuals, who were glad to see the most plainly dressed girl win, mixed with the genuine appreciation of those who agreed heartily with the judgment, and the volume increased as the friends of the contestants recovered from their disappointment.

When the crowd surged forward to congratulate the winner she was gone!

The door of the kitchen of the Penguin boarding-house flew open, and Elsa Ronig, hatless and coatless, bounded in. Her mother had just begun to ladle the soup into the soup-plates from the blue granite pot on the stove.

"I got it, Mother! I got the medal!" Elsa cried.

Anna Ronig's face turned white, but her hands went on mechanically filling the plates.

"I sang it to you, Mother. I meant you in every line. I called you to come out and play with me, to leave all this ... and this..."

Elsa threw out her long arms to indicate the smoked walls, the ragged and ribbed linoleum, the scraping of chairs in the dining-room beyond, where the men were "sitting in."

Anna Ronig laid down the ladle and embraced her daughter with a sob in her throat.

"I sang it like I never did before, Mother," said Elsa, clutching the shoulders of her mother's print dress. "I wanted all the lovely things in life for you. All your life you've scraped heavy plates, and scoured steel knives, and scrubbed dirty floors. It is not fair that you should miss so much."

They were standing in the middle of the floor locked in each other's arms when the swing door into the dining-room woof-woofed and Mrs. Bruce, the proprietor of The Penguin, came in and surveyed them for a moment with a puzzled look on her face, then—

"On with the soup, Anna!" she said, not unkindly.

COME TRUE

"You have the eye of an artist," I said to the ample lady who was serving us at the roadside booth. I was looking at her attractive display on the long table, where pumpkins, squash, carrots, yellow apples, all in pyramids, formed a background for the roast chicken, rolls of butter, plates of homemade biscuits and glass jars of fruit. The ample lady was dressed in a pale yellow dress abounding in frills, and with her fresh color and becoming cap looked like a goddess of plenty.

"It is from my Elsa's hair I got the idea of yellow," she explained. "One color kills another, so I say to Elsa, 'We will just have yellow. We will use what we have. I am fat and you are slim, so I will have frills and look more fat; you will have stripes and be yet more slim. You and I will make good picture, so, and if people will like to take picture it is good for business.'"

She laughed pleasantly, with a child-like merriment, and stroked her frills. "You can come now to a table and eat, and I will make you a pot of coffee."

She took us to a yellow table under a canopy, where we ate our chicken and rolls and raspberry jam.

It was a lovely spot. Across the road the harvest field, dotted with stocks, ran up the hill and over, a rail fence edging it like a band of herringbone. The clear air of the September evening carried sounds of peace—cowbells tinkling, dogs barking, the rumble of wagons, and cars stopping for supper.

At the long table the slim daughter with the golden hair was now serving the customers, and I found myself wondering where I had seen this lithe young blonde.

"For three years now my Elsa and I have come here each summer to sell home-made cooking to car-people, and we have done well. Elsa was not pleased that I should stay all my life in the City, cooking in a dark kitchen; here we have something to see as we work."

She had brought us a pot of coffee from the big square stove.

"My Elsa is a very fine singer," went on her mother proudly, "and when she was but fifteen years she got a gold medal at the big festival."

Then I remembered.

"I heard her," I said, "and she sang like an angel."

The big woman drew a rocking-chair over beside me. Now we had a real point of contact.

"Tell me about her," I said.

"She sings now every Sunday morning in the Lutheran Church in the City, twenty miles away. We lock up and drive in with the truck, and she is nearly through her High School, and will teach. Twice she sang at ladies' teas, and there was a piece in the paper. 'Miss Ronig,' it said, 'has a voice of unusual appeal.' I have the piece; in my Bible I keep it."

Just then a fawn-colored car, glittering with silver trimmings, turned in, and three young girls in very smart sport clothes swarmed up to the long table where Elsa stood.

Their voices, somewhat shrill, carried over to where we were sitting.

"Now, Elsa, you simply must come this time. We are going to have a heavenly time. Dinner at the big hotel, and dancing—the orchestra is simply thrilling. We'll ask your mother. She'll let you go, I know... Oh, you will slay me with your excuses. I have your dress all ready—this will be a real party."

I couldn't hear what Elsa said, but I could see she was refusing, and I wondered.

When they had gone and the mother was busy serving another party I went and talked to Elsa; I told her I had been listening and wondered why she had not gone. She told me frankly.

"I know these girls at High School, and they have always been very friendly. I sing in the Glee Club there, and one of them does, too. But they belong to another world, and I know it... If I went with them I would have to spend money on clothes which we can't afford, and there is a danger that I might get discontented with our way of living, and that would be pretty tough on my mother after all she has done for me.... Anyway, I couldn't go away and leave Mother here alone to do everything. I didn't say that to them, for they wouldn't understand it. They've never earned a dollar or done without anything.... and I couldn't have a good time if I deserted my mother."

She looked me in the face, and I think I never saw a lovelier pair of gray eyes.

"My mother has gone hungry so I could have enough to eat; she has gone shabby, but I had always nice clothes for

school.... Those girls can't think of their mothers as I do—they regard their mothers as pleasant friends whom it is nice to have around; their mothers never did anything more heroic for them than lending them a pair of stockings on Wednesday afternoon when the stores were closed.... We are doing well. Mother is a wonderful cook, as you can see. We'll get enough, maybe in another year, to buy a little cake shop. I'll be through for a teacher in a year.... We love it here and are very happy, but you see, if I got a taste for wearing sleezy dresses and chiffon stockings and gold slippers, and wanted to dance to an orchestra afternoon and evening, it would sure spoil everything.... So I just keep on with the yellow cotton dress and white running-shoes.... And I am not a bit sorry for myself.... Don't you think this is a lovely place to spend the summer? You should see it in the morning when the valley of the river is full of mist."

NEIGHBORS

Mrs. Everton regarded her neighbors on the left with a tinge of suspicion and disapproval, for in the three months since they had taken up their residence in Mayfair Crescent they had broken many of the unwritten laws of that circumspect and immaculate neighborhood.

They had too many children to begin with, for while all the women in Mayfair Crescent believe in large families, theoretically, it is rather embarrassing to have a large family living on the next lot, and particularly a family like the Morrison's, who leave toys and parts of toys, even denuded dolls, on the front lawn, bathing-suits on the fence, odd stockings in trees, and kiddie-cars on the sidewalk. In addition to this, their washing was frequently done on Saturday, and in that washing gray flannelette blankets had been distinctly seen as the huge clothes-reel ran before the breeze.

Mrs. Everton was not the sort of person who would discuss her neighbor's washing with anyone, but she noticed that many a neatly plucked eyebrow had been perceptibly lifted when the advent of the Morrison family had been noted. So she knew she was not the only resident of Mayfair Crescent who was viewing the situation with alarm.

Mrs. Everton, by a little discreet watching from behind lace curtains, knew that the two eldest Morrison girls went to business every morning, and she admitted, just a shade grudgingly, that they were neatly and suitably dressed. We all like to have our theories supported, and when a family does its washing on Saturday, uses gray blankets, and allows the younger children to litter the front lawn with their toys and intimate articles of apparel, the grown-up girls really should go on the street with bare arms and runs in their stockings.

It was because of Dorothy, her one child, that Mrs. Everton was disturbed over her neighbors on the left. Dorothy was a carefully reared child. She had been taken to a child specialist regularly; her calories were counted; her weight was watched weekly; she slept without a pillow; she had her own library of handpicked volumes, from which fairy stories had been rigidly excluded; every garment she owned was monogrammed.

Ruth Morrison was in the same grade as Dorothy, and Mrs. Everton almost trembled when she saw the two little girls come home from school hand in hand; but being a kindly woman, she really felt sorry for little Ruth, who seemed to take so much care of her two little brothers.

"I wonder how that child ever gets a moment to herself," she said one day to Dorothy. "She always has those two babies with her."

"Oh, she doesn't mind," said Dorothy cheerfully, "she likes them. She says she is going to have six children, too, when she grows up. I told her I wasn't going to have any at all. I do not want my front lawn messed up. I want a lovely home with spacious grounds, all neat and stately, where I can have gorgeous garden parties for the Children's Home and the Fresh Air Fund, and have my picture in the paper."

Mrs. Everton looked quickly at her young daughter, but Dorothy went on.

"The Morrisons are going to have a picnic on Saturday. Fancy a picnic in October! Don't they do the weirdest

things? Ruth says they always have a 'goodbye to summer' picnic. They're going to bake potatoes and fry bacon. I'd love to go. There's a prize for the child who finds the loveliest autumn leaf. And they are going in their old car, of course, and the paint is off it in big blotches, and so they call it now the 'coachdog,' and sometimes the 'galloping bedstead.' Isn't that funny? Everything they do is funny. I never knew people could have so much fun without going to a show or anything. And Ruth knows more riddles and stories than anyone I know. Her father reads to them a lot; and of course her mother does not have to go to clubs, and she can tell stories better than even Miss Evans in the Library, though she has to darn stockings while she is doing it."

At the end of the month Dorothy's report card showed she no longer held the first place in Grade V, and her mother got the second shock when she found it was Ruth Morrison who had displaced her.

Dorothy was not disturbed. "She got the highest marks in the school for telling stories," she told her mother. "You see, she has to tell stories to the two little ones or they won't go to bed—Teddy tells the story one night and Ruth the next—and she got the vote for being the most helpful child in the room—that's because she knew what to do when Billy Smeaton's nose bled when we were out playing. Miss Williams praised her ever so much. You see, it's easy for her. Oh, I don't mind Ruth beating me; she's my best friend now, and both our birthdays are in December. She tells me secrets, too. I'll tell you because it won't matter—you won't be seeing Mrs. Morrison.... They're all saving to get Mrs. Morrison a fur coat for Christmas—that's why Margaret and Florence didn't take any holidays. And even the two little ones know, and they won't tell. Isn't that lovely? Ruth said I could come in and see how surprised her mother will be."

Mrs. Everton was thinking of her own childhood and its raptures and its loyalties. She was one of seven. She remembered saving orange papers and getting a spoon for her little brother.... And her first month's salary—when she got her mother a piano-drape with silver lace. Had she been missing something after all? She had comfort, ease, money, freedom to go as she pleased, a circle of friends—idle women like herself. But what about Dorothy—had she played fair with Dorothy?

Dorothy was still talking.

"What's wrong with using nice gray blankets? Or washing on Saturday? You see, the big girls do the family ironing, and Ruth does her own and Teddy's."

"There is nothing wrong at all," said Mrs. Everton, warmly. "It's a good plan, and I was just thinking I would like to have Ruth's birthday party and yours together this year, and have a real one, and let the two little ones come, too."

Dorothy Everton, well-trained child that she was, stared at her mother with her mouth wide open.

THE MILKMAN'S CHRISTMAS

Hilda Stillings, in her small white bed, which stood in the front room night and day, found that going to sleep early in the evening paid large dividends, for by so doing she heard many delightful things that would otherwise have been withheld from her; and when a person is only seven and has to lie in bed on account of a little heart trouble which is going to be better pretty soon, one is justified in using every means of picking up little flickers of news. It is such a cruel long, black road from sunset to sunrise.

The news of her father's promotion came when she was really, officially, awake. Not only awake, but propped up on her pillows. He had walked in just as if nothing had happened, and even sat down. Then he proclaimed it in a loud voice that shook a little.... Her mother made him go over it all again. Where was he standing when the boss called him? Which way was the office? Hilda had once been at the Consolidated Milk Plant and could picture the interview.

"Come into the office, Dick, when you are through," the boss had said, as her father had come in with the empties. Then, in the office, he went on: "Dick, I am going to give you the Summit for your district. It's the best we have, and I am

glad to see you get it. It has its problems, too, many of them, mind you; collections are tough. But with Christmas coming on it should go big. It's the place for parties and teas and big orders. Just keep after them, Dick, and be civil, and I believe you'll manage them!"

Mrs. Stillings was pleased, but not surprised. When a man has worked for a milk company for three years, never been late, never been complained of—good-night! Why shouldn't he get a raise?

Then began a glorious time for Hilda Stillings. Her father had so much to tell. In this enchanted region called the Summit, where he made his early pilgrimages, the houses were lordly mansions of brick and stone, with garages lovelier than any house on Water Street—garages with upstairs, and windows with curtains, and red chimneys, and on even the back doors of the houses red lanterns burned all light long, just to make it easy for the milkmen to count the tickets and warm their hands, too, when a note has to be written telling the lady of the house she had not counted just right and would she please return the bottles. It would not be the lady's fault, of course, for it was quite likely a foreign maid who had put out the tickets.

During the periods when Hilda was apparently asleep she heard something of the vicissitudes of serving the Summit. One woman had gone away owing eleven dollars, and in the paper it said she had gone for a trip around the world and had closed the house. The boss had been very decent, and said the Company would stand half the loss; but "even so," her father had said, "that settles our turkey for this Christmas."

One day the doctor came to see her, and he was sure she would be better next summer and able to go bathing in a nice little red and white bathing-suit and red running-shoes. But just before he went away he stood talking to her mother in the other room, and his face was sad; and Hilda knew he was thinking of some other little girl who maybe wasn't going to get better. But at the door, when he was going away, she heard him say, "It is an experiment, Mrs. Stillings. Fresh air and sunshine may do more than medicine." And that night Hilda thought she heard her mother crying, but she knew her mother never cried, so that must have been a dream.

But she did hear the next night something that would have set a strong little girl's heart racing. Her father had seen a red sleigh in front of Smith's Furniture, a beauty, with high back and corduroy cushions. He had said, right out loud, "It's a lot of money, but we have to have a nice one." Then Hilda knew. She was getting better, and she was going to have a sleigh for Christmas.

The day before Christmas came, a bitterly cold day, with a high wind that made Richard Stillings draw his old trench coat more tightly around his thin body as he made his rounds in the shivering dawn. The prospect of getting less than half of his cheque was chilling his heart more than the day. He had left carefully written notes for the customers the day before, explaining that he was responsible to the Company for all milk delivered, and how hard it would make it for him if payment were not made.

The largest customer, who took a dollar's worth each day, had told him she never paid until the end of the month, but he had explained to her that the Company gave the men their cheques the day before Christmas, for their convenience, and she had agreed to pay him then. But on this cold morning there was no cheque in the milk-box and no response to his knock at the kitchen door. He left another note, saying he would call at three o'clock in the afternoon, and would she please leave it for him.

When he made the return journey in the afternoon, on foot, the sharp-faced maid told him Mrs. Deering always took the baby out in the afternoon, when the sun was the strongest, but she had left word for him to go to Mr. Deering's office in the Marine Building. Across the City again went Richard Stillings, only to be informed by the girl at the desk that Mr. Deering had left for home five minutes before.

Cold and hungry, with a rising tide of anger in his soul, Richard Stillings presented himself once more at the stucco house on Wellesley Street, and was admitted—Mrs. Deering would see him. From the kitchen come the pleasant odor of turkeys roasting.

"Too bad, milkman," said Mrs. Deering with a dimpled smile, "I intended to phone Mr. Deering to wait for you, but you know what the day before Christmas is like! However, you knew the account would be paid. I'll make the cheque out

to cash, so you can get it any place. Everyone knows me. It's nineteen-seventy-five, isn't it? I'll make it the even twenty, and a Merry Christmas to you!"

He thanked her and hurried away to the furniture store and presented the cheque. He knew one of the men there, and had a hope he might get the sleigh a dollar or two cheaper, and get a Christmas candle for Hilda, and maybe a chicken. There was some hesitation on the part of the clerk. Then he suggested that he go to the bank and get it marked or cashed.

The bank, a few doors away, was crowded with people, and as Richard Stillings stood in the long line his knees began to ache with weariness. At last he reached the wicket and leaned against the wall for support when he presented the cheque.

The teller took it, read the signature, then handed it back. "I am sorry," he said, "but Mrs. Deering has no money here—she closed out her account with us three months ago."

Richard Stillings came out into the street staggering a little. People looked at his white face and wondered. It was beginning to snow now, and the shoppers called gaily to each other that it was real Christmas weather. He went back to the furniture store.... The sleigh was gone!

IT WAS LOADED

There are no idle words; words may be wise or foolish, worthy or worthless, honest or insincere, but they are never idle. They work overtime, and carry their own impact of good or evil; they can sear and wound, or heal and bind; they can darken the sun, or lighten the darkest night.

Words can build or destroy, inspire or defeat us. The gun is always loaded, and no one knows where the charge will strike. We do not need to be convinced of this in our little town. Listen to this:

About ten years ago Emma Baird came to live with her married sister. She was a thin, stoop-shouldered girl, very shy and apologetic, with a low voice and a tendency to blush when anyone spoke to her. Being the youngest of a family of girls, all of whom were married, she had stayed at home and taken care of her parents, and had, rumor said, inherited quite a sum of money from them, but had foolishly given it to her sister's husband to invest, and he had lost it. There was no definite knowledge of this, but it seemed probable. That shrinking, trustful type of woman would be glad to hand her money over to some man to invest; and Emma's brother-in-law, Dick Turner, was the sort of man who would both take it and lose it.

Dick Turner was a born promoter; always ready to let someone in on a sure thing; always on the verge of starting something, always had inside information which he was not at liberty to reveal; smiled to himself as he walked jauntily down the street; was a practical joker and a great jollier. People said it was a crime the way he ragged his sister-in-law about being an old maid.

One dull day in harvest, when the rain had stopped the cutting, the little town was swarming with idle men, and Dick Turner's office had drawn its full allotment. It happened that Emma passed down the street. Dick tapped on the window to attract her attention, and then winked at the company who filled the chairs.

Emma came in timidly and looked at her brother-in-law for an explanation.

"Emma," he said seriously, "it is fortunate that you passed just now. I was just going to send for you. I have a great piece of news for you. Something wonderful has happened. You know I have long wished to see you in a home of your own, Emma. So have we all, and now I find there is a kind, good man in our midst who has been waiting for a chance to ask your hand in marriage. That chance did not seem to come, so he has asked me to do it for him."

Emma's face had turned crimson.

Dick's voice fell. "Price, here, wants to marry you, Emma."

Price Graham, the young veterinary surgeon, was standing behind Dick's chair with his mouth wide open. He had once taken Emma to a picture show.

Dick went on, with a serious face: "You are not very young, Emma, but Price is willing to overlook that. He is not any too bright himself..."

Emma turned to look at Price. One of the men laughed, and the crowd began to roar. Then something broke in Emma Baird's slow-moving mind. Her face went as white as chalk and she walked over to where her brother-in-law sprawled in his yellow round-backed swivel chair. He did not sense what was coming, and it was all over before anyone could stop her. She struck him a stinging blow across the face, then turned and walked out.

The men drifted away to tell their wives, warning them not to tell, which caused the ladies to spend a busy afternoon. Before night it was all over town that Emma Baird had pulled Dick Turner out of his chair, flung him on the floor and jumped on him, which report was strongly contradicted by the eye-witnesses, though they admitted that it was quite a "woundy blow" that she had placed on the face of her brother-in-law.

When Emma Baird walked out of the office she went to her sister's, packed up her things, carried her straw valise to the hotel, asked for a job and got it. In three months she had earned enough money to buy some good clothes and went into the City. There she got a job in a millinery establishment and learned not only how to make hats, but how to sell them. At the end of a year she was taking out trunks full of hats to the mining towns and selling them to the miners' wives on pay-day. She bought mining stock, and, what is more uncommon, sold it at the right time. She set up her own establishment in the City, and under her own name.

One day last week she came back and went straight to Dick's office from the train, and again it was a cold, dark day in harvest-time. The same old gang were there. Not much change in any of them—maybe a little shabbier. The calendars on the wall were still a few months or years behind, and still hung crooked. Dick, still the small-town joker, sat in his yellow-backed chair, but it no longer swings. The swivel broke a year or so ago, and he hasn't fixed it, but he is going to when he gets time.

Emma Baird is a handsome woman now, neither shy nor apologetic. She wore a rich brown suit, kolinski trimmed, with a bright velvet hat and long earrings, and on her left hand there gleamed a solitaire diamond. She carried a burnt orange umbrella with an amber handle.

Walking over to her brother-in-law, just as she did five years ago, while the company sat breathless, Emma handed him a thousand dollar bill, saying with a smile, "for services rendered and value received."

FLOWING GOLD

I knew that an angel had troubled the waters when I opened this week's issue of the Mandonville *Enterprise* and found the whole first column was of poetry, a narrative poem, written and signed by the Editor. It began:

"In all the annals of the *Enterprise*
To-day we got our greatest, glad surprise.
A leading citizen, a tough one, too,
Who sells us shaving soap and stomach brew,
Came in and paid his toll!!!

Four years' arrears,
One year, advance!
Who'll say romance
Has fled the human soul?

I have not told
The tale complete.
HE PAID IN GOLD,
And asked for no receipt."

As I read on I determined I should hear the prose version of the story, and two days after I had the good fortune to meet Miriam Bruce, whose husband, George Bruce, has been the Mayor of Mandonville for two terms. From her I got the story at its source.

Two weeks ago George Bruce came home immersed in barber shop blues and, sitting at the table, leaned his head wearily on his left hand, while with his right he served the mutton stew. Miriam could see his thoughts were concerned with nothing so cheerful as mutton stew, and the one before him was a good one, too, embellished with carrots, onions and capers.

Before even asking the blessing, George began to unload his depression. "France and America are hoarding gold," he said; "their vaults are full of it, idle, useless gold, held out of the channels of trade, while the nations of the world suffer and starve. The whole system of our economic life is rotten. I don't see any way of escape. Look at our politicians! What do they care?"

Then he addressed himself to Miriam, sitting opposite. Grandma Bruce, his mother, was at one side of the table; Tommy and Charlie at the other.

"If we had our lives to live over again, Miriam, knowing what we know now, we would never have had the temerity to bring children into this unhappy world!"

"Blah!" said Grandma Bruce, in a loud voice. The family, not having started to eat, could not very well stop eating, but they sat bolt upright and looked in surprise at the bland face of their respected ancestor.

"I said 'blah!'" Grandma said, in answer to their looks, "and that's what I mean.... Say the blessing, George, and let us get on with our meal, and then we can talk... You talk about not bringing children into the world.... Don't heed him, boys; it's a good world, and we're all glad you are here!

"When you were on the way, George, my big worry was not whether France or America were hoarding gold. It was one much nearer home. I was wondering if the storekeeper would give us credit for a few yards of gray flannel to make you wee dresses, and canton flannel to make you a set of still more necessary garments, because he was not yet paid for the last lot, which your brother Tom was still wearing.... But he did. And he was paid, too, in the fullness of time.... And here we are!"

"Grandma," said young Tom, looking up from his supper, "where did you hear 'blah'?"

"I heard you say it, dear, and I want to thank you for bringing it home to me. It is a grand word to have when the occasion arises, as it did just now, when your respected father made his statement about not bringing children into the world. I didn't know that I had it; but you can see how the Lord provides, Tommy; a great need brings its own supply."

George Bruce looked at his mother and smiled.

"I never had a chance to argue with you, Mother," he said, "you have me beaten before I begin."

"I am not a great hand in an argument, Geordy," she said, "but I've seen so much real hardship I cannot stand all this talk that goes on about hard times. Ordinary people now-a-days live better than kings and queens lived a hundred years ago.... But I am glad to hear you find fault with the countries that are hoarding gold. Call them all the names you know,

and I'll tell you some more, some good Scotch words that fairly spit. But before we do that, Geordie, tell me this: It's now the New Year—did you buy yourself that new suit you always start the year with?"

"No, I certainly did not. I could not bring myself to spend forty-five dollars for a suit when I can get by with what I have."

"Well, then, don't say too much about hoarders.... An order for a suit would hearten little Tibbets, the tailor, and all the little Tibbets.... Supposing everyone gets the same mean feeling, and none of his usual customers buy a suit all year, the Tibbets won't be able to live. What sense is there in that man being left idle and not able to pay for his groceries? Do you see how that would affect your store? The most of this talk of hard times is in people's minds. Excuse me, Miriam, I am going to leave the table, but don't remove my plate. I am not near done with it; I'll be back."

She returned with a little leather bag in her hand.

"Here are the gatherings of fifty years," she said, as she rolled the contents on the white cloth, bringing a cry of surprise from the boys.

"Granny, it's gold!"

"Thirty pieces of gold, saved for my funeral. But I am not going to save it any longer. There's a lot of posthumous pride in the Scotch, masquerading under the cloak of godly independence, and I am laying mine aside here and now. I will no longer hold out my gold from the channel of trade, even if I have to be buried in a covered coffin. I think we'll get the house papered and painted, Miriam, and that hole in the plaster fixed, too, and maybe the floors done. That will spread the work around.

"I can't let you do this, Mother," George said, flushing.

"Try to stop her!" cried young Tommy, looking at his grandmother admiringly.

The next day four of the gold pieces had been spent for wallpaper and one for paint, which gave the hardware merchant the best day he had had all week. He gave three of them on salary to his clerk, who went around to the Maypole Grocery, of which George Bruce is the proprietor, and paid his account in full. George Bruce came home with the three gold coins and presented them to his mother.

"Here, Mother, put them back in the bag for a nest-egg."

"Will I, now?" cried the old lady. "I'll take them, but they are out of the bag once and for all. Here, Miriam, go down tomorrow and buy one of the nice dresses we saw in the Trading store. Don't talk of nest-eggs, Geordie. Nest-eggs are notoriously barren, chicken-hearted, or china-hearted, or just plain bad."

When the work on the house was done ten more of the coins were placed in the channels of commerce; and everyone in Mandonville knew about the old lady's plan to benefit trade, and there grew up a sort of gentlemen's agreement that the coins would not be changed into bills. Holders proudly exhibited them, and diagrams were drawn in the barber-shop on the backs of the envelopes, showing how the coins had circulated. At the end of the first week ten business houses had been benefitted—the drayman had one coin, the shoemaker one, and even the doctor had one. Miss Cherry, the milliner, had received on three occasions a gold piece in payment for hats, and, being a woman of good business sense, advertised a sale, offering any hat in her establishment for five dollars in gold.

George Bruce's order for a suit at the tailor's was followed by so many others that Mr. Tibbets has taken back the two tailoresses he had let go in December, and the paper-hanger says he has not been so busy since the outburst of weddings last summer.

But it was not until the druggist, of his own free will, had gone into the *Enterprise* office and paid his account in full, and one year in advance, that the Editor was inspired to give the story wings. His poem closes with these words:

"Gold that was held against a grave objective

Has given Mandonville a new perspective."

WHEN FEARS DIE DOWN

The doctor struggled to get the right word, the kindly, sympathetic word... It is not the easiest thing in the world to tell a woman she has only a few months to live, even if she is a poor tired, wispy little thing who probably does not care much about living anyway.

Seeing his dilemma, and appreciating the kindness which caused it, Stella Brown came gallantly to his assistance.

"How long do you think I have, Doctor?" she asked quietly. "I have saved some money ... about fifteen hundred dollars ... will that see me through? I will go on working if it is going to be a year or so."

"It won't," said the doctor; "the sum you mention will be ample. You will not need the half of it."

Miss Brown stood up to go, and put out her hand, a well-shaped, capable hand that did not tremble.

"Thank you, Doctor," she said. "I really do not mind very much. Life has been pretty tough—and I have seen a lot of it, and have not much to look forward to, either. So it's all right."

She came out of the office and stood for a moment irresolute. She wondered why she did not feel sad or panicky. Instead she found her spirits rising as she breathed the sweet airs of evening, and noticed the gold-flecked clouds above the tall buildings. The street was full of hurrying people, intent on life, not death.

The snow began to fall from a passing cloud as Stella stood leaning against a pillar, and she watched the folding patterns it wove. The colored signs threw a warm radiance on the wet pavement. She wondered why she was so keenly alive to the scene about her, so sensitive to its colorful beauty—the shops with their tempting display of candy and fruit, the strings of colored lights outlining the windows, the purple and silver velvet negligee on the wax figure, ... what were all these to one who was appointed to die?

Automatically Stella began her homeward journey; then, suddenly remembering she had not eaten since morning, she turned into a cafe, the nicest in the City, in which she had never been before. Pleasant odors assailed her—warm, spicy odors, reminiscent of her mother's big kitchen. She took off her coat and studied the menu with interest.

"Beefsteak and onions," she said to the waiter, "with tomato-catsup, apple pie and cheese, coffee and rolls."

Just then one of the women from the store passed by her—Miss Deane, the head saleslady of the French room.

Miss Brown called to her. "Come and eat with me, Miss Deane," she said. "A snowy night like this is no time to be eating alone, and I crave company tonight."

Miss Deane looked at her in surprise. "I will be glad to join you," she said, with a smile.

"Two orders of everything then, waiter. Big orders, and plenty of onions. We are hungry."

"It's so nice to have someone do the ordering. I hate making decisions, don't you?" said Miss Deane as she seated herself.

"Just at the moment I am so thrilled at the prospect of fried onions I cannot think of anything else," Miss Brown replied. "For years I have been living on fish, brown bread and the usual run of chickweeds, but the doctor gave me good news to-day. He says I can eat anything I like now."

"Well, that is good news!" said Miss Deane.

"Don't you think," Miss Brown went on, "that women usually do eat apologetically, taking a rather foolish pride in missing a meal? I have been denying myself for years, but now—well, here come the onions, they do look nice."

"I haven't eaten so heartily for years," Miss Deane said when they rose to go, "and I feel strong enough now to face even an angry landlady.... In my present state of well-being a call to the manager's office would not send my pulse up a beat. You and your fried onions have put a spell on me."

"I feel much better, too," said Miss Brown. "You see, all my life, until the present, I have been afraid. When I was a child I was afraid of the dark, afraid the house would burn, afraid my mother would die, afraid I would be left alone with the children and they would take sick and I would not know what to do. And, as a matter of fact, all these things happened in due course.... Then I was afraid I would break down before I got the family raised, afraid the boys would go wrong and run away.... At last they all grew up, and are now able to do for themselves. I came to the City and got a job, and acquired a new set of fears—afraid of getting old, of getting stout, of losing my job—afraid I would die in the poor-house or be a burden to my brothers. Now, for the first time in my life, I am free from fear!"

Miss Deane looked at her in amazement. "I saw a girl once who looked like you do now," she said slowly; "it was when she showed me her engagement ring."

Stella Brown finished the month, and then asked for a leave of absence for a month. When her holiday began she had the ecstasy of a child at Christmas. She would do some of the things she always wanted to do. She bought a brown velvet dress, transparent velvet, soft as a duck's breast. She visited beauty parlors, and enjoyed the luxury of manicures and face massages, falling asleep under the soothing touch of the operator's hands and the odors of witchhazel and white roses. She sent magazines, toys and games to her brother's children, and gave her wash-woman the thrill of her drab life by sending a new rug for her tiny living-room on her birthday, which no one had remembered for twenty years. She began to attend church, and enjoyed the peace and comfort of the services.

At the end of the month Miss Brown went back to the store a changed woman. There was a radiance about her, a confidence and sympathy, which drew the other girls to her, and brought her customers, too. The strain and tension had gone from her life, and the little irritations incident to her work now passed by unheeded. What did it matter? She ate well, and slept soundly, and the old pain around her heart was gone.

One day, when the six months the doctor had given her had expired, the manager called her into the office and told her he was being made the head of the three floors, and had been asked to name his successor in the Ready-to-Wear.

"Will you take it, Miss Brown?" he asked. "You are by far the best saleswoman on the floor, and the girls will work better under you."

Stella Brown sat down hurriedly.

"I'll tell you tomorrow," she said; "there is something I have to find out before I accept."

That night she went to the doctor's office and waited her turn in the big waiting-room. When she was shown in the doctor peered into her face.

"You don't know me, Doctor?" she said, "but you'll remember the woman with the bad heart. Well, here I am, still alive."

The doctor reached for his stethoscope and listened to the action of her heart.

"I don't know what you have found, Doctor, but I want to tell you I've gained fifteen pounds, and have just been offered the best position in my department; and I don't want to die one little bit! I have just learned how to live! Don't

think me ungrateful, Doctor, but I hope you were wrong."

The doctor looked at her with a sort of fatherly pride. "The diagnosis may have been wrong, but the psychology was correct," was his response. "You were a sick woman six months ago; now you are well. It does not matter how it was done. I congratulate you!"

WE MAKE OUR OWN

Miss Clarice Bowden opened her dark eyes and yawned luxuriously. She had a cloudy sense of expectancy in her drowsy brain. Something very thrilling had happened the night before. Then she remembered.

At the Staff dance she had heard a wonderful piece of news; which goes to show that it is sometimes well to do your duty. Staff dances are the dreariest things on earth, but if she hadn't gone she might not have met that pallid little white-wear traveller who told her the news about Eric Landers, who had made a fortune in oil. Fifty thousand dollars, and still some holdings to hear from!

Miss Bowden admitted to herself that she had underestimated Eric Landers, but who wouldn't? He was such a prim little fellow—the Canadian-boy-in-training type—who would tithes his salary and support a missionary in India if there were no one to watch him. She had found him one night at a cabaret dance, and had showered favors on him to make someone else jealous (just for the moment she could not remember who it was), but in a week she had Eric proposing honorable marriage, and not in the slapstick manner of "Say, Kid! What about it?"

No indeed! Eric had his introduction, presentation, and conclusion.

"Since first I met you, Miss Bowden, you have dominated my thoughts—given me new aspirations and ambitions ... with you as my guiding star I can make a place...."

Miss Bowden was glad now she had been diplomatic. She certainly had not burned her bridge. Eric Landers with fifty thousand dollars was a very attractive solution of the future. He was good-looking and tractable. What more could anyone want?

She had, fortunately, kept all the letters he had written to her since he went away; and now, getting out of bed, she wrapped a crimson velvet gown around her and re-read some of them. The latest one was six months old. She should have kept a closer hold. But she resolved not to blame herself; she would write him a little note, and follow it up with a visit. Fortunately she had two weeks holidays coming to her. Eric had once said the sight of her handwriting had set the joybells ringing in his heart.

She rang for her breakfast, and as she waited composed a tactful little message. "Dearest Eric: I did not know I could miss anyone as I have missed you—and I am so excited I can hardly write. I am going to be in your city for two days. I will ring you as soon as I arrive. Till then, Clarice."

There were no explanations to be made to her family. She had cut them adrift two years ago and gone to live in a suite with three other business women, and of late had not gone home at all. Her mother had been broken-hearted over it, and, being hopelessly old-fashioned, couldn't understand why any girl wanted to leave her own people.

She was glad that Eric had gone farther west. She had no desire to live her life in the same city with her impossible family. She would be glad to forget them.

Three days later Miss Bowden arrived in the oil city of the West, and registered at the big hotel. She carefully removed all traces of travel before she telephoned Eric. She knew he would come over, and she had carefully rehearsed

her words.

A woman's voice answered, "Mr. Landers is in the City, but he is not in the office. You might get him at Mrs. Hamilton's—W2811."

Miss Bowden tried again. It was an older voice she heard this time.

"Mr. Landers was here, but has gone. He has gone to his new home. No, there is no 'phone there. He will be 'phoning here later. Can I take a message? A friend of Mr. Landers from Winnipeg? We will be glad to have you come to the trousseau tea this afternoon. My daughter is having a few of her friends, and Eric will come in at the tea hour. This is the house number..."

Clarice Bowden sat down in a black mood. This was an intolerable situation. Her first impulse was to return on the next train. Fortunately she had not given her name—but she had registered at the hotel... Then she remembered the letters ... some of the paragraphs would make blithe reading for the bride.... Eric Landers might be very glad to possess them! She would go to the party.

Miss Bowden took a taxi to the house and found herself going up the steps of an old house with blue, red and brown squares of glass in the front door, and a lace panel in which a deer stood on his hind legs poised for a leap across a precipice. It reminded her so poignantly of her old home on Walnut Street that she thought she was dreaming.

Mrs. Hamilton answered her ring and greeted her warmly. "Come away in," she said hospitably. "Alice isn't down yet; there have been so many showers and teas she can hardly keep up with them. She knows so many girls on account of our giving meals to business people here. You see, when Mr. Hamilton died we really had nothing but this old house and a little insurance, and with three little boys to educate—the eldest one thirteen—and it was Alice's plan to give meals, home-cooked meals, and rent a couple of rooms. She had a good position in an office, but she gave it up and came home to help me. She said it was the only way we could all keep together. She trained the boys to wait on the tables, and got them to take a pride in it; she can do anything with them. And she and I have done the cooking, and we've had a happy time at it and have really done well. We feed thirty people every day, and Bruce, our big boy, is ready for the University now."

Clarice Bowden thought with a start of how shabbily she had treated her two young brothers when they came one day to the suite to see her. She had been so afraid someone would see them with their corduroy clothes and rumpled hair.

"That's how Alice met Eric Landers," continued Mrs. Hamilton. "He came here one day for lunch. He says he first fell in love with our little Donald, who looks so sweet in his white coat carrying a tray, and he is a bonny lad, too."

Miss Bowden noticed the old-fashioned furniture, the dark oak bookcases, the cross-stitch footstools, the round black table with its wreath of roses, the old andirons beside the fire, the faded Brussels carpet. And yet it had a presence, a feeling, a warmth, a comfort, that was unmistakable. Beyond, in a big room, she could see the tables, set for the next meal, with brightly colored china and white linen.

"Alice has her things set out in a room upstairs. The wedding is the day after tomorrow, and they are going to California. It will be Alice's first trip. And she deserves the best in life, for a better girl never lived... I will carry on here. I am getting a good cook and a dishwasher, and the boys and I can manage... Everyone is so lovely to us."

Just then Alice came down the stairs, a slight young girl with big honest blue eyes glowing with health and happiness. The two girls greeted each other.

"It was so friendly of you to come to wish me well, Miss Bowden," said Alice. "I am glad to meet one of Eric's friends. Did Mother tell you it was her cooking that made the match for me?... Eric will be here in a few minutes. Come up and see my things, won't you?"

"I should be glad to see your lovely things," said Miss Bowden, looking at her watch, "but I must go. Wedding-gifts are much the same all over, but there is a difference in brides. I am so glad I could be here for a few hours between trains. I wanted to see you. Give my love to Eric.... Tell him I used to believe in luck, but I am beginning to think people

make their own."

MEMO FOR DADDY

Let no one think that Mrs. Ormond went through her husband's pockets either maliciously or acquisitively. She was merely removing the odds and ends, that natural monthly accretion of letters, street-car tickets, gum-wrappers, loose change, acid drops, and what not, in preparation for the suit's trip to the cleaners.

It happened on this Monday morning that a foreign looking lavender card fell to the floor. She picked it up and read it. It was a business card, announcing the fact that the Magic Beauty Parlor was still operating in the Strome Block, and was growing in popularity. In finer type it told with modest pride that here was the place for women to find their lost youth. Mrs. Ormond smiled wanly at that, for it was Monday morning, and she had just finished the washing, and had given the basement an extra "do," which had left her somewhat weary. But it was a good chance to get it done, for Jim Ormond was away for the day, and she would have no lunch to get. Jim had often told her she was foolish to do all her own work, but Mrs. Ormond belonged to the old school. To her it was somewhat of a disgrace for any woman to pay for work she could do herself. She was about to throw the card into the chintz-covered paper-basket when she saw that something was written on the other side. She read:

"Memo for Daddy.

"Marigold Monday night at the Grand.

Zola."

Mrs. Ormond's back was not aching now. She turned the chaste lavender card over and over; she even smelled it, detecting a delicate perfume suggestive of daintiness and beauty, and a queer feeling clutched her heart. Mrs. Ormond had read, in the carefully selected magazines that came to her house, stories of middle-aged men who tired of their gray-haired wives and carried on with slim young mermaids at bathing-beaches and such places. But Jim was not one of those flighty ones—that thought was absurd. As a matter of fact, Jim was very hard on the young girls of to-day with their plucked eyebrows and sword-wound mouths. He admired the old-fashioned women with their careful, frugal ways. No, Jim was a home-loving man if ever there was one. Mrs. Ormond had hoped they would go out a little when they moved into the City. After twenty years on the farm she would have enjoyed going to the theatre and picture-shows; but Jim was away so much—there were so many meetings and conventions for him to attend—that when he came home he was tired, and wanted to fall into his big chair and listen to the radio. The few times he had wanted to go out it happened that she was too tired or too busy to go.

She laid the little card, with the rest of the "take," on the small table at the head of the bed, and went on with her work. But somehow the day was shattered and all her composure gone. She thought of that sentence on the card about women getting back their lost youth, and made a quick resolve. She would go to the Beauty Shop in the Strome Block. She had a free afternoon. She would not even wait for the clothes to dry. Mrs. Ormond, as casually as she could, asked at the desk for Zola, and was told she would be free in twenty minutes. Would she wait? She would.

On the modernistic lounge of mauve, gray and black she sat and looked about her. It was an interesting place, with its clean, soapy smells, its whirring of driers, and the passing of mauve-smocked operators. A sense of exhilaration came over her. She was away from home, and no one knew where she was. Jim would get a surprise if he 'phoned and found she was out... He never expected her to be out. She had often heard him say: "Leave the message with Mrs. Ormond. She is always here." Jim was too sure that she always wanted to stay at home.

Zola came to the desk at last for her instructions, and Mrs. Ormond went with her to one of the stalls. Zola adjusted the chair with her foot. In the mirror Mrs. Ormond could see Zola's face. A wise young face it was, artistically made up. Zola's cool hand rubbed in a fragrant cream.

"Do you give men facials, too?" Mrs. Ormond asked. Somehow the lavender card and its memo did not seem so absurd now.

"Oh, yes, quite often. I have quite a few regular customers—more for manicure than facials—and of course we give scalp treatments, too... You have a nice skin, fine and clear, but you should use a cleansing cream instead of soap and water; it will keep away the wrinkles.... But perhaps you don't mind a few wrinkles... If I didn't have to work I wouldn't mind having a few gray hairs and wrinkles."

The towels were on Mrs. Ormond's face, and she could not answer.

Zola's pleasant voice went on.

"Men are just as frightened as women of getting old... You'd be surprised at the number of men who come here to get their hair dyed... And when the operator tells them they look ten years younger, they are so pleased... I give manicures to quite a few regular customers, and I believe they just want someone to fuss over them... And I like doing it... I always wanted to be a nurse, you know."

Mrs. Ormond wriggled her foot to show she was interested.

Zola went on.

"Men need someone to praise them and compliment them all the time... That's where plenty of women lose out—they take their men for granted, and think once they are married the whole matter is settled. But they're wrong. I know ... My husband is just the best fellow in the world, but I keep on telling him that he is."

Mrs. Ormond loosened one edge of the towel and looked out. "Are you married?" she asked in surprise.

"Sure," Zola answered, "but I am Miss Bell in business... There's so much prejudice against married women... Harry has been out of work for six months, and I am certainly glad to have a job. I'll be glad when I can stay at home, too. I don't believe there are many married women who really want to be away from home."

Mrs. Ormond was sitting up now, having the foundation cream applied. "I want you to do something for me," she said, impulsively. "I am a lonely woman from the country. My husband is gone for the day, and won't be home until midnight... I have two good big country chickens in the refrigerator, and I am going to cook them in a cream sauce with split baking-powder biscuits around the platter... And I will have home-made apple-pie for dessert. I want you and Harry to come tonight and help me eat them. And then we can sit around and listen to the radio."

Zola stopped tapping Mrs. Ormond's cheeks with her soft finger-tips. Then she exclaimed: "Isn't this a bit of tough luck? I promised to go to see 'Marigold' with one of my customers, a nice old fellow ... one of those lonesome old lads I was telling you about. He says his wife doesn't care much about going out. She's one of those wonderful housekeepers who are always making lace for sheets or something. He says her idea of a good time is to wash, clean the basement, get in the clothes, iron them all, and be all tired out for the week... But I certainly am sorry to have to turn down a lovely invitation like yours."

"You are not going to miss it," said Mrs. Ormond, warmly. "I'll have supper ready at six; the play begins at eight-thirty. Leave my address for your old friend on your door, and he can call for you. Is he taking Harry, too?"

"I'll say not. Harry is not supposed to exist," Zola laughed. "But Harry understands, and is glad for me to have a chance to see the play. We'll come, and you are a dear to be so good to us."

"I am just being good to myself," said Mrs. Ormond. "I am lonely, you know."

"Most people are," said Zola.

When Jim Ormond called for Zola he found a note on the door of No. Four telling him to call at a certain address; and, to his horror, he saw it was his own! It was like a crazy dream. He drifted out into the street to think.

Finally he went into a picture-show and under the welcome cover of the darkness tried in vain to find a solution. At eleven-thirty he went timidly home. The lights were burning in the livingroom, and Mrs. Ormond in her best dress met him with a smile.

"Jim, I have had the loveliest day. I had company for supper and went to a picture-show. I met the nicest girl to-day where I had my face massaged... She and her husband came for supper. She was going to 'Marigold' with one of her customers, but he didn't come. She says they often forget like that. She says he is a nice old chap who just wants someone to fuss over him a bit. Wasn't it funny? She didn't even remember his name. So we all went to the nine o'clock show at the Capitol, and I've just got in. We saw the best play, Jim. It was called 'Indian Summer.' I want you to see it."

Jim sat down and wiped his face. "I've had a hard day, Mary," he said, wearily.

"You work too hard at all these conventions. They impose on you, Jim; I'll get a cup of tea. Stretch out on the chesterfield... Never mind, dear, you're home now, and everything is all right."

MISS JUNE'S ROMANCE

"I had no relations to go to, and dear Papa was quite opposed to women working, so I could not do anything; he believed that women must be sheltered and protected. When he died I was quite alone, and dreadfully upset."

She was a quaint little thing, with big blue eyes, still filled with a childish wonder, who stood at my back door. She had come in answer to an advertisement for a cook. I knew she would not do—she could never cook for my lusty brood—but she was so little and lost and appealing I asked her in for a cup of tea.

We had it together before the fire, and she told me a fantastic tale, of which I believed every word. Little Miss June was as honest as a school clock, and as guileless as a day-old chick in a brooder.

"Papa and I lived, ever since I can remember, in a very lovely old house, and I didn't know whether we had money or not. Papa never said, and, of course, I dared not ask. He liked to have me read to him—and play sometimes—and one day he died—and then it seemed there were tradesmen's debts and all sorts of quite distressing things. But I had Mamma's jewels—they were all in a beautiful wooden box that Great Uncle Simon had brought from China—but I didn't know what to do with them. But just the day after the funeral a friend of Papa's came to see me—such a very pleasant gentleman, whom I had not seen before—and he asked me if there were any jewels, and I brought them down. He said they were worth pounds and pounds, and he said it was quite unsafe for me to keep them now that Papa was gone. I begged him to tell me what to do, and he said he would sell them for me and bring me the money. He was really very handsome, and so kind."

"Had you never ever heard of him before?" I asked.

"Of course, you know, Papa did not often speak to me, unless he was telling me to do something, and I was sure he had many friends I had never heard of."

"And you gave this man the jewels?" I asked. But I knew the answer.

I looked at her again. She had a feather boa around her neck; a hat with a drape falling to her shoulders; one gray ringlet which fell over her left ear; many things around her neck, oxidized silver trinkets, keys and baskets, and stars suspended therefrom, and a purse attached to her belt, the old-fashioned chatelaine. I looked at her and shook my head as I asked the question.

"What else could I do but give them to him?" she said. "He seemed so very kind, and he said he was Papa's friend—and he really seemed to admire me, too. I trusted him just the moment he spoke."

"You would," I said, sadly. "And he never came back?"

"He gave me his card. I have it yet, but when I went to the place they did not know any Mr. Benson."

"And how have you lived?" I asked.

"I have done everything," she said, brightly, "but not very well. I was a governess once, but my discipline was not good. However, at last I got a chance to bring an old lady to Canada, and since then I have been doing housework or mending. I can really cook quite well, but only for two; it upsets me to cook for any more. No, I can see I could not cook for your family; but will you remember me when you are entertaining, for I am very good at setting a table and arranging flowers? And many of the ladies here are very kind to me; they give me sandwiches and cake.... The City pays for my room, you know."

I thought of her papa, who didn't believe in women working, and hoped he was looking down—or up.

I have sent for her several times since, and she is always so grateful for the box of sandwiches and cake. She seems such a little thing to be battling with the world.

I saw her last week. She was writing letters in the waiting-room of one of the hotels. But she told me quite honestly she was really only pretending to write, for it was "so lovely and warm here," and her room was a bit "fresh" now that the cold weather had come. But she hastened to assure me she was doing very well, for there were three teachers in an apartment near, and she had been able to earn quite a little pocket-money mending their silk stockings.

She still was wearing the curl over the one ear, and a long earring in the other.

"I lost the other one of the pair," she said, "but with my ringlet it does not matter. Is it not fortunate?"

We went into the coffee room for tea and sandwiches, and she told me she had dreamed for three nights now about the gentleman who had taken her jewels, and she believed she would hear from him yet.

Today I went to see her in answer to her note—a tremulous note, that told me such a wonderful thing had happened. Evidently she had changed her address. I thought of the jewel-box and wondered.

"I have two wonders to tell you," she began, as she opened the door, and no child meeting Santa Claus for the first time could have looked more radiant. "Come into my little sitting-room. You see I have my own apartment now."

I looked in wonder.

"I am so happy. It is just like having Papa again. I will tell you, briefly, I am looking after Mrs. Burns's father while they are all away; and we have a Chinese cook. I have only to read to Mr. Powers and take him out walking. Mrs. Burns tried several women, but he wouldn't have them. He said they argued with him. Of course, Papa never allowed any one to argue with him. So Mr. Powers took to me. When he rages I just keep saying, 'I am very sorry, sir,' and it does seem so good to have someone even to rage at me. He says he wants me to stay after they come home. I am so happy over it: But here is my greatest joy. We had a friend of Mr. Powers's one day for dinner. I have my meals with Mr. Powers every day—he says it is a treat to see someone who knows how to eat jam and take the top off an egg. Mr. Powers told his friend about the man who took my brown box and all my treasure. And his friend, Mr. Leighton, seemed very upset over it, and very indignant. The next day he came back, and he brought me this."

She went to a drawer in the desk and took out a carved wooden box, which I took from her greatly wondering.

"A man who died at the Old Folks' Home gave him this, years ago, and told him it belonged to a young girl whom he had robbed of her jewels twenty years ago. He said he had been very unhappy over it; had never known a day's happiness since. He said (here Miss June actually blushed) 'she was a very pretty girl'. Mr. Leighton said he was a fine-

looking old gentleman, and was so very repentant."

"There was nothing in it?" I asked.

"Oh, no, he had pawned everything and spent the money long ago, but I am so happy to know he was not really a thief. I wish I had seen him to tell him not to mind."

Before I left she took my hand and looked at me with those haunting eyes of hers, over which a cloud seemed to pass.

"Dear friend," she said, "I am just a little bit troubled over one thing. I must tell you, I am not quite sure about the box. I thought Great Uncle Simon's box was bigger and had more carving. Do you think I am doing right in keeping it when I am not quite sure?"

"Quite right," I said, staunchly. I never could bear to see a child's faith in Santa Claus destroyed. "I am sure it's yours... You were so much younger when you saw it last it might easily seem smaller to you now than it did then, and a brown box might turn black in twenty years. Keep it, dear Miss June, and enjoy its possession."

"I knew you would know," she said, gratefully.

I wish I had seen Mr. Leighton before he brought the box. I would have advised him not to kill off the repentant gentleman, and then little Miss June could have gone on expecting a tall, handsome man to knock at her door!

BLACK POOL

The sun had gone down with red streamers, and the quick night of early winter had closed in. Ruth Atherton, alone in her drab little house, reacted to the loneliness of the place and the hour. At sundown she always felt like a little girl whose mother had deserted her. She was afraid to look out at the sombre waste that stretched away from her door, the great dead, colorless prairie that mocked her with its immensity. It was her prison, her prison without locks or gates or walls. She was a prisoner of space, as hopeless and undone as any poor soul that ever beat his head against stone walls in vain.

She huddled beside the square stove, so lost in her misery that she did not notice that the fire had burned low. She could think of nothing but the terrors of the advancing night. She thought of Abraham, and of the horror of great darkness that had fallen on his soul. She had asked her Sunday-school teacher once about that, but she never need ask again.

It was three years since Ruth Atherton and her husband had come to the West, on the advice of a specialist, who had said that the high, dry air of Southern Alberta would clear up Henry's lungs and he would be able to go back to his work again. So they had come to this little chicken ranch to make a fight for health. Ruth had worked, inside and out, with feverish energy; and tonight a cracked lip and chapped hands contributed to her depression. She knew, too, she was becoming a stoop-shouldered, faded woman, though she had long since stopped looking in the glass.

Henry's health was certainly better, and ordinarily that fact atoned for everything, but tonight, alone and wretched, she saw and felt nothing but her own misery. A baby had been born six months before, a precious little thing, that had lain beside her for three golden, glorious days, its little breath rising and falling. But on the fourth day, at sunset, the tiny breathing suddenly ceased, and the little soft hands grew cold. It had been hard to believe that all her agony had been for nothing, and in Ruth's heart had grown a sore resentment against the powers that rule.

Today Henry had driven into the small town fifteen miles away to sell the turkeys and chickens that she had plucked and dressed. He had wanted her to go, too, but how could she go in her shabby clothes? Henry had coaxed and reasoned, and at last flamed into anger, telling her she was suffering more from silly pride than anything else; and now, in the cold

gray silence of the little house, his words, like whiplashes, came out from the corners of the room to torment and beat her.

There were times when Ruth was frightened by the wells of bitterness in her heart and the strange things she had done. When Martha, her sister-in-law in Toronto, had sent her a cheque for Christmas, pinned to a Christmas card, she had returned it with a curt note saying they were not asking for or receiving charity—and this to Martha, the best friend she had or ever would have. The next day she had been horrified at what she had done, and had written a contrite letter of apology.

But the hardest thing to bear was that Henry could not see that she had any reason for her depression. When he had his breakdown she had humored and petted him like a sick child, which indeed he was; she had stayed beside him night and day, for he wanted no one else, and that had pleased her, too... But in her low moments, when the demons of despair were riding her, she was left alone.

She knew she should light the lantern and see about the animals. Henry would not be home until late, for there was a Farmers' Meeting which he would attend... She must shut the hen-house door, for there were weasels and mink watching their chance.

Mechanically she now performed the evening chores. The hens were on the roosts, drowsily murmuring—she stopped a moment to listen to them. Then she threw the pigs a few sheaves of oats, and filled their trough with water. How she hated them and their interminable squealing and clamorous greed! The two cows were in their places, chewing their cuds, full of oat-straw and contentment; they had been in the oat-stack all day, and needed no more. She liked the cows the best of all, but tonight they were just two stolid lumps, making no response when she spoke to them.

She thought of Lady, the third cow, and her tragic death in the black pool behind the stables, where the creek widened into a willow-edged bowl, with one high, treacherous bank over which Lady had fallen... She had helped Henry to draw her out, poor young Lady, with her smooth round body and her big glassy eyes. Lady's calf had died, and they thought she had gone looking for it in the willows at the top of the bank... That was last spring, nearly a year ago.

When she reached the house she rekindled the fire, and knew she should get herself something to eat. But a great weariness was upon her, and she sat huddled in a shawl, with her feet in the oven, resting on the poplar wood that was drying there...

There was not a sound in the house save the ticking of the clock. She looked at the queer shadows the lamp-chimney threw on the whitewashed ceiling ... the scalloped top made an outline like the willows on the top of the black pool ... and to blot out the picture she put out the light... But she went on thinking of Lady and how she had found a way of escape from her troubles and her loneliness—poor young Lady, with her smooth round body and big glassy eyes!

She was awakened by Henry calling her in fright. The lamp was still burning, dazzling her eyes.

"What's wrong, Ruth? Why are you sitting here in the dark? Ruth, I am worried about you. Are you sick, old dear? I've been worried all day about you. I didn't stay for the meeting."

Ruth stood up waveringly. "Oh, I'm all right, Henry," she said, "and I'm so glad you are home. I was having a bad dream. But it is all gone now. Did you buy your overcoat?"

Henry was fixing the fire.

"No, but I got something we need more," he said, "something for you, dear. I am sorry I was cross with you, Ruth, when you have been so wonderful to me."

Ruth's black mood was all gone. "What did you bring me, Henry?" she asked. He went out and brought in a big black and gray police dog, on a leash. The dog walked straight to Ruth and laid his handsome head on her knee. Her arms went around his neck.

"Oh, you dear pet!" she cried, "no one was ever more welcome or more needed. Now I won't be afraid to see the sun go down."

Henry was setting the table. "I sold the chickens and turkeys," he said, "and met an old friend of yours who wants us to come in for Sunday, and we will. She gave me a year's issue of a magazine, with a story in it she wants you to read. She says the woman in it is like you... And, Ruth, the editor of the paper wants you to do a weekly article on how to improve farming conditions for women. We had a long talk. I met him when I was having my dinner, and I told him you did newspaper work once. And I got a bottle of cream for your poor hands."

Ruth stood up, her hand still on the dog's head. No one would call her a faded woman now.

THE RETURN OF THE LIZARD

Mrs. Moore opened the door and looked out into the night. A fog had gathered suddenly, and now the street lamp on the corner had an aura of golden mauve around it. The street was empty and silent with the lateness of the hour. She went to the edge of her narrow veranda and looked up and down. There was something sinister in the stillness, something wicked and threatening. She looked again at the cross of light against the mist, and shuddered with cold.

"She can't be long now," she said again; "I'll soon hear from her or see her. She's not the girl that would keep her mother in hot water."

The 'phone rang. Mrs. Moore seized it with hands that trembled a little.

"It's Dan, Mrs. Moore," said a young voice, tense with anxiety, close to her ear. "Is she home yet?"

"Not yet, Dan," said Mrs. Moore, steadily. "She won't be long now. I'll give you a ring when she comes. It is not often we get a fright like this, and we mustn't worry, Dan. I am afraid of an accident, that's all. She's not the girl to stay out late."

"We should have stuck out, Mrs. Moore. Nora wouldn't have gone against us. I hate that bird, anyway. If I knew where they were, I'd..."

"Easy now, Dan. We can trust Nora. She won't be long now."

She must have dozed then, for she sprang up with a start at the sound of a car stopping, and watched her daughter and the man who was with her coming in. Thank God, Nora was safe!

"This is too bad, Mother," Nora said, going over to where her mother sat. "I am sorry you've had this long wait, but I'll explain it."

"No matter," her mother said; "it's what some poor women have to bear every night, and it's not often I've worried over you, Nora."

She had not spoken yet to Nora's escort, who stood at the door with his hat in his hand.

"Now to your bed, Nora dear. It's little enough sleep you'll get now, and you have to work to-morrow."

Then she turned to Philip Snider with an entire change of manner. Her face went a shade paler as she said icily: "And what explanation have you to offer for keeping a decent girl out until three o'clock in the morning, after promising me you would bring her home early?"

He came over and sat down before her.

"I want to talk to you, Mrs. Moore," he said, gently. He had a way with women that had not often failed. He was a thickset man of perhaps thirty-five, with a tired face that would have been attractive but for the heaviness of the mouth. "I have been studying your daughter for some time, and I want first to congratulate you on being a wonderful mother. I did not know that there were daughters and mothers like you and Nora."

Martha Moore's face showed no response; her gray eyes searched his soul.

"I am older than Nora, and I have lived hard; but I am tired of the life I have been leading, and I want a home—and children."

Mrs. Moore sat up straight, and bright red spots shone in her cheeks.

"I have plenty of money; I can give Nora a setting worthy of her ... and I am not asking her to leave you... I know how dear she is to you.... Nora has told me of how wonderful you have been. You will come with her. I was first attracted to Nora because she would not come with me until you gave your consent... The girls of today are not like that. I loved the way she obeyed you tonight without a word; it is a rare sight to see in these days. And while a man will play around with the easy sort of girl, when he goes to pick a wife he wants one who has been taught to respect authority... I took Nora tonight to a place where there is every temptation... I wanted to be sure... I laid every trap for her—I tried to get her to drink with me... I am speaking very frankly ... but she stood every test. She is one girl in five thousand."

If Philip Snider had not been so sure of himself he surely would have been warned by the blazing eyes that watched him. He went on, his voice growing more velvety and caressing:

"I have loved many women in my time, and I have not once in my life-time been denied—until now; Nora is younger even than her years, and does not know her own mind, and she has held me at bay. She says there's a young fellow at the service station here, called Dan, to whom she is attracted ... a sort of boy and girl affair, I suppose. I want your help, Mrs. Moore. I believe your influence is strong enough to win her for me. I want to marry her; I never wanted anything so terribly in my life. Have I made it all clear?"

Mrs. Moore was holding tight to the black arms of her old-fashioned rocker.

"Quite clear," said Mrs. Moore, in an even voice. She paused for a moment, then continued:

"I can best explain to you just how I feel at this moment by telling you something. One time, when Nora was a baby, she and I were invited to a lake in Manitoba where friends were camping for the summer in tents, and one night there came a great storm of rain that drove the lizards up on the beach. I heard someone shouting outside the tent, and I jumped up in a fright and struck a match, and there was a great slimy brown lizard creeping across the pillow toward Nora, and her sound asleep with her little pink fists doubled up beside her cheeks. Don't look so surprised—and don't say a word till I'm done. I listened to you, remember. You have sat here before me and told me in plain words that after a long life of tom-cattling around with any girl that had the misfortune to go with you, you have found one girl that has both decency and self-respect, and in order to get her you are willing to go the length of marrying her; and you have the effrontery to ask her mother to help you, bribing her with the offer of a home. I don't know why you think you have any right to marry a decent girl. Why do you not stick to your own class? Nora's people have all worked for their living, and were not ashamed of that.

"And that boy at the service station, Dan Rooney, is a clean, handsome lad that I love like my own son. He keeps the station at night and goes to the Technical School in the day-time, learning to be an electrician, and he loves Nora as a man should love a woman. He would rather die than put a slight on her, but you took my girl tonight to a place where no decent man or woman goes, lying to me by asking me to let Nora go with you to a friend's house to a little dance, and telling me it was a very nice party and you would not be late. And now you tell me you used all your arts to lead my little girl astray—my Nora, who has been on my heart and in my prayers since first I knew a child was coming to me; Nora, my baby, who lost her father two months before she was born. You, who never did an honest day's work in your life, you don't know the joy that people have in working together and loving each other. I only had my Peter a year and a half, and he has been gone twenty-one years, but I remember the lilt in his voice and the smile in his eyes. We saved soap-wrappers for our first set of dishes. I have them yet. He made that chair you are sitting in. Mr. Snider, with all your

money and the women who have loved you—if you can call it love—you are a poor man, and I pity you. Life has passed you by...

"You remember I was speaking of the lizard crawling on the baby's pillow—no doubt he was a good enough lizard in his way, living up to his own standards, and perhaps you are doing the same. You may be, like him, even a fairly good one of your class. I did not kill him. But I did throw him out!"

She opened the door significantly and stepped aside for him to pass.

The man went out without a word into the foggy night.

Mrs. Moore reached for the 'phone.

"Dan," she said, "we've nothing to worry over, lad. She's home safe and sound... Everything is settled. Come on over for a cup of tea... We can watch from the window and see if any cars drive up... It's surely time everyone was in bed except the like of you and me who have duties to perform."

From the top of the stairs came Nora's voice, "Mother, I'm coming down; I want to see Dan, too."

THE FORTUNE TELLER

One morning last spring a distress signal came to me over the 'phone from Jessie Pound. "I want you to come with me to the Golden Glow this afternoon," she said. "You must. My sister-in-law has arrived from the East, and if ever I needed a friend it is now. She has gone out to post a letter, so I can speak. She says she would trust no man to post a letter, and but few women. I want to hear her character read by Madam Cleo at the Golden Glow; I think it will make good listening if Cleo knows her business."

I asked about the sister-in-law, "What seems to be her trouble?"

"Rightness," said Jessie, "eternal rightness. She was never wrong or even mistaken in her life. She has an opinion on every subject. Her mind is made up—like a spare-room bed. She can tell you what is wrong with the world while you wait. She knows why we have unemployment—these fellows wouldn't take a job if you gave them one. She knows why the market crashed—extravagance of women. She has lived in the same small town all her life, and everyone is afraid of her."

At four o'clock I was waiting for them, and saw a tall woman bearing down on me like a ship under full sail. She was dressed in a hard, granite-like tweed, with leather facings, carried a cane, and had a draped hat; and the biggest shopping bag I had seen since 1918. And she was undoubtedly good-looking and of striking appearance, in a hard, cast-iron way. She looked like something that should be on the prow of a boat.

Jessie led the way to one of the tables in a window recess, and we sat down, Mrs. Pound depositing her parcels on the wide window-sill behind us, and looking about her with a critical eye. I wondered what she thought of it all.

The tables were full, and the billows of conversation rose and fell. A pungent odor of incense was in the air, coming from the mouth of a brass dragon that stood on a red lacquered table near us. From the centre of the room came the musical lapping of water from a black marble fountain. Amber lights on the golden walls threw a soft glow on the mossy green carpet; and heavy chandeliers gleamed like clusters of topaz above us. The windows were covered with honey-colored curtains that moved in the breeze, and the whole effect was one of remoteness and retreat. Jessie had ordered for us, and we were quite enjoying the beauty around us when Mrs. Pound's voice boomed out, like a radio that has been left on by mistake.

"I don't know why you wanted to come to a foreign-looking place like this, Jessie, with all the decent daylight shut

out in the middle of the afternoon; and that heathenish smell, I'll warrant, is turned on to cover up something; it smells too much like wet dog for me to say I like it."

Mrs. Pound, sitting high on her chair, could look over the whole room.

"I don't hold with this business of fortune-telling, anyway. It won't hurt me, of course, or anyone of sound and balanced mind; but women are naturally foolish and run after all kinds of cheap excitement. This scene is merely a fulfillment of the prophecy, 'In the last days evil spirits will lead captive silly women.' Look at them!"

I looked at them. I saw many tables where women were having a cup of tea and a friendly chat. I knew some of them, and they were not likely to be led captive by any evil spirit, but I did not say so.

"We went through all this in the East twenty years ago," she said, "and it seems it has just reached here now. I really had not realized there was such a difference, though, of course, I knew the West is backward."

"We had the flu only last year," said Jessie, innocently.

"Now what sort of stuff does this woman tell?" asked Mrs. Pound.

"Very pleasant things," said Jessie, "and nothing to frighten anyone. She told me I had lost something, which I would find under the cushions of the chesterfield; and, sure enough, there was the brooch I had been looking for and a pair of scissors, too."

"I don't need a fortune-teller to tell me to clean my chesterfield. In my home that is done every Friday."

Madame Cleo was only two tables away now, and we had finished our tea and had our cups in reverse waiting our turn.

"The tea was good," said Mrs. Pound, just a little grudgingly; "I will say that; but the biscuits had not enough salt. And the cake should have had three spoonfuls of hot water added to the recipe to give its softness."

I shook my head in admiration.

"How does it happen you know so much?" I said. "Jessie says it's just marvellous how well-informed you are."

She gave me a rather pleased look.

"Kept my eyes open," she said, "and remembered what I saw."

Madame Cleo was quite near us now, and Jessie lowered her voice in the vain hope that her sister-in-law would do the same.

"Be careful, now, don't talk about her; she is just behind you."

Mrs. Pound turned and looked.

"That woman is no more gypsy than I am. Look at her blue eyes. She's a society girl doing this for the novelty. What's your Local Council thinking of to let it go on?"

"You can find out if you like," said Jessie, with a little edge on her voice. "The president of the Local Council is having her cup read now. But don't talk so loud, or she'll hear you, Clara."

When Madame Cleo came to us she picked up Mrs. Pound's cup, and, holding it in her jeweled brown hand, stared at it as if she had never seen a cup before. Then she reached over and touched Mrs. Pound's hand. Mrs. Pound said bluntly: "You may as well understand I don't believe a word of this."

"No? But you will," said the fortune-teller, in a sweet voice. "Madame is a very clever woman, made for some big

position; has not found her true place. Would have made a head for a big store like this. Now, I'll show you I know something. Your name is Pound, Mrs. James Pound, and you are a visitor here. You are going home sooner than you thought. Quite soon, but that's all right, too. Short visits make good friends. There is no need for you to go home—your husband is having a good time. I see him very happy."

Mrs. Pound's face changed. "How can you see that?" she asked, eagerly. "Show me!"

"Oh, very easy for me to see. I cannot show you. Madame's cup is easy to read. He is talking and laughing—very good fun. He is like a boy—I laugh, too, when I look at him. He is not lonesome."

She took Jessie's cup. "Just one big thing for you, Madame," she said, "you get your wish. Very soon, too. Sorry I am in a hurry to-day. So many waiting."

When we came out Mrs. Pound was silent. I noticed that her name and address were on her shopping-bag, but I held my peace.

THE STEP-MOTHER

Eunice slammed the door angrily, and was gone, but her stinging words hissed around the room like angry wasps.

"You don't understand us," she had cried, "and you don't try! You were never young yourself, so you don't know how we feel. You are still thinking of the Epworth League types; and they went out with the covered buggies. Jerry hasn't the nerve to talk back to you, but I am telling you. We are old enough now to go where we like and come back when we are ready; and you may as well get used to it. If you don't like my friends I am going to live in a suite with the girls down town. I can go to the Bruce's any time I want."

The stepmother sat down on the lowest step of the stair and watched the front door, with a quivering hope that Eunice might come back. Surely she would not be so cruel as to leave her all day like this ... it was so unfair to say that she had not tried to understand them.

Moira Grant was not of the crying kind, or she might have found relief in tears.... She leaned her head against the stair-rail, and a crushing conviction shot through her that her twenty-one years of devotion had been wasted. The forces against her were evidently too strong; she was beaten! She had put all her eggs in one basket, and now the bottom of the basket had dropped out.

"You were never young," Eunice had said.

She had been young enough twenty-one years ago when her sister had died leaving twin babies, a boy and girl a month old; and the bewildered father had turned to her with a face like a wounded lamb and said: "Moira, you will have to take them. I don't want them. I can't bear to look at them. It is not fair or right; I want Jessie."

That was in the north country, where he was a missionary; and she, Moira, had taken the two little ones, and a year later had married their father. And they had come to the city, for after the shock of Jessie's death he had not been able to carry on on the frontier. The Church had found a place for him which he had held until his death, three years ago.

This was Moira's life history briefly told. She was eighteen years old when Jessie died, the most popular girl north of the Peace. But with the care of two babies, and very little in the way of means, and with no help from a heart-broken, absent-minded man, who spent his days in reading—taking to books as some men do to liquor to drown sorrow—she admitted to herself as she sat on the stairs that her youth had soon gone by. But it was not fair to say she had never been young. It was cruel of Eunice!

However, Moira had not been unhappy, for the children grew and thrived, and were her great recompense;—the

little Eunice, a perfect blonde, with violet eyes, and hair like the blossoming broom; and Jerry, dark, with Grecian features.

Just before his death Donald Grant was left a small legacy from an uncle in the old country, and with this bequest she had bought the house. With the renting of two rooms the problem of living had become easier.

Eunice always had been a leader, and, having grown into a very beautiful young woman, she was quite conscious of her own charm, and lately had been giving Moira much concern with her headstrong ways.

The quarrel had come this morning when Moira objected to her staying out so late night after night, objected to the company she kept, to the way she dressed, and to her general attitude of defiance and lawlessness.

Moira Grant went through a gruelling period of analysis that morning. Why had she failed with Eunice and Jerry? She had given up her life for them; she had worked and planned and managed to get them both through High School; she had studied and gone to clubs and lectures to keep herself abreast of the times. She wanted to be a real companion to them. The fault must have been with her because she was only a stepmother after all. Real mothers have occult wisdom in handling their own children; heavenly inspiration and understanding are their's. But she had nothing but a groping devotion. That must have been the cause of her failure. Maybe, too, she had been too indulgent, just because she was a step-mother. She had so often given them their own way rather than make a scene. The Reverend Donald Grant desired peace and quietness above all else, and that had held her from exercising the discipline which was needed. She always had believed love was the greatest power in the world, and had trusted in this belief to bring everything right.

Moira faced the present crisis squarely. What was to be done now? One of the lectures she attended had advanced a theory that seemed foolish to her then, but held some comfort now. The woman who was speaking had said that parents should follow this rule with their children: "Have them—love them—leave them." Jessie had had them and left them! She had loved them, and if it were for their good she could leave them.

It might be a way out, the only way. She set the house to rights and made her preparations. She would leave them everything. They had evidently talked it over; and Eunice was their spokesman in declaring their independence. They had declared for self-determination! Very well, they would have it.

She left a note on the newel-post upstairs, and set the alarm clock for the morning half an hour earlier than the time she usually called them, for they would have to get their own breakfast. They could write to the General Delivery in the neighboring city if they needed her.

"It is evident that my authority is at an end," she wrote, "and I am quite willing to withdraw unconditionally. I hope it will work out well. The house is clear of debt, and there is five hundred dollars in the bank. I leave a blank cheque signed. I certainly do not want you to have to leave your own home, Eunice; it is better for me to go. As I know life, you are both on the wrong track with your late hours, bad company, bad and dangerous habits, careless spending, and no serious purpose in life. To my mind you are heading for destruction. I may be wrong. I hope I am. If you don't need me any more this is good-bye. There is enough in the frigidaire for two days. I paid all the bills and left the money for the laundry on the pantry shelf.—M. G."

At the station that night one of Eunice's friends, the Mrs. Bruce Eunice had spoken of, came and spoke to Moira as she sat waiting for the north train. Of all the shrill-voiced company that frequented her house, Mrs. Bruce was to her the most likable. Moira knew a little of her history, and it was not a happy one. A young man whom Moira had not seen before was with her.

Mrs. Bruce was evidently greatly agitated, and her eyes were filled with anxiety.

"Mrs. Grant," she said, impulsively, "I want to talk to you. I have done a terrible thing. I've run away. You know about me from Eunice. My husband is drunk all the time. I can't stand it any longer, so I've left him... He can get a divorce now.... And then Peter and I will get married."

"Where is your baby?" Moira asked.

"I've left her, too. I couldn't take her. Is that an awful thing to do?"

Moira Grant caught her by the arm.

"Yes, it is—an awful thing! A baby needs her mother. Don't do it. A woman may leave her husband and still preserve her self-respect, but she can't desert her baby. It's not too late yet, dear Mrs. Bruce. Your baby needs you—get back to her—a baby needs her own mother. No one else will do. Poor little thing! Oh, don't be a quitter! You brought her into the world—now stand by her."

Mrs. Bruce pressed her hand and was lost in the crowd.

Moira Grant shut her eyes hard to keep back the tears. A light had shone around her in that moment. "Who am I?" she said to herself bitterly, "to call that woman or any woman a quitter? They need me more now than they ever did. I must stay with them; they're mine. If I can't sail the ship to safety I can at least go down with it."

The guard was calling the train for the north, but Moira did not hear him. She sprang up quickly, picked up her valise, and went out.

THE LADY JOSEPHINE PEARLS

Ambrosine's attendance at the theatre was one of those negative happenings that seem to have no meaning at all. Mrs. Loring, her mistress, had found a theatre ticket, tried to give it to two people who could not use it, and in desperation had given it to Ambrosine, her kitchen help, feeling that it wouldn't do her any harm, for she wouldn't know what it was about anyway. Ambrosine was grateful out of all proportion to the occasion, for favors or pleasant surprises like this had been the least of her life's portion.

The moment of enchantment began when she found her feet on the softly carpeted stairway and her hand on its heavy gold banister, and when she turned the sweeping bend and saw the stage in its lighted brilliance she leaned against the wall and breathed heavily. Then an usher piloted her to the seat in the dress balcony. For one dazzling moment she seemed to be suspended in air, and from then until the curtain went down on the last act, and the people around her were shuffling for their rubbers, while the orchestra played the national anthem, she knew nothing—that is, nothing of the drab life of Ambrosine Robins, in whose earthly tabernacle her soul had been dwelling.

When she found herself on the brightly lighted street she had to find the big clock on the Post-Office to learn her way back to Mrs. Loring's. The night was bright with moonlight and cold with the damp cold of spring, but Ambrosine's heart, ablaze with new emotions, warmed her thin body. She had a street-car ticket in her glove, but forgot to use it. Anyway, she had lost her fear of dark streets; for, having looked on life in the last two hours and found it good, there was nothing to fear from other human beings.

Ambrosine's first emotion was one of surging gladness. She was suffused with the joy that comes to one who has entered into a new inheritance. Though she knew she was a homely woman, thin and ungainly, with thick glasses, sallow skin, broken hair, and bunioned feet, not fitted for romance herself, still, like the boarding-house woman in the play, there was a place for her in the romance of others. Had not Mrs. Brown in the play helped Harold and Imogene to elope? Hadn't she stood between them and the anger of their relatives? And at last, in that scene of delirious joy when the two young lovers, united at last, had stood in the mellow moonlight locked in each other's arms, Mrs. Brown was there, the guardian angel of their tempestuous young lives. And how they loved her, and praised her, and blessed her!

Ambrosine hurried on; the habit of hurrying was ever upon her. Always there was someone waiting for her with impatience. Even yet she wakened at night thinking she heard her mother's imperious call; for Ambrosine had been the burden-bearer of a large and demanding family. She had been the one of the children who had stayed at home; and even now, when her family duties were at an end, she, after all her years of hard work, had to begin life over as a poorly paid,

harassed housekeeper for a moody and high-tempered old lady.

However, to-night in her new found release she stopped hurrying. She would loiter if she wanted to. The blue sky over the bare trees seemed to bend down to her; and the stars had a friendly twinkle. There was friendship and love in the world, even if a person were forty-two and the humblest of all workers. A resolve came to her: she would dress better, more like other people. She had a good figure, anyway, and would make more of it. She had fifteen dollars of her own, and she would turn it into clothes ... a navy blue dress with frills ... and in three months more she would have enough coupons from the laundry soap for the Lady Josephine pearls, which were given for fifty coupons and eleven cents in stamps to pay for the packing. A blue dress with shimmering pearls, and black slippers—her feet were too big for anything but black—would make a difference!

When she reached the corner where Mrs. Loring's house stood Ambrosine went quietly around to the back door, where the evergreens made a deep shade. Because of the moonlight night the street lamp on the corner was not lighted, and she had to grope her way to the steps.

Suddenly she stood still, though with no feeling of panic. Her groping hand had come in contact with the rough surface of a man's coat.

"Were you looking for someone?" she asked, quietly.

Out of the darkness came a young voice: "No, I certainly was not. I was wondering if I could get something to eat."

"Mrs. Loring never feeds anyone," said Ambrosine, in her even voice, "and though I have a key I am afraid I can't let you in. She is very frightened of strange men."

"I am not so much a strange man as a hungry one," said the voice. "I just came in from Vancouver on a freight, and I think it is about six months since I had a meal ... but I'll go on. It's awfully decent of you not to scream and threaten me with the police."

"I am not afraid," said Ambrosine; "I am not even afraid of Mrs. Loring."

She marvelled at herself when she said this.

"Sit down here, and I'll find you something."

"You're an angel," came from the lower step.

When Ambrosine let herself into the kitchen her radiant mood began to pale, for the house had its clutch on her again. The very smell of it, breathing ten thousand fears and cautions, rose up to accuse her. What was this terrible thing she had done? Unlocked the house and betrayed her trust! There might be a gang of them under the trees! She stood irresolute. If she turned on a light Mrs. Loring would be on her like a flash, for though she was very deaf she had the eye of a hawk.

Ambrosine went back to the door.

"Excuse me for locking the door," she said, politely. "It is not that I am afraid, but, you see, the house is not mine."

"O.K., lady. I've been locked out before, and in, too. I'll wait here."

She went upstairs and to her treasure chest, the oak box where her hard-won savings were kept, and all the gatherings of her barren years. She found the envelope; in it there were fifteen dollars, all in one-dollar bills.

She was out on the step again.

"Here is some money... I am afraid to feed you ... she would call the police, I know ... but this is mine and you are welcome... I know from your voice you are just a boy, and I am sorry for you. Maybe sometime you'll think of me kindly.

I am just a lonely woman, all by myself. No one cares anything about me. I'm glad to help you."

His hand closed over hers, excitedly.

"Angel, tell me your name. I'll send the money back as soon as I can, I promise you."

"Ambrosine," she said, "and the house is the corner of Fifth Avenue and Tenth Street. You can remember that."

"That's too long, that name of yours. I'll just address it to Angel. I'll get to Winnipeg now, where my girl is. She'll write to you, too. Good-bye, Angel. I'll not forget."

He was gone.

The next morning, on the front page, in black type, stood the news of ten daring robberies, committed between eleven-thirty and two o'clock. A gang of clever crooks had come in on the west train, and had broken into stores and houses, all in the west end. The robbers had not been caught, but were thought to be still in the City.

Three months went by. No letter had come, and Ambrosine began to lose faith in the pleasant voice that had spoken to her out of the darkness. Sometimes she bitterly mourned the navy blue dress with the frills that had gone glimmering on the tide of her generous but mistaken impulse. She thought of it today with a new stab of regret, for she now had enough soap coupons from the new box of laundry soap for the Lady Josephine pearls.

She went to her room with the new coupons in her hand to count them over before she sent them away, and shook the envelope in which the old ones were kept over the bed. With a cry she fell on her knees and peered through her thick glasses at what she saw. Fifteen one-dollar bills littered her white quilt!

As Ambrosine stared at them a choking feeling of guilt seized her. Her hands and feet grew cold as ice.

"And he called me 'Angel'," she whispered to herself, with a catch in her throat. "And he will never know—he will never know! He will think I——"

Downstairs Mrs. Loring was rapping her cane on the stairs.

AT THE NIGHT CLUB

They were looking out at the saffron glare upon the sky where, forty miles away, the waste gas from the oil wells burned itself idly away, making a perpetual sunrise on the black walls of the night. The sky was cloudy, with a threat of snow in the north wind, which had driven them indoors; and they, looking out of the southern windows, speculated on the amount of waste that was going on before their eyes. Below them, on the steel ribbons of trackage, trains came in with great smoke plumes lying back over their shoulders, and throngs of people came surging over the platforms, meeting friends and delaying the traffic with their greetings. "Red caps" staggered along under their armfuls of valises, and the miniature trucks loaded with baggage threaded their way carefully through the human swarm.

"Always somebody going away, somebody coming home," said the young man with a Scotch accent. "It's as good as a play to see from these windows the trains coming in and going out."

It was he who had brought his three companions to this pleasant place above the traffic. "The finest night club in the City," he had said, as he led the way up the two flights of stairs; "but it is an exclusive one; and there must be no undue

levity or unseemly behavior. Mind that, now." The four young men were soon comfortably placed, and their conversation presently turned to money.

"I don't see any sense in hoarding money," said the young man from Texas, who, in a leather coat and leggings, stood leaning beside one of the windows. "They tell me that one of the richest men in this City, who lives in a house of twenty-five rooms, can only take a glass of skim milk and a slice of brown bread for his breakfast, and pea-soup for lunch, and one soft-boiled egg and weak tea for dinner. I nearly cried when I heard that. And they say when he was a young fellow he was mighty mean and carried around a little bank to put his nickels in; and that he got his first start making tin cups out of old cans and selling them from door to door. He never got married, but he had an old lady keeping house for him; and he counted the eggs every night to be sure she wasn't eating too many. And think of him now sitting down alone to pea-soup with money in ten banks. It's an awful lesson to young fellows like us not to be too grasping, but to take a good time while we can. No one knows what the future will be."

His companion, the Scotch boy, shook his head.

"It's funny about money. I'm Scotch all right, but it never meant a thing to me; I could always make it and spend it, and have just as much fun one way as the other. I always had luck with me at the races; I could run my eye over a list of names and one name would seem to glitter. I can't explain it—never met anyone who could. It's just a gift. I could see one name in gold letters, and every time it was the winner all right. I remember one time I put all I had on Rambler Rose; she was a new horse, and the odds were long. But when the names were read out through the meg. Rambler Rose came first. I lived high then, I'll tell the world. It's a great feeling."

"Why did you ever quit?" asked the little fellow who had not spoken.

"It's no fun when you can win every time," said the racetrack wizard. "I went into oil then. Two of us owned one of them big wells down there whose flares you are looking at."

"I had a pretty good break with my oil stocks, too," said the pale young man, whose black hair fell over his forehead. "I was grubbing along in a shoe store, and that's the last job on earth, trying to make women wear the sort of shoes they ought to wear and like them. One day I had a sour old dame who wanted to wear fours on her number six feet, but just as I was getting to the place where I was going to tell her a few plain things Bill Evans dropped in. Bill motioned to me, so I stepped over to see what it was, and he said, 'Rick, can you dig up one hundred dollars?' and I said I could if I had to. So he told me the Home was about to blow in—his brother-in-law knew about it some way and had passed the word along. He knew where he could get me two hundred shares at fifty cents a share; the fellow that owned them had got into a jam. Bill says to me, 'I'll get them for you and hold them, for that's going to be the best well in the Valley.'"

"I'll bet you held them too long," said the Scotch boy.

"I'll bet I didn't. I sold at twenty-four dollars, solid green money, and I got a swell car and lived at the hotel then. I used to go into the shoe store sometimes and watch those other poor fish looking into sweaty shoes to find sizes...."

"I went out as an oil salesman," he went on, "and I certainly could sell. One woman sold her stove in the morning for twenty dollars. I bought stock for her and sold it before night, and she got back her stove and had twenty dollars in cash to the good. That was just chicken-feed, of course, but it got in the papers, and there was a lot of talk about it, and big sales sure came my way. I averaged a hundred dollars a day. Lots of people just gave me their money, and I bought and sold; they never saw their shares."

"That's the sort of business I like," said the little fellow, his eyes brightening. "I sure do hate the small stuff. I left the house I was with because they wanted a voucher for my expenses; and I was pulling down big money for them, too. I said to the old man, 'I'm going—in fact, I'm gone. You can't check me up on every ten-cent piece. I'm no jitney salesman.' And I heard afterwards he often wished he had me back. I met a fellow last week who said the old man said he never had a fellow who was so popular with the trade as I was. 'He was an independent young cuss,' he said, 'but boy! that lad could sell!' ... Oh, well, it was O.K. with me... I went over to his opposition and got a hundred dollars a month more! I certainly won't count nickels for anyone."

There was a heavy step at the door and a lantern shone in. Then came a voice, a policeman's voice. The lantern circled the room.

"Say, you fellows; you can't stay here. You've got to get out. That's the Company's orders. Come on, now. No back talk. If you had had the sense to keep your mouths shut I wouldn't have known you were here."

They came down the stairs and out into the night. It was beginning to snow.

TEN WORDS

The luxury of being alone, in her own house, with no one to cook for, speak to, or think of, flooded Mrs. Burke's heart with an ecstasy at once poignant and rapturous.

She lay in the hammock swung in her upstairs gun-room and watched the sunset, rose and amber, that flared over the mountains... For the first time in her life she could be idle without reproach or apprehension. It was not so much the deliverance from the daily grind that brought this exquisite happiness; it was the escape from people with their demands, their needs, their clamorous presence. She was even glad that Ralph, her youngest son, had gone away for his holidays; and now for two weeks the house was hers, and every hour of the twenty-four.

She thought of the thirty years that had gone, and the struggle she had had, and in this self-approving hour she gloried in the knowledge that she had done well... Her three boys were "on their own," well equipped for life; her house was paid for ... the reign of her boarders was ended.... She was a free woman, and still young enough to enjoy the freedom.

But the immediate cause of Mrs. Burke's great gladness lay in the new possession of a spare room, the dainty mauve and rose retreat that opened on the sun-porch, the walls of which, all violet-sprinkled, she could see from where she lay. Since her boarders had gone, a month ago, she had remodelled the whole upstairs, papering, painting, making curtains and cushions and covers; and now the entire house was in a state of completeness that it had never known before. The last workman had gone that afternoon, with his money in his hand, and it was then she locked the doors and came upstairs to the hammock to let her soul expand in a great exaltation. She had watched the sun go down behind the mountains and the long blue shadows come down over the valley. Then the stars came out mistily, and the street lights ran like strings of gold beads up the hills.....

"Now I have time to stop and stare," she quoted happily, "unhaunted by ugly ghosts of unwashed dishes or unmade beds. It's a beautiful old world, and I am glad I am in it."

A library book, a new one, lay on the table beside her, but she had no desire to read. No story could be more thrilling than her own... She would join the Literary Club, and go to the Current Events Classes, and have a tea, and a luncheon; she would pick up the threads of life; and maybe after a while she would take a teacher or one of the newspaper girls—a young girl would be good company ...

When the room grew dark a good wholesome hunger seized her, and she went down to the re-modelled kitchen, very trim and smart in its new linoleum and frilly curtains, and fried two pork chops and opened a can of corn—rejoicing over her freedom again. No longer had she to think of dyspeptic boarders with their many inhibitions. Meatless menus, calories, blood-pressure, acidity, gastritis—she was done with them—they had passed out with her four over-weights. She sang as she set the table.

Suddenly the door-bell rang with a loud clanging. She must muffle the bell, she thought, as she went to the door. It was too strong for a quiet house.

A boy handed her a telegram. A sense of dread came to her, and her radiant mood faded.

"Dearest Mother," she read under the hall light, "this wire will surprise you—but something wonderful has come into my life. I have met a glorious girl, and we are going to be married (stop) I know you will love her (stop) We will be home on Friday. There is just one point of difference, and I know you will help me in that (stop) She has strong views on the subject of coming in to live with her mother-in-law. Could you go and visit somewhere for a while? She doesn't know how easy you are to live with, or she wouldn't feel this way (stop) I know you'll help me as you have done all your life. Wire reply tomorrow.—RALPH."

Mechanically she set away the pork chops untouched; put the bread back in the tin box; wrote a note for the milkman—she would not need anything. Then she walked upstairs, heavily, wearily, her bad knee aching like a bad tooth; the telegram in the pocket of her apron... Ralph had asked her to get out, to make way for this girl whom he had known only a few days ... get out of the house that she had paid for, bit by bit. Ralph had asked that!

She sat on the edge of her bed in the dark and held her head in her hands.

"He has known the girl less than two weeks... Well, I won't do it... I have worked all my life for this, and I won't give it up... Even a cat will fight for its haymow... I can get back my four old men ... three meals a day three hundred and sixty-five days in the year... What a fool I was to believe that my release had come! And yet, a little selfish, maybe, but that was my fault... He never had to do anything for me... I took the brunt. This girl has bewitched him ... some red-lipped hussy with plucked eyebrows... Why couldn't he have written all that?... Two pages of a telegram!"

She lay down without dressing, wrapping the eiderdown around her. A wind had sprung up, and mourned wistfully around the eaves. The doorbell rang again, a violent ring, maybe another wire.

She went downstairs and received it.

"There will be no answer," she said to the boy. The house was cold now, with something sinister in its silence. Under the hall light she read: "Ralph's wire went without my knowledge. Disregard it. Letter follows. MARY."

Mrs. Burke read it again, and a sudden hope came to her. At least it was business-like—just ten words. And somehow it sounded dependable. Mary is a sensible name, too—Mary! She went back to the kitchen and heated up the pork chops.

The next day Mary's letter came.

"This son of yours is a nice boy, and I hope to marry him some time; but that wire of his to you nearly finished him with me. I can see you've been too good to him, and he presumes on it. But he'll learn a lot in the next few years if he marries me. He has told me all about the boarders, and how good you have been, and how you have been doing the house over; and I'm sure it is just beautiful. I'd love to see that spare room in mauve and rose, with the few touches of black, and the oval rug in front of the dressing-table—I told him you must have your house to yourself after all your years of hard work. Men do not understand just what a home means to a woman; but we know. And he really thought it would be all right for us to walk in, like two pirates, and take your house?"

"I work in a bank here, and I can get a transfer—I want to place Ralph under observation for a year at least. I suspect traces of selfishness, but that can be treated for. Don't worry any more now, dear Mrs. Burke, will you? Lovingly, MARY."

Ten words went back to Mary: "Observation at close range approved. Mauve and rose room ready. KATE BURKE."

HIS LAST PROMISE

The monthly ceremonial at the home of Mrs. Ellen Bell was about to take place, and the whole family was gathered in the combination kitchen and living-room to witness the simple act which to them meant that another milestone had been safely passed.

A calendar hung over the table, bearing the record of the month of December, with a colored picture above depicting a cosy fireside scene, with the father reading out of a large book to three curly-haired children while the mother knitted a bright red cap and a cat lay asleep on the hearthrug.

Mrs. Bell addressed her three curly-headed children, who stood at attention.

"Abbie Bell, George Bell and Ross Bell," she said, solemnly, "look again at this picture. That's the kind of a home we should have had, and would have had if your father had stayed and helped us. But he had the wandering foot, and he had the roving eye, and when times got hard and you children came on pretty fast he sold the house over my head, took the money and left us—may he never darken our doors again! I cried my eyes out, for I just felt I couldn't give him up, and if he came back this minute I might be soft enough to take him in and believe his promises, though he never kept one in his life that I know of. But he had a way with him, and a finer-looking man I never saw, and he had the manners of a prince, even when he was drunk. Now he's been gone six years and eleven months, and if, by the mercy of God, he stays away another month, he will be declared dead by the Court, and we will get the Mother's Allowance. And with what I can earn we'll be able to manage, and there will be a little sleigh for you boys, and music lessons for you, Abbie. The hope of this has kept me alive all these hard years, and it's only a month away now. Thank God for all His mercies!... And now," kissing them all, "I must go, dears. There's enough soup to do you at noon. Boil three eggs, Abbie; and there's plenty of bread. I won't be home until six o'clock, but I'll bring something nice for supper."

The two lads were soon washed and brushed, and Abbie Bell, aged ten, sent them on their way to the little school, which stood box-like and bald on the edge of the prairie town. Then she set the house in order, and had just dressed herself in her new plaid dress and put the bright red ribbon on her dark, curly hair when a loud knock sounded on the door. Abbie's heart missed a beat! Who could be coming so early? Could it be that the dreaded moment had come?

She opened the door. A shabbily dressed man stood before her. He took off his hat and asked: "Does Mrs. Abner Bell live here?"

"Mrs. Ellen Bell is my mother's name," said Abbie. She tried to keep her voice steady. "Will—you—come in?"

"Just for a moment," he said, "if I may. I bring a message to Mrs. Bell from her husband. He is a friend of mine."

"If you could tell her he was dead it would be good news," said Abbie, honestly; "but if it's anything else I think it would kill her. You see, the time will be up in a month, when we can get the pension, and she's been afraid he would come back. It's been on her mind night and day."

"Do you remember him at all?" he asked, after a pause.

"I remember my mother crying about him and looking for him to come back. I was three when he left."

"There are two other children," he said, "boys, I believe."

She nodded.

"Do you know why he left us?" asked Abbie, eagerly. "I'd like to know that. Mother says she could forgive him for leaving her.... But a man that leaves his children should never be forgiven."

"He was a fool, a big, crazy fool," said the man, "fond of dancing and music and liquor, and not any too fond of work... Thought he could start an orchestra. But I want you to tell your mother one thing. When he sold the farm he sent her all the money except a hundred dollars he needed to take him to the States. He gave it to her cousin Bill Smith to give to her; and he often wondered if she got it."

"She didn't get a cent," said Abbie; "I know that! Why didn't he bring it himself and tell her he wanted to go? He

never would face anything disagreeable, that was his greatest fault."

"He thought he'd get rich and send for you all. He always had big plans. I'm telling you the truth, Abbie; he didn't mean to desert. You see, I know your name.... What does your mother think about him now, Abbie?—would she want to hear about him?"

Abbie hesitated. She could see a wistfulness in the man's eyes that prompted her to soften her answer.

"She said this morning, when she tore off the month, that she hoped he was dead, for she knew if he came back hungry and cold and asked her to take him back she would be soft enough to do it. He was always good on making promises, but he never kept them. And then she'd never get the pension; and he'd break her heart all over again, for he hadn't the backbone to keep straight. And he never kept his word, never once—that's what she said.... I don't know. I am awful sorry for him... I wish he had stayed with us. It's hard having no father; all the children at school have them. Mother says he would have been like the man in the picture over there. She says he'd be even nicer than that man if he had been a good man. She says he had the manners of a prince."

There was a long pause.

"Mother won't be back until six o'clock," Abbie resumed. "She works five days a week, and she's always pretty tired when she comes home. It would only make her cry to hear about him."

"Don't you remember him at all, Abbie?" he asked again.

"I remember waking up at night and hearing him and Mother quarreling. I put the bedclothes over my head so I couldn't hear. And I remember he gave me a little tin horse once. I have it yet. It came apart, and I pretended it was two horses. The boys don't remember. Ross was born a month after he left.... I'd like to see him, though. I believe I would know him. Could I see him, do you think?"

He did not answer her.

"You think sure your mother would be pleased if she could be certain he was dead? It would make it easier for her—now?"

Abbie nodded.

"Well, I can give her that assurance. Abner Bell is dead. I was with him when he died; and he wanted your mother to know that he was sorry, and that he wished her well, and hoped none of the children would take after him."

"But they do," said Abbie, quickly. "We all have curly hair, and the two boys are the best singers in the school. George got a prize; and they both sing at concerts."

He didn't speak, but Abbie noticed his chin was trembling.

"Some nights Mother can't sleep, wondering if he's cold, or hungry, or in jail. She'll feel better now when I tell her. Would you write it down?"

"No, you just tell her; that will do."

He rose to go.

"Good-bye, Abbie," he said, putting out his hand.

"Good-bye," said Abbie; "it was good of you to come and tell us. Mother says Father's friends were no help to him, but I am sure she would like you."

He held her hand for a minute.

"Abbie," he said, "there's a story about a fellow named Sidney Carton, who wasn't much good while he was alive—a sort of rough-neck and a drunkard—but there was good in him, too. You'll read it some day. Your father was something like him."

That afternoon, twenty miles away, an unknown man was killed on the track. He had been riding on the freight, and apparently had fallen off. There were no papers or letters in his pockets, and no other way of identifying him.

HOW LITTLE WE KNOW

Many ladies in Waverley Crescent employ Mrs. Dane when they entertain. She is such a pleasant and capable little thing in her blue house dress, and, anyway, they are sorry for her, for her husband was disabled in an accident years ago and will never walk again. One of her employers, speaking with the authority of a doctor's wife, says the man is likely to live twenty years; and, after hearing that, the ladies of the Crescent are still more sorry for Mrs. Dane.

Making sandwiches on the kitchen table in the palatial home of the Wescotts, Mrs. Dane could not help but hear the quarrel going on in the dining-room. She shook her head in grave concern as the voices mounted higher, and a grieved look came into her quiet eyes.

"This is my wedding," cried Ethel, with a hint of tears, "and I think I should be able to choose my guests! I wouldn't mind having Ed Hibbard, only you know well enough Dad will have a fit when he sees him. You know that, Dot, and Ed knows it. It will spoil everything, and we've got to get it settled. I'll explain it to Ed; I should think he'd know enough to stay away."

"You'll do nothing of the kind!" cried Dot, the younger sister, in a shrill voice. "Ed is invited, and he is coming. I have some rights in this house, too! It's nothing new for Dad to dislike my friends; it's a principle with him; he is never so happy as when he's in a towering rage over something, and my friends are as good as anything else to rage over. Our dear parent loves to do the heavy father."

Mrs. Wescott intervened.

"You should not talk about your father like that, Dorothy. He has done everything for you—and for both of you. No two girls in the City have more than you. He denies you nothing."

"Except the right to choose our own friends," said Ethel. "I am in a hurry to marry Pete before Dad finds out he has a police record, or another wife, or something... Though I will admit he is right this time about Ed Hibbard, and you know it, Dot, but you are just holding out to be mean. You don't care anything about him—you couldn't!"

"How do you know?" Dot came back. "You're Dad all over again, mind-reader, prophet, efficiency expert, dictator. Well, I won't argue—I've learned that much wisdom—but either he comes or I will not be here either. You can get another bride'smaid. But it may look a little odd if I am not even at the wedding. But there's the ultimatum."

Mrs. Wescott began to cry quietly. Her family had gone quite beyond her.

"I'll be glad when it's over," she said between sobs. "There's been nothing but trouble since the wedding was announced, and sometimes I think you will drive me crazy. I try to keep peace, but no one cares for anything but their own way."

"You've let Dad away with too much, Mother," said Ethel, unmoved by the tears. Their quarrels always ended this way.

"A man has some rights in his own house, surely," said Mrs. Wescott. "I can't make him like Ed Hibbard. He detests him, and he won't have him. Can't you see that? I can't change him." Mrs. Wescott's voice was worn and scratchy, like an

old record.

"You won't need to, Mother; I am going out of town until the happy event is over.... No, I won't be here today for the trousseau tea. Make what ever excuse you like, Mother. Tell them I'm dead if you like."

"But your dress and everything! What will Madame Shubert think? She's 'phoned twice to-day for you to come and have a fitting. You surely won't leave your sister like this?"

"I'm gone," said Dot.

Mrs. Wescott came out to the kitchen; the high ceilinged, bright kitchen, where a green and white stove, and a green and white refrigerator stood on a green and white tiled floor, and a flower bloomed in each muslin-curtained window. She was a pale woman, with a lined face and tired eyes, and a mouth that had sagged a little with its heavy load of life's grievings. She walked over to the window, clasping and unclasping her hands.

"I think I will help you, Mrs. Dane," she said. "I must employ my hands or I will go crazy...."

Mrs. Dane set a chair for her at the table. "I will be glad to have you do the cutting for me, Mrs. Wescott," she said. "You always had a good hand for sandwiches. I remember the pretty ones we had for the Valentine tea, with the little red hearts. It was your idea; and I never saw anything so dainty."

"I am glad someone thinks I am good for something. My family certainly do not. Mr. Wescott blames me for the girls being so stubborn, and they blame me for not being able to hold him down.... Jerry took his dad's car last night—his own is getting fixed—and he had an accident; and now Mr. Wescott can't get the insurance because Jerry has had so many accidents and he was not supposed to drive any car but his own. There was a terrible scene this morning. Mrs. Dane, life is too complex, with all this clash of personalities, isn't it?... But, dear me, I should not be unloading my worries on you—you have plenty of your own. How is Mr. Dane?"

Mrs. Dane's hands flew on the sandwiches.

"Indeed, he's quite wonderful;... he can get about so well in his chair." She changed the subject. "What are you going to wear yourself at the wedding?" she asked. "I always like you in that dress of smoky blue that matches your eyes. It makes me think of asters on the hills; and that dress of yours with the silver lace that you wore at the luncheon makes you look like a queen in a book. Your girls are lovely and smart, and all that, but they can't touch you for looks."

Mrs. Wescott smiled her bleak little tired smile. It lightened her face like a burst of winter sunshine that lingers a moment and then is gone.

"Mrs. Dane, my dear, good friend, you are the only one who ever pays me compliments. You have a sweet soul, and that makes you see beauty where there is nothing but dead leaves. How does it happen you are always so cheerful? You work hard and have a heavy load to carry."

"Carrying a load never hurt anyone," said Mrs. Dane.

That night Mrs. Dane told Mr. Dane about it when they sat down to supper on the oilcloth-covered table in their one room.

"If ever I felt sorry for anyone it's for that dear woman, and her so gentle and kind, but driven this way and that by the other four. I wanted to tell her today how happy we are; but there's some things a person can't talk of... Did Mr. Bruce look in on you today?"

"He did indeed, and stayed an hour with me, and brought me two books. He's going to preach on Russia, and he wants me to give him the theme of them. I'll have a good go at them tomorrow, but I want to read you a lovely story tonight, about two people just like us. It came in a magazine today. It is a heart-warming story, and you need something

pleasant after your day's work. Two ladies 'phoned for you, Sally, and want you to help at teas. One woman said she couldn't think of having tea without you."

"Did she, now? Was that Mrs. Hinds? I thought she'd be having something before Lent.... That will be nice. I love her house, with its black and white and crimson sun-room.... These potatoes are lovely, Dave. You do know just how to season them. Mrs. Wescott wanted me to stay for dinner, but I knew a place where a better meal was waiting for me—and company besides—the best in the world! We may not have much around us, Dave, in the way of silver or mahogany, but we've always had good talk, and good talk furnishes any room.... I am so happy over the doctor's last report that nothing matters now so long as I have you, dear."

Across the narrow table they clasped hands and smiled; and above their heads, in his little cage, a yellow bird swung on his perch and sang a song of love unconquerable and full of glory.

THE HIGH HAT

When Clem Hastings discovered that his wife, Jean, sang when she was cross about something, it made him angry out of all proportion to the offence.

"When you're cross you should rattle the stove, or slam doors, or break a dish or two, but to sing sounds nutty. It's always a mistake to cross your signals," he had said, and left her to think it over.

It was a dull morning in April, when the snow had gone, leaving a drab landscape, muddy, littered and forlorn, behind it. Jean Hastings, looking out of the small window above the kitchen table, saw nothing that brought any comfort to her. Her father-in-law's big red brick house looked down upon her from the knoll across the road, and it had never repulsed her more than on this dreary day, when she and Clem had had their first quarrel. She had known that Clem's mother had never forgiven her for taking Clem away from the sallow-skinned Mary Bryan who lived on the next farm, but she always had felt so sure of Clem until this day, when he suddenly had lost his temper and had gone out slamming the door.

The big brick house across the road, with its dull gray varanda, its muddy yard in which the pigs wallowed, its broken and sagging front steps that were never used, stood for all the things she hated.... And she had had such plans for this neighborhood, too, when she came here, a bride, a year ago. She would start a woman's club, and a home and garden improvement society. She would get them to subscribe for magazines, and lead them to a love of poetry and good furniture.... But now she had to confess that everything had ended in failure. Beginning with Clem's mother, the women were suspicious of her, and resented every suggestion she had made.

The quarrel had begun when Jean had said she was not going to go to the Institute meetings any more. All they talked about was house-cleaning and pickling and quilt-making. They never discussed a book, or anything that had any cultural value, and never had any suggestions for improving their way of living. In spite of their money, she had said, the standard of living in the neighborhood was low; bare floors, oilcloth-covered tables, ironstone dishes, hired men, sweaty and unwashed, reeking of the stable. She wondered why they went on year in and year out without improvement.

It was there that Clem had interrupted her.

"That's why you have not fitted in here, Jean," he had said. "You have gone around with your eyebrows lifted; you have high-hatted all the women, my mother included, and you have made them so sore that they wouldn't do anything now that would be likely to please you. My mother has been hurt many a time by your high-handed ways, but she has never said a word, even to me. She wouldn't do that, but I have seen it. She may eat with hired men on an oilcloth, but she's too loyal to criticize you."

"Why, Clem," said Jean, in surprise, "you often have said you wished your people would fix up their house and take

more comfort. You said your mother spent her days like a slave, and you wished she would read more and leave those endless quilts alone. I said nothing more than you have said, did I?"

"Maybe not," said Clem, hotly, "but you said it in a different way. Anyway, they are my people, and I love them. I can criticize them if I want to, but I am not going to listen to you, for to you my father and mother are very ordinary, unintelligent people, quite devoid of culture as you understand it, miles below you in the social scale."

Clem was standing at the door when he spoke; a handsome young fellow in his overalls. His fine blue eyes were dark with indignation. Jean had a generous impulse to go over to him and tell him they were her people, too, but a perverse spirit prevented her. Turning her back, she walked away, unconsciously humming a tuneless air.

She watched him hitching up his team and going out to his work, and a sense of frustration assailed her. She had failed, and she knew it. Clem knew it, too. Evidently he had been turning it over in his mind.

"They'll never change," she said to herself, "and if I stay I will have to grow like them. I wish Mary Bryan were here in my place at this moment, and I was still teaching at Mid-Valley. Clem said it was a mistake to cross one's signals, so I won't do that again."

When Clem came in at noon there was a note on the table in Jean's clear handwriting.

"I am sorry, Clem," she wrote, "that we had this quarrel, and I am not leaving you—I'm going to the city only for a few days to see Mother. I want to think things over. I got a chance of a ride. Don't say a word to anyone, Clem.—JEAN."

When Jean arrived at her mother's house, unexpected, she found her mother ready to go out.

"Oh, Jean, I am glad to see you! If ever I needed support it is now," she said. "Come in and freshen up a bit. I am invited to Mrs. Spicer's reception, and I wish I did not have to go. Hurry now! I'll tell you about it as we go..."

"Phil goes around with Mollie Spicer, and I am worried about it. She's not our sort, Jean. She is too modern for me—plays cards on Sunday—you know the type—wears very few clothes, and never goes to church—talks of mid-Victorian taboos. Phil asked me to have her for tea one Sunday afternoon, and I had everything as nice as I could, and even got new curtains for the dining-room—but I couldn't find any common ground with her at all. She's the thinnest little sliver you could see, and has no enthusiasms. I will be glad when this reception is over; these people make me feel so awkward, somehow."

"Don't worry, Mother," Jean said, re-assuringly; "your new dress is lovely. A good dress brings great moral support."

"I need it," said Mrs. Boss.

They were admitted by a maid in uniform, and shown into a cloak-room off the hall, where they left their wraps.

"I am afraid my dress is wrinkled," Jean said.

Mrs. Spicer received her guests at the door of the long drawing-room—a stately woman, in a silver cloth dress, with an air of weariness and rather an icy smile. Jean became suddenly conscious that her hat was a last year's one, and that she should have left on her gloves. Mrs. Ross introduced Jean with the explanation, "I took the liberty of bringing my daughter, who lives in the country and who came in unexpectedly to-day."

Mrs. Spicer's smile wavered and grew even frostier, and in that moment Jean knew that she and her mother had taken a liberty. She had not been invited. Mrs. Spicer would definitely index her family now. Her knees weakened.... She had had a dream once, a terrible dream of being all dressed up at a concert, singing, and suddenly discovering that she was barefooted.... Someone was asking them to come to the dining-room. Jean tried to recover her composure, but it was gone. Her hands felt red and awkward, and she was sure she was toeing in. She had only one desire now—to get out of the house before she stepped on someone's corn, or spilt her tea, or broke a vase.

When they reached the street Jean breathed a sigh of relief.

"I wonder how it is," she said, "that, without saying a word, that woman made me feel like a social-climber, a shop-lifter and a house-breaker, all in one flash? I never felt so mean in my life, and she did it all by lowering her smile for the nth part of a second."

She stopped suddenly.

"Did you forget something?" her mother asked, anxiously. "I hope we won't have to go back."

"Oh, no," said Jean, "I was just thinking."

That night Jean called Clem on the 'phone.

"Oh, Clem," she began,.... "I want you to do something. Can you come in for me?... That's good. Come tomorrow morning and bring your mother. My mother is making a quilt, but it's not nearly so pretty as that sunflower pattern of your mother's. Ask her to come and get my mother going on the sunflowers in yellow, brown and green. Will you?... Thank you, Clem. Good-bye till tomorrow."

WHEN NO ONE NEEDS YOU

"A woman never bothers much with her own meals," mused Martha Means, as she sat at her porcelain-covered kitchen table and cut the top off a soft-boiled egg. "Now, this is a pretty pallid layout for a woman who has won cooking prizes to offer herself at the close of the day. I suppose if I go on living alone I will get to be a queer-looking little thing with wrinkled skin and black heart, like an apple forgotten in the bottom of the barrel. I am heading that way now, eating a mean little meal on a bare table—and talking to myself."

Martha Means, the eldest of seven, had educated and looked after all the members of her family, and when the last boy had started in business for himself she had rented the old home farm and bought a model bungalow in the City, and there settled down to enjoy the fruits of her hard labor.

But the venture was developing strangely, and she was not so happy as she had expected to be. The days were long and empty; the nights silent, and rather terrifying. Not that Martha Means was timid, but she was so utterly, heart-breakingly lonely!

When she finished her meal and had set away the dishes in the glass-doored cupboard, she went into her small living-room and sat, like a stranger, on the durable tan and brown chesterfield, and tried to recapture some of the ecstasy she had hoped would be hers when she left the farm.

"It feels like a warehouse," she said to herself, miserably. "These things do not feel a bit like mine, even though I paid for them. The old rocking-chair in the kitchen at home, with the log-cabin cushion on it, was always coaxing me to sit down, but these——! Even the fireplace is a staring thing—it takes two, at least, to sit by a fire—I have found that out. And I was so glad to be done with the farm and all the hard work. I said I wouldn't even keep a bird, for I did not want to be tied down. I wish I had something to do that had to be done—I've been on the treadmill so long I can't stop all at once."

When she went to bed that night in the square bedroom off the living-room there seemed to be no reason for sleeping. Having done nothing all day, she was not tired. Through the open window she could hear the women on the street calling in their children for the night, and setting out the milk-bottles. From nearby came whistling for a dog, then the shrill voices of friends arriving in a car across the street, and the blare of a radio throatily singing "My Blue

Heaven."

Martha was feeling low in her mind to-night because all her plans to launch herself in society had ended in bitter failure, and she knew that the fault was her own. When she went to church she had hurried away, giving no one a chance to speak to her; even in the store at the corner, where she got her supplies, she transacted her business as quickly as she could, oppressed by the young man's darting efficiency. The country-woman's shyness had walled her off from her fellowmen.

"You can't teach an old dog new tricks," she said to herself, sadly, and then suddenly and without the slightest warning Martha Means began to cry.... It was so terrible to come to a place in life where no one needed her and no one would miss her if she were dead! The milkman would notice that no one had removed the bottles, and would stop coming; the man who reads the meter might report the house empty—that would be all.....

She heard the patter of spring rain on her tapestry shingles, and somehow it comforted her. There would be a quickening of the soil, she thought, and grass for the cattle. She loved the springtime on the farm, when the night winds whispered in the leaves outside her windows, and every day new shoots came in her garden; while a great, glorious day's work awaited her at every sunrising.

But here—here she was not even living in this ready-made house; she was only an inmate. The world ran past her door, but it was a self-sufficient, hard world, that did not know her or need her.

In the early morning, when Martha wakened, a resolve formed in her mind. She would get out of the house; she would throw aside her shyness, if it killed her. It would be better to be held up and robbed or kidnapped than to die a lingering death of loneliness. She locked her house and went rapidly down the deserted street, a resolute figure in the chill dawn. She knew where she was going—to the station to see the five o'clock train come in—the train from home. She might see someone.

The City, newly washed by the night's rain, lay sweet and clean below her, and the air in her nostrils had the tang of good brown earth broken for the seed. Her spirits rose. She liked the City when there were no people to be seen.

At the station the new sign "Lunch," in red letters that gleamed in the misty dawn, drew her eyes. A cup of coffee would hearten her after her walk, and the train was not due yet. She sat on a round stool and watched the night-waitress draw the golden liquid from a huge white urn.

She was a slim girl, with a pale face and burning eyes; but her hand, when it chanced to touch Martha's, had a coldness that made her start. Martha's shyness left her in a flash.

"You are tired and sick," she said, "aren't you?"

The girl's face began to quiver.

"I am—not very well—but it will soon be six o'clock, and we change then.... I must not give up; jobs are scarce, and I was out for two years. I've only been here a week, and I haven't been paid yet. I came in from the country to get work. I got fed up, but I wish I was back. The farm is a good place if we only knew it."

Martha Means' mind acted quickly.

"Here, give me your white apron, and go over to the seat there and wrap yourself in my coat; it is nice and warm. I can hand out coffee and doughnuts as well as anyone. Will you have a cup of coffee first?... That's right!"

When six o'clock arrived, and the other girl came on, Martha explained to her what had happened.

"She's a friend of mine, and I am taking her home with me,... so you tell your boss she won't be back... Where can I get a taxi?"

When Martha got her young friend to bed in the other square room, and had set the porridge to cook in the double-

boiler for breakfast, the sun was just beginning to gild the tops of the houses farther up the hill.

"Now, drink your orange-juice, dear, and then I'll bring you your porridge. And you are to have a good long sleep; and then we can talk."

Martha stepped softly lest she disturb the sleeper in the back room. The emptiness had gone from the model bungalow.

At nine o'clock the postman rang her bell and dropped a letter through the door. Martha seized it eagerly. It was from Mrs. Snider, her neighbor on the farm.

"Dear Martha," it began, "I certainly can't tell you how we have all missed you, and it looks like you should come back. The people you rented to are not shaping up well. They say they ain't going to put in any crop—only what they need for feed—because when you get out your share there won't be much left with prices gone to pieces the way they are. They are bone lazy, that's all; real renters, Martha. The only one of them that's any good is the girl—she's the step-daughter. She got fed up with them and went into the City, and is at the lunch-counter in the station. Bill saw her there last week. You might look her up; she's a good girl all right, but not very strong. Mind you, Martha, they won't even put the seed-wheat through the fanning-mill. I wish you would come out and see for yourself that the old farm needs you, and so do we all. Your old friend,

JANE SNIDER.

Martha Means wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron. Her world had grown suddenly alive and glorious. She was needed. The old farm was calling!

BACKGROUND

They were gone! The Doctor and his bride! Their silver ship, climbing the stairless aisles of the night, was fading from sight in the midnight blue, and all Meadows, assembled and waving their hats and handkerchiefs, forgot to cheer in the sheer beauty and wonder of the flight.

Mrs. Porter and Mrs. Peers, standing together, held each other's hands in their excitement.

"I think this is the right time to use the word 'stupendous'," said Mrs. Peers, "for certainly this wedding has left me in a stupor. It has been so lovely and so quaint, so dignified, and everything. Beauty like this hurts a little."

"I'll bet it hurts the Doctor's bank account, for, of course, he paid everything," said practical Mrs. Porter, turning toward her car.

Too excited to sleep, the four principals who had helped the Doctor carry out his plans assembled at Mrs. Porter's to recapture in glowing words the events of this wonderful day. They had sent their families home to go to bed.

"I think the idea rolled up bigger and bigger, like a snowball," said Mrs. Peers, "for that first day, when the Doctor asked the four of us to come to his office, he merely asked us to help him with the flowers at the church and the reception. Did you ever see anyone so radiantly happy as he was? He was bubbling over with joy. It did my heart good to see him, for life is hard on a country doctor, or any doctor who is as tender-hearted as Peter Hawling. 'To think that lovely girl is willing to marry me,' he said, 'a grizzled old boy like me, forty years old.'"

"I think he is a good catch for any girl," said Mrs. Porter, "he has a nice house, a great practice, and the good-will of the whole countryside. And what is she but an unknown little country school teacher—pretty enough, I'll admit, but the world is full of pretty girls."

"Yes, of course," said Mrs. Peers, "but isn't it lovely to see him so satisfied and happy? He didn't marry her for her pretty face—he is too wise a fellow for that; he sees the beauty of her mind, her grace and tact and kindness. I do not pretend to know her very well, but I loved her at sight."

"Well, I didn't," said Mrs. Porter, stoutly. "She seemed a bit insipid to me—much like a chip in porridge, neither good nor bad. But I was glad to strip my garden to the last flower for the Doctor's sake—and we'll see how she wears when they come back. Personally, I think the fuss that was made over her may have turned her head a little."

"Weren't the flowers the loveliest sight? And you certainly arranged that bank of sweet peas neatly, Mrs. Porter, with the monk's-hood and dephinium standing so majestically over them; it made the most wonderful gateway for the bride and groom. I can see them when I shut my eyes, Evelyn in her dotted muslin dress and her hat of flowers. She looked like a lily herself."

This was from Mrs. Dykes, the druggist's wife.

"The band playing outside the church when the wedding party drove up was something I never saw or heard before," said Mrs. Gray, "but it was the Doctor's idea to let everyone share in his joy, and he knew everyone couldn't get into the church; and that strip of red velvet carpet up the church steps certainly gave a touch of splendor. I am sure it must have given Evelyn Brent a thrill to walk into that crowded church carrying fifteen dollars' worth of roses—knowing all this display was for her. I don't know that I like a wedding to be such a public affair—and such an expensive one. Of course, the flowers, bouquets and everything went to the hospital, and every sick person in town got some of them, with a nice card signed, 'Peter and Evelyn Hawling'—that was very thoughtful—but the whole thing is all over so soon."

Mrs. Gray was wrong just there. It was not over. It was not nearly over.

At the end of two months, when the Doctor and Evelyn returned from their trip and settled down in their modest house on the Avenue, there were faint murmurings, hardly audible at first, discreetly, furtively uttered, muffled whispers behind hands, and heads shaken ominously over the bride. It was a very queer thing, but she had not acknowledged her wedding presents!

When this was talked about other aspects of the wedding were remembered, and brought forward as collateral evidence. It was Mrs. Porter, who felt she had every right to be annoyed after all she had done, as well as having given a very handsome lamp, who pointed out that the bride's family at the wedding had looked very queer and uncomfortable—her brothers in blue suits, pink shirts, tan boots, ready-to-wear ties clipped on and riding high on their collars; and her father and stepmother appeared ill at ease—rather common people, no doubt—and, of course, it would have been in much better taste for them to have been married quietly at home. Really, so much display, high stepping, and cloud-clapping was inherently vulgar; and now Evelyn's neglect to acknowledge her presents simply revealed the ugly fact that she was not well bred at all! What could you expect from a girl with no background?

Someone contributed additional evidence on the matter of Evelyn's background. She had worked for her board in Dauphin when she went to school. The Brent family had once been so poor the Institute had supplied them with clothing. No wonder her new position had gone to her head!

Mrs. Porter said someone should teach her a lesson. Gentle Mrs. Peers was of the opinion that someone should speak to her in all kindness. Mrs. Porter opposed this strongly, and, being a forceful woman, carried her point. It was so much easier to agree with Mrs. Porter than to argue with her.

The tongues grew louder and bolder, and the Doctor's young wife could feel that she was being criticized. She became self-conscious, nervous, unhappy. The Doctor, to his utter amazement, was now met with cold looks and averted faces.

The matter reached a climax in October, when a celebrated singer, Mrs. Porter's cousin, came to Meadows and gave a concert in the Town Hall, with a reception afterwards at Mrs. Porter's, to which the Doctor and his wife were not invited.

Evelyn Hawling stood at her bedroom window and watched the people arriving at Mrs. Porter's front door.

Everyone, it seemed, everyone! Fortunately the Doctor had been called out. Maybe he would not know about it. Oh! how had she failed so terribly—if they would only tell her. Her mind went around and around in the same sore circle.

In Mrs. Porter's dining-room, where the shaded candles shed a rosy glow on the lace-covered table, painting the faces of the guests with a ruddier hue, Madame Zavier was speaking, in that resonant voice of hers that carried like the notes of a cornet over the waves of conversation.

"Sadie," she said to her cousin, who sat at the head of the table, "do tell me about that lovely woman, the young thing who married the doctor here. I must see her. Is she here? I met them in Toronto. We were at the same hotel, and she and I saw a lot of each other; she told me all about the wedding, and how kind you had all been. She said she thought you were trying to make it up to her that she had lost her own dear mother when she was such a little thing. Didn't you love the letters she wrote to you? I remember the one she sent you, Sadie. I thought it was so sweet when she said she wanted you to advise her as a mother would. Her heart was simply overflowing with gratitude. I thought she was unique as a bride, to sit in her room writing letters acknowledging presents on her honeymoon.

"I remember very well, Sadie, what a trouble your poor mother had in making you write your letters; but this dear Evelyn had brought all her cards with her, and remembered everything that had been given her. She sent them all in the same mail, and by air mail. She thought the red and white envelopes and pretty stamps made the letters seem a little more important and joyous. She is surely a precious lamb, and I hope the winds of life may never blow cold on her! I wondered about her letters when I read, two days later, about a mail plane crashing somewhere in the West. I am so anxious to see her!.... With cream and sugar, please, and in a big cup. I am always so thirsty after I sing! What's the matter, Sadie? Have I talked everyone down with this booming voice of mine?"

ONE OF THE LEAST

The case of Minerva Baker was being called. She arose uncertainly and turned around her chair like a dog about to lie down. The police matron firmly took her arm and led her forward, and the observers who filled the benches had a fair view of the woman who was charged with shoplifting. There was a distinct feeling of disappointment as the two women went forward. Why—this woman was old and queer! Why should she steal a silk dress, a bead-bag, and toilet articles? The observers had expected to see a young culprit with red lips and slim ankles.... Why should this funny little frump be interested in clothes?

A few drifted out—there might be something better to listen to in the men's Court upstairs. The magistrate read the charge, in that rapid way magistrates have of getting the thing done. In Minerva Baker's case it did not matter. She did not care under what sub-section she was being charged. She wondered what all the fuss was about, and why there were so many people around.

"Are you guilty, or not guilty?" the magistrate asked, and the police matron drew Minerva's attention to the question.

"I took them, if that's what you mean," Minerva Baker answered, steadily.

Then the store detective told of seeing the prisoner looking at dresses one Thursday afternoon—very cheap dresses—and when she went to her and asked her if she wanted anything, she said she wanted one of the red dresses if she could have it by paying ninety-five cents. The detective explained to her that bargain dresses could not be sent out on approval, and the full price must be paid. Prisoner had seemed to be disappointed, and said the lady where she lived often had dresses sent up, wore them once, and then sent them back. Prisoner asked if the red dress could be kept for her. Prisoner expected to be paid her wages. This was refused. The next day prisoner came again and was seen loitering around dress-rack. Witness became suspicious, came suddenly on prisoner, and discovered dress in shopping-bag; also fancy purse, pair of stockings, powder puff and rouge, and fancy combs—value about ten dollars. Prisoner made no attempt to deny theft.

As the witness was giving her evidence Minerva Baker's shoulders drooped lower and lower, and the observers on the benches could see a flood of crimson rising in her cheeks. Her long hair, uncertainly held in place by rhinestone combs, threatened to fall, and her air of dejection indicated that she did not care whether it did or not. Her shoes were old and broken, her stockings, black ones, were darned and crooked.

The magistrate asked if there were any other witnesses, and, none answering, questioned the prisoner.

"Minerva Baker, why did you do this? Don't you know it is wrong to steal?"

Minerva Baker shrank lower into her clothes and shook her head.

"Tell me, what made you do it?" said the magistrate. "I want to hear your side of it."

"I first took a loaf of bread," said the prisoner, after a pause. "One Thursday my lady told me to stay out ... and I got hungry. It was a broken loaf ... and I made supper on it in the wash-room at the station. I never stole before, but I began that way—then buns and nut-bars."

"Had you no money?" asked the magistrate.

"No. I work for a lady for five dollars a month, and I had to get boots. She says there's girls working for nothing and I am lucky to have a place. She hasn't paid me for two months, and I have no money."

"And you felt you had to have clothes, Minerva. Was there any special reason just now?"

Minerva's color swept up again in a crimson flood.

"Yes," she said, "I have a friend who said he would take me to a show.... He said he likes a girl to be dressed real snappy.... He was working in the garden for my lady.... I asked my lady for money and she promised me the ten dollars yesterday.... I had it all added up.... I have it here."

She handed the magistrate a leaf from a scribbler.

"I could have had it all, but she changed her mind. She said she had to have clothes it would hurt her husband's business if she went shabby, and it didn't matter about me. I didn't intend to steal the things when I went down to-day. I just went to see them—to see if they were there. I was so disappointed. The little purse is so pretty.... I took it first, and then ... I don't know why I did it. I know it was wrong, but I didn't care."

There was silence in the Court-room. The observers stirred uneasily, and the magistrate, visibly distressed, leafed over the Statutes of Alberta.

Minerva spoke again.

"I know you have to send me to jail. That's all right, I know I should be punished; but don't send me home—don't do that! You see, I've learned my lesson. I thought I might get decent clothes and go to a picture-show sometimes with Charley. I am not as old as I look. I am only twenty-five, and he said I'd be a good-looking girl, if I had the clothes. But I won't expect anything now. That's where I was wrong. Charley didn't come. I waited all evening to tell him I couldn't get any money. I thought maybe he'd tell me to come on, anyway, with my coat on over my housedress. But he didn't come at all and it was the next day—to-day, I mean—I took the stuff. I believed the lady when she said she'd pay me. And I believed Charley. I was wrong about both of them. But I've learned my lesson. I know now there's nothing for me—only don't send me home. I couldn't bear that. My mother is too old to have any more trouble. It doesn't matter to me what you do, but don't send me home. I'll go to jail for a year if you like."

The magistrate stood up.

"Minerva, I have to sentence you—the public have to be safeguarded. There's been so much of this. You knew you were stealing. I'll make the sentence as light as I can, and when you come out come to me and I'll get you a place where

you will get wages. There are thieves among women who take advantage of these hard times to get girls to work for nothing. Officer, get from the prisoner the name and address of this woman. I will summon her to appear before me. She is probably well able to pay wages. I'll teach her the elements of honesty. But we can't condone shop-lifting. Two months' hard labor."

* * *

When the morning paper, bearing a brief notice of the Police Court happenings, was read at the breakfast table the item regarding Minerva Baker got scanty notice.

"Love of finery is going to ruin our women. Silk dresses and fancy purse! Ridiculous!" said the solid citizen, complacently, and turned to the market page.

* * *

On a sunwashed park bench, where Charley and two friends sat happily eating salmon sandwiches and apples provided by a hospitable housewife, the conversation was all of women.

"I had great fun with a skirt, an English girl, the other day, over in one of the new bungalows," said Charley. "Believe it or not, but that girl has worked a year for nothing—one pair of shoes and two house-dresses—and she's afraid of her life she might lose her job. I told her she hadn't any; she needn't be afraid. She never had a beau, she told me, and I sure strung her along, telling her what a good-looking girl she would be if she just had the clothes; and she declared that she would ask for money that very night. And, say, couldn't she cook, though? It was a crime the way I put it over the girl, promising to take her to a show and everything. I forget now what night it was I was to come for her, but I'll bet she didn't forget. I always get on with women someway."

* * *

At the same time Minerva's mistress bemoaned the perfidy of her late employee to a friend over the 'phone. "It makes me shudder to think I had a thief in my house for over a year; and I trusted that girl with everything, and was so careful of her. I never let her join any of the girls' clubs, or go running around to the Y.W., or places like that. I think they put notions in girls' heads and make them discontented. Just imagine this! I see some woman was speaking to the Thursday Club on "*Charm*." Isn't that delicious? Poor Minerva; she was exactly the slavey type, youngest of nine, born in Whitechapel.... She was in every night except Thursday. I always let her have Thursday afternoon and evening. I thought it was good for her to have a look at the shops, but I warned her she must not bring any of her friends around.... Really, I thought she was too dumb to steal.... But I am sorry to lose her. She certainly could put work through her hands, and she was devoted to the baby."

* * *

In the day coach of the north-bound train Minerva Baker sat on her way to the Provincial Jail, with the police attendant beside her. It was a dewy morning in June, when the green meadows were starred with buttercups. The mountains, mistily blue, framed the picture that Minerva saw from the window: red and white cattle contentedly feeding on the fresh grass, glad to feel the sunshine on their backs; the cultivated fields with their green lines of growing grain; lilac trees, covered with blooms; dark rows of onions, pale lettuce, red rhubarb—homely, honest, pleasant things....

Minerva looked away from them. They were not for her. Life, never easy, never kind, had suddenly shown its teeth.

"I have learned my lesson," she muttered. "I know now not to believe anyone or expect anything. All the nice things are lies! She never meant to pay me! Charley didn't come! Nobody cares what happens to me.... I know them all Now. I've learned my lesson. Lies, all lies! But I'll get even some way... I'll show them!..."

The sunshine of June poured down, grass grew, water ran, and birds sang. But on the soul of Minerva Baker the blackness of night had fallen.

THE STROLLING PLAYERS

It is the smell of wolf-willow blossoms that has bewitched me this morning and carried me back to another summer, when the hot, moist June air of Manitoba was heavily freighted with this cloying sweetness, and I was one of a band of young pilgrims taking our barefooted way across the prairie from Northfield to Millford. We were not merely moving from one place to another; we were on our way to Millford to put on a play at their school-closing concert. There were seven of us, not counting the baby, and as our school had closed that day, too, the delirious joy of school-let-out sang in our veins.

Millford School had paid us a visit on several occasions, and on the twenty-fourth of May had beaten us in a spelling-match (who would have thought that "skilful" would have only one "l"?) and it may have been in a mean spirit of retaliation that we set about to produce a scene from "Ten Nights in a Bar-room" to give at their concert on the last day of June.

We had worked more than a month on it now, and rehearsed it in the shade of the sun-baked woodpile every day at noon. We made our own properties, had written our own lines, and now, in our best clothes, carrying our shoes to save them from the dust of the prairie trail, we were on our way to fame and glory.

Bob, who played the part of Simon Slade, the fat and prosperous proprietor of the "Sheaf and Sickle," carried his own bar, a high bench painted barn-red. The bottles, of which we carried a generous supply, were distributed among all the members of the cast, and stuck out of pockets and dinner-pails, giving our band a rakish and sinister appearance which must have been offset somewhat by our serious young faces.

I, being poor Fanny Morgan, the drunkard's wife, carried, carefully wrapped in a big newspaper, my mother's shawl, which had come from Dundee. It was a green shawl, with red, yellow and black lines, making an elaborate pattern, and it had belonged to my grandmother.... I had not asked my mother for it. I knew I could not convince her of how badly I needed it, and I could not ask any of the other women for a shawl when there was one in my own family. So I took it ... and that lay heavily on my conscience.... But what could I do? I had to carry the baby in a shawl when I went to Simon Slade's bar-room to look for Henry.

We had come straight from school and walked the five miles, carrying the remains of our dinner in the tin-pails. We held our last rehearsal where we stopped to eat, at the junction of Spring Brook and Oak Creek. But first we washed our feet, put on our shoes, and the ladies of the party released their hair from its many tight braids; then we set up the red bar on the gravelly shore and put on our act, glad to get one chance to present it undisturbed by the young dissenters, who, with no appreciation of the classics, had mocked us and hindered us with their interruptions at our other rehearsals behind the woodpile.

The "baby" should have been a little girl called Mary, according to Mr. T. S. Arthur's text, but we had no little girl with fair curls, and I was determined to have fair curls showing at one end of the green shawl and bare feet at the other, so we had a little boy of seven who had a mop of yellow hair. We had to have a good-sized child who could walk the five miles there and back, and Benny was able for that and more. The part was a minor one, but important. He had to say, "Father, won't you come home?" but he had to say it in a "low, pleading voice, full of sorrowful love, too deep for the heart of a child." I am quoting Mr. Arthur's own words, and as director of the play I had put a lot of time on Benny—and had promised him a beautiful glass alley if he said his words nicely.

The final rehearsal was entirely satisfactory, and with light hearts and high hopes we continued our journey, walking well up on the grass to keep the dust from our shining shoes. We crossed the bridge, skirted the high bank of Oak Creek, and climbed the hill to the level field where Millford School stood, surrounded now by horses and rigs and a swarm of people.

Our teacher had not been able to come with us, so Bob (Simon Slade), who was sixteen and the oldest of the company, made our presence known to the Millford teacher. We were warmly welcomed and invited to come over to the

long table, where the women were clearing up the remains of the supper. We were given salmon sandwiches and tea, and everyone was glad to see us. After that we were invited to inspect the stage and curtain and found all in order. The stage was small, but well-lighted with bracket lamps, and we put up our bar and the bottles and wished that we might begin. We knew our parts and were fearful of delay. The sun was still several yards high, and did not seem to give an inch, and we knew a play would hardly seem right without artificial lights.

The baby had been left at the table with his brother Joe (the bar-tender), while Bob, Bert, Lena and I inspected the stage. The baby had given us a little trouble in the dress rehearsal, and seemed to be holding out for another alley, but we were entirely unprepared for the blow that fell on us when Joe came running in to tell us that he couldn't find Benny anywhere, and was afraid he had beat it for home. We dashed out and called. Everyone looked and shouted. Then a little girl said she had seen a little boy go over the hill barefooted and travelling fast. It was Benny! He had deserted us! The baby had gone home over the sandhills, curls and bare-feet and all, and what could we do?

A search began for a substitute. I canvassed the crowd, now filing into the school. I coaxed and bribed: "You won't need to speak—just cry a little, and I will pinch you when the time comes." There were no bidders. At last I got a big eight-year-old girl, a heavy child, who lay like a bag of wheat in my arms. She had no curls, and she wouldn't take off her boots; they were new ones. And she wriggled. But we put on our act. With the squirming millstone in my arms I made my speech. I told Simon Slade he would have been a happier man if he had remained an honest miller grinding wheat into flour to feed and nourish his neighbors. I warned him that the ruin he was bringing on others would fall upon him and his. Then I pleaded with Henry, my Henry, to come home. The fat one cried at the right place, but spoiled the effect by tapering it off into a giggle.

The bar-room loafers jeered me, and asked Henry why he didn't keep me at home. Then Henry seemed to sober up a little and said he was not going to have his wife insulted, and would never put his foot in this cursed place again. So Henry and I and little Mary go out and the fun goes on. Mrs. Slade comes in just in time to see her boy, who is minding the bar, take a drink on the sly. She cries and wrings her hands.

Henry, who evidently has given me the slip, comes back and lines up at the bar. Simon Slade applauds him. Then the curtain falls and three years pass.

When the curtain was drawn back we were all there except little Mary, who had died, and I stood upright, draped in my shawl. The years had left their mark on me. I was looking for Henry. Simon Slade had grown coarse, dishevelled and stout (Bob had roughened his hair and stuffed a towel under his vest, and the effect was wonderful). Old Judge Hammond stood, a trembling old man, leaning on his cane. But we weren't sorry for him—he had thought the bar-room a good thing for Cedarville. Willie Hammond, his son, lay dead on the floor. Someone had thrown a bottle and killed him. Mrs. Slade, came in, saw what had happened, and screamed. Frank Slade, the proprietor's son, asleep in his chair, was too drunk to notice. Simon Slade turned to fly, but the sheriff appeared with a warrant for his arrest and an order to close the "Sheaf and Sickle." And it was all over.

We walked home in the starlit night, travelling together about half the distance. Then our roads divided. An old moon hung low in the southwest, and the sky was clear with a million stars. Little warm breezes came curling up from the hollows, fragrant and friendly. About a mile from home the old dog met me, and although I was not afraid, I was glad to have him. And suddenly I felt tired. But it's nothing to be tired when you are happy. Our act had gone well. The people had said it was "wonderful." I did not lose the shawl, and when the sun arose the next day it would be the First of July!

POISON

The wild roses, set in jam-pails sitting in the windows, were drooping a little, but their sweet fragrance battled with the stale air of the church, and John Avery was grateful to the person who had put them there when he faced his

congregation on this the first Sunday in July... As he read the scripture and gave out the hymns his mind was divided between the words he uttered and the faces before him, and he wished the latter were a little more friendly. It was a late spring and a dry spring; the soil had shifted with the wind, but, even so, everyone in the country had enough to eat, and there was no reason for all the dour faces. The men were the worst—big fellows, most of them, with sun-cured faces, crisscrossed with lines, looking uncomfortable in their Sunday clothes. When he knew them better he would tell them to take off their heavy coats and be comfortable, and he would see to it that the windows were opened. Bad, stale air with its dust-content reminded him of the dull hours he had spent in church dumbly praying for release when he was a child.... But he would go slowly and not offend anyone. People were so touchy on religion, and could hurt each other so pitifully over nothing. The last two years had taught John Avery that. Life had a way of turning on you when you least expected or deserved it.... Innocent things could suddenly grow black and sinister.

He had his sermon well prepared, and gave it with a sincerity that penetrated, even if it did not always convince. He could feel that he was making his way with the women and children. But the men were dubious. He could tell what they were thinking: they were wondering why he, a big strong fellow, full of vigor, chose the ministry. How could he ever get the idea across to them that he wanted to preach, wanted to help people, especially boys. It was so hard to impart an ethical truth. He knew these men, though he had never seen them before. He knew them. His father had been of that same sinewy build, dour-faced, gloomy and cynical, believing the worst of everyone, not only believing, but hoping. His father had wrapped himself in a mantle of his own good deeds, believing that any man who pays his debts and works his farm well and supports his family has earned the right to be disagreeable. So he went about with a perpetual frown, and seldom spoke except to find fault. The other members of the family accepted their dark lot, but young John rebelled, and at fifteen decided to give the world a try-out.

And he found, to his great joy, that decent people did not need to be sour and heavy and grim, but that life was a thrilling adventure.... He had sold papers on the train, washed dishes in a restaurant, put up pins in a bowling-alley, done some reporting for a country newspaper, gone to night school, and found friends everywhere.

It was when he was nineteen that the crash came that might have wrecked his life but for the kindly intervention of the old minister of the down-town mission, who saw the boy's possibilities and rightly read the impulses of his young heart. After that he had one passionate desire; he wanted to hold a lamp in the dark places of life to keep young feet from stumbling. He had seen over the edge of the pit, seen the misery and heartbreak that can overtake the innocent and unwary.

And now, at twenty-six, John Avery, a theological student in his third year, was preaching his first sermon, on the first Sunday in July, a handsome young fellow, with shiny black hair, gray eyes, dimpled chin, and an indefinable presence that made people either like or dislike him. He was not the sort of a person who could be ignored.

As he developed the theme of his sermon that life was an adventure, he noticed a dark-eyed boy in his congregation whose face gleamed like a lighted lamp, and before the sermon was over John Avery had forgotten the inhospitable faces before him, with their narrow scrutiny, and saw this one face, sensitive, melancholy, and yet aflame with some great passion. He sat between two older people, evidently his parents, who bore a resemblance to each other in their thick-set type, the middle-aged stiffness, the shrouded, unanswering faces. "No doubt," thought John Avery, "these are Meadows' leading citizens, with money in the bank and a thorough contempt for people who haven't. But where does the bright-eyed boy belong? He looks like a bird in a cage. I must speak to him; there's a lad I can help—I know I can help him, and he will help me."

Then the choir sang and the offering was taken, and the service was over. John Avery made his way to the door to speak to his people as they went out. The organist played "Onward Christian Soldiers," with all the loud stops open, making conversation difficult, but it had always been done that way.

"What is your name?" John asked, holding the boy's hand in his.

His mother answered for him.

"This is Reginald, our son, our only child," said Mrs. Guthrie, "and this is my husband. We were among the first people to live in Meadows."

John Avery knew it, but just for the moment he only wanted a word with the boy.

"I will be here again on Wednesday, Reginald," he said. "Will you come and see me at seven, here in the church? I want to talk with you. Let's see if we can't get something started here among the boys. Round them up for me. We'll have a talk and make our plans."

"I'd love to," said Reginald.

"Reginald," said his mother, "don't promise. You have your music lesson on Wednesday evening, remember."

"And what do you think of our new preacher?" Mrs. Guthrie said as she helped the vegetables. Mrs. Guthrie's question was addressed to the table at large, but more particularly to her sister-in-law, who, having come from the East, where preachers abound, was well qualified to pass judgment on a theological student's first sermon.

"I thought he spoke well," said the sister-in-law, guardedly, "and he certainly is a smart-looking young man.... His family live out in Grey County on a farm near where my husband's people live. He practically ran away from home when he was about fifteen."

"Not any too fond of work, I suppose," said Mr. Guthrie, busily engaged in apportioning the chicken. It was the Guthries' regular Sunday dinner—stewed chicken, cream sauce, split biscuits beading the outside of the platter, mashed potatoes, canned peas, a flaky apple pie sitting on the sideboard, cut in four, with a square of cheese on each piece.

"Gee, Mother, why didn't you ask him to come to dinner?" cried Reginald. "I'll bet he would be nice to talk to... I like him. Isn't he big and fine-looking? And no one asked him to come and eat. I thought sure someone would."

Reginald was looking at the flaky white meat, cooked until it fell off the bones. His mother answered him.

"He has to hurry to his next appointment, and as they have Sunday-school before church at Berryhill, he has hardly time to eat. Mr. Miller never had dinner on Sundays."

Aunt Minnie salted her dinner by beating slowly on the bottom of the salt-cellar with two plump fingers.

"Yes, I know your preacher," she said. "So many of the students attend our church. I think perhaps this young man has changed for the better, but he had rather an unfortunate affair two years ago. He was in the Police Court. I remember there was a lot of talk about it at the time, though I forget now just what the trouble was. Being a theological student made it so much worse for him. I wonder that our Church would send out a young man with a police record. I suppose they thought no one would know it here ... so far away."

No one noticed that Reginald had stopped eating and was looking helplessly from one face to another.

Mr. Guthrie gave a short laugh. "I knew there must be something wrong with that bird. Why, with his smart tongue he could go into business and do well."

That was all. But it was enough.

A year later a letter came from Aunt Minnie to Mrs. Guthrie. After telling about the round of activities in the church, the rummage sale, and the guest tea, she bewailed the scarcity of young people in the church.

"I do not know what the world is coming to," she wrote. "It is so hard to get any young person interested in Christian work. Surely this is a changing world... I notice what you say about Reginald. It's a hard time to bring up children. They seem so restless. I feel better satisfied now than ever that I never had any. I hope Reginald will come out all right; you have done so much for him. I am so sorry to hear you are having this sore trouble with him.

"I intended to write before about that young man Avery. I asked our minister about him. It seems he was not to blame

at all for that police affair. He happened to be at that place when it was raided. He had gone in looking for a boy whom he knew; but he was arrested with the others. Mr. King said he made no defence, but the whole thing came out later. I am writing this to you because I feel you should know. I want to be fair to the young man; I would not do him any harm for the world. It is too bad he did not stay longer—he might have been able to do something for Reginald. I remember he liked Mr. Avery that first Sunday. He is back here in the City now. Mr. King says he is the best boys' worker he has ever known, and he is employed now by all the churches, and is doing a great work with teen-age boys.... Well, it surely is needed.... Religion seems to be losing its hold.

"I hope the seeds grow that I sent. My garden is beautiful now. We expect to use potatoes from our own garden next Sunday... Be assured, dear sister, I will not forget to pray for Reginald."

ONE GOOD SLEEP

At seven o'clock Mrs. Mellow left her home, with the usual precautions to the children. "Be careful of fire, and don't fight... Muriel, I depend more on you than on any of the others... I don't know how you are going to do it, but try to watch them. I couldn't do it myself, even if I could stay home, for that time Stanley got the matches I was here... But maybe God does help us. He knows well enough I am not scrubbing offices every night in the week because I like it... And now I am going... Go to bed nice for Muriel, won't you, boys?"

"Sure thing! Don't you worry, Ma... We are always good," came from the table where five little boys and the two girls were gathered. The baby had already been put "bye" in his homemade cradle.

Mrs. Mellow came back once more to look at them, and her face was troubled.

"If I wasn't so tired all the time I would be proud of you kids. You are all right-wise and not bad looking, and smart, too. When you boys get big enough to work I won't do a thing but sleep. Now, I'm warning you. Now, good-bye again; I'll be home at eight or half-past. Muriel will get you ready for school, and do as she tells you, boys. I know Millie will."

She walked a mile to get the street-car that ran into town, and in half an hour was at her night's work, setting in order the offices in the White Building, emptying baskets, sweeping, scrubbing, dusting. She ate her two sandwiches when the chimes tolled out the hour of midnight, and drank water from the tap in the hall, stopping her work to look down into the bright street where cars still ran and people walked about as if it were day. A little rain had turned the street into a mirror, and each car that passed trailed a crimson ribbon behind it.

"I wonder why people stay out late when they don't need to... Isn't it queer? Everyone of these people have beds, and they are not using them. The world is badly divided, surely. I'd give a lot to sleep a night through just once."

But she did not linger. There were floors to wipe and chairs to dust—the halls were the worst, so big and empty; and the stairs, so hard on the knees. But it had to be done, and done well. Jobs were jobs these days.

At half-past seven, when she was finishing the Western Realty Company's office, Mr. Lane came in and asked her if she could fix up a bungalow before she went home; the people had just telephoned they were leaving, and he wanted to get the "For Rent" sign in the window at once. It would mean another three dollars if she could do it. He put the money in her hand, for he was going out on an early train.

Mr. Lane took her in his car to the place and the work of reformation began. She wondered about the children. Poor little Muriel would miss school—that was the worst; but three dollars would buy a lot of milk-tickets.

The bungalow dwellers had left ham and eggs and a half loaf of bread in their frigidare, and part of a pail of jam, and Mrs. Mellow cooked herself the best breakfast she had had since Christmas. Then she set to work on the vacated rooms to bring them back to order and cleanliness, working with all her speed. At ten o'clock she had put a shine on

everything. It was too late for Muriel to go to school then... The beds were all made up ... but the chesterfield, a great downy one in the living-room, seemed to call to her to come and sleep where it was all so quiet. At home the baby would be up now, and there were so many things to do ... she must get some sleep. She couldn't go on forever. Just an hour would make her feel better... She couldn't keep her eyes open any longer. There was a nice afghan on the chesterfield, rose and gray... It was all so quiet and warm... She would bring Muriel a pair of stockings ... three dollars extra. This was the day for a piece of meat.

When noon came and her mother had not come home, Muriel Mellow sent one of the boys over to one of the neighbors, and the neighbor, being a thorough-going person, 'phoned the police and the Red Cross, and the Public Welfare Board, and the Salvation Army. Mrs. Mary Mellow was missing! A 'phone to the block brought the information that she had done her work, but the policeman on that beat had not seen her leaving as usual in the morning. The block was searched, but no trace of her was found.

A reporter was sent to the home of Mrs. Mellow that morning, and the afternoon paper carried the story, featuring the faithful little Muriel, who in her mother's place had sent her brothers and sister to school, and was found diligently scrubbing the floor.

"She never stays away," wept Muriel. "Something has happened to her. She went away as cheerful as ever, and now maybe she is dead ... and what will we do? She gets five dollars a night, and it keeps us in everything. We have meat twice a week. Mother brings it home—and this is the day. I don't know what the boys will say."

The reporter told the Board of Welfare, and groceries, including meat, were sent that afternoon. When the story came out in the paper several generous citizens 'phoned, urging the paper to start a subscription for the bereaved family, and the money began to pour in.

When Mrs. Mellow wakened the noonday sun lay bright and golden on the floor beside the chesterfield.

"I'm afraid I've slept in," she said, springing up. "But, O boy! what a couple of hours of sleep can do for a person! I feel like a new woman, but hungry as a hired man. Mr. Lane said to take the eatables, and I'll buy a bit of meat, and won't we have a meal! I'll still be in time to let Muriel go to school this afternoon." She heard the chimes and whistles. It was just one o'clock.

When she came in sight of her house her heart missed a beat. A red truck stood at the side of the house and a car at the front. "There's been an accident," she groaned, and began to run.

When she opened the door a strange sight met her eyes. Two well-dressed ladies were in the front room, one holding the baby, who played with a red balloon. The table was full of parcels. Muriel flung herself into her mother's arms and cried with joy.

"Where are the boys and Millie?" asked Mrs. Mellow, trembling with excitement.

"We sent them to school," wept Muriel. "I didn't know what to do. Oh, Mother, where have you been? We've been so frightened!"

"I am a little late I know. I couldn't 'phone, but I knew you'd stay, Muriel."

"But, Mother," said Muriel. "It's tomorrow."

"Sure it's tomorrow," said her mother. "Don't I know it? I went out last night and I came home this morning, or at least as soon as I could."

"It's the day after tomorrow," said Muriel. "You went out Monday; this is Wednesday."

Mrs. Mellow looked around her and her face broke into a smile. "Do you mean to tell me, Muriel Mellow, that I

slept there all day and all night on that soft chesterfield? No wonder I feel so light and fine." ... The women were laughing with her now and shaking her hand. Just then two other women came in with covered dishes and some articles of clothing.

"I often wondered what would happen if I quit," said Mrs. Mellow, unsteadily, as she noticed the offerings of food and clothes. "I thought my poor children would starve only for me. But I didn't know the kindness of you all."

"You don't know half of it," said one of the women. "Look at your picture in the paper, and all the story of how bravely you've carried on, and how well your children do at school, and how clean and neat you keep them. And there's a fund raised already that will let you have a two-weeks' holiday, and will buy new clothes for all your children, and paint the house... And, look here, you are a widow, Mrs. Mellow. You should be having a mother's pension. That will be about sixty dollars a month. Did you not know about it?"

"I knew about it," said Mrs. Mellow, "but I did not know it was for a woman like me. I thought it was only given in case of need... But this piece in the paper is a queer thing, and that's my picture all right.... Are you sure I am not still down there in that bungalow, sound asleep on the chesterfield... I always knew a real good sleep could make me young again, but I didn't know it could change the face of the world."

TRAVELLING WITH FRIENDS

Helen Brady held her head in her hands and rocked back and forward on the telephone stool in an abandonment of self-pity. Here was trouble surely! It would happen this way, just when everything was ready for her party! And she had worked so hard to have everything right—and here at three o'clock in the afternoon had come the message. A detached voice over the phone had read: "Mother will arrive Thursday instead of Friday. Travelling with friends. Reta."

This was just like Reta, the incarnate sister-in-law, with her genius for managing everyone's affairs! She had decided to go to Europe, and that Helen and Fred would take the mother! She hadn't taken the trouble to find out if it was convenient; she merely wrote that mother was coming, and now wired that she was coming twenty-four hours earlier. "Travelling with friends!" That sounded so like Reta! Old Mrs. Brady did not need a guardian.

Helen had arranged to have a party so her entertaining would be over before the old lady arrived ... and now, with everything set and the people coming, what could she do? The spare-room was all dressed for company, with its voile spread and drapes—the women's wraps would be there... The train came in at ten o'clock, just when she would be busy with her guests... The old lady would likely be tired and want to go to bed. She had given up the thought of a trip to the Coast on account of the old lady's coming, but this was worse! A thousand times worse! What could she do? No use telling Fred—he would be no help. He would say, "Why, sure, Mother won't mind. I'll go down and get her." ... She would get Miss Frank at the Y. to meet her. No, that wouldn't do; she wouldn't know her. Fred would not like that ... he would think it a slight...

Then came a thought, a dark thought that shocked yet fascinated her. The message had only been 'phoned. She had not signed for it. It might have been 'phoned to the wrong number—telegrams are sometimes lost. It was not likely to be delivered until tomorrow! Old Mrs. Brady was not helpless, nor stupid. She would manage some way. There was the Traveller's Aid, and the Y., and hotels, and the weather was fine. It was a rotten thing to do ... but...

When Mrs. Brady, senior, "travelling with friends," arrived at the station there was no one to meet her, but with a red-cap carrying her bag she made her way through the throng. It was a clear, fine evening, and even at ten o'clock the sky was still luminous. She waited half an hour, then took the red-cap's offer to get her a car. Having given the driver the address she settled back on the slippery seat... Maybe Reta had not sent the wire. She was so busy getting ready to go. Fred and Helen might be out. It was too bad to walk in on them like this. Reta had really bundled her off, and not given her time to think. Reta was too bossy! And the friends who had travelled with her had been no pleasure to her. She would have been happier alone. They shouted at her as if she were deaf, and talked baby-talk to her; she had pretended

she was asleep to get rid of them! When the car stopped, the driver came and opened the door.

"Say, your folks must be having a swell party tonight—there's cars lined up on both sides of the street... I'll carry your bag."

Mrs. Brady looked out. The house was lighted in every window. "No, never mind," she said hastily; "I won't get out. They are not expecting me, and I won't go in. Take me to a hotel—some nice quiet place."

When she stood at the desk and asked for a room, a pleasant-faced young woman looked up from the register and welcomed her.

"Yes, indeed, we have plenty of rooms. Business is a little slow these days. I will carry your bag. I let all the girls off at ten."

In a small room, with a gray enamelled bed and brightly frilled curtains, Mrs. Brady leisurely prepared herself for sleep... She was so glad she had not gone into Fred's house ... and it was nice to be away from everyone ... and able to do as she liked. A good light at the head of the bed suggested reading for a while... Reta had not approved of reading in bed. However, she was no longer subject to Reta's authority. Reta did not even know where she was. Nobody knew. And that thought was delightfully thrilling. She laughed happily as she braided her hair in little braids to ensure a measure of fluffiness for the morrow. The girl at the desk had not asked her to register... She felt young again and full of adventure.

When she came down stairs the next morning her desk friend led the way into the dining-room, where a pleasant clatter of dishes and a smell of good coffee cheerfully announced that the day had begun. Sunshine poured in from the tall eastern windows, and was reflected in the yellow poppies on the table and in the gold and yellow dishes.

"What a pleasant place!" Mrs. Brady exclaimed. "I never knew that a 'Y' could be as nice as this. I always thought they were rather grim places, with durable brown woodwork, sticky linoleum on the floors, not enough clothes on the bed, and prunes for breakfast. Why, this is lovely!"

The secretary laughed pleasantly.

"You should see our Mountain houses," she said, with her eyes beaming, "and I have the nicest one... I am going back tomorrow. We have a number of women who stay the whole season with us."

Mrs. Brady looked around her. At little tables a number of women her own age, and some older, were eating and talking.

"It isn't an old ladies' home, is it?" she asked cautiously.

"Oh, no. We do not know anything about age here. We have all ages. The older women get up earlier, and so are the first to have breakfast. But it so happens we get quite a few older women. It solves the question of many a family vacation, too, and quite happily. Most of the women you see here are coming on to the Lodge with me tomorrow morning. I have a friend who is now expecting her mother-in-law to stay for the summer. She and her husband had planned a trip to the Coast, but they can't very well take the old lady, and my friend feels she will just have to stay at home. I am going to make the suggestion that the old lady will come with us to the mountains, but my friends do not want her to feel they are slighting her. But I know she would enjoy it. The old ladies knit and crochet, and go for walks down the ferny paths, and sit beside the river, and talk and argue. You see, they belong to the same generation, and so are interested in each other. I had a great flock of them last year. We have a lovely situation, with a snow-capped mountain burrowing up into the clouds behind our Lodge, and a waterfall that can be heard at night when all other sounds are hushed."

"Your friend's mother-in-law would probably be much happier there than sitting around in her son's house feeling she might be in the way," said Mrs. Brady, thoughtfully. "It's hard for the young and the old to associate happily. I know that."

"You will be here a few days, won't you?" the secretary asked quickly. "Only to-day? Well, that will do. My friend's

mother-in-law is coming in tonight on the train, and I will have to go to see them tonight, for I am going out early tomorrow morning, and I may not be back until September. I will take you with me, and I wish you would put in your little comment about the two generations; and I will tactfully suggest a holiday in the mountains for both of you, far from relatives, grandchildren and other complications. Helen is anxious to do the right thing by her mother-in-law, and this is the first time she has visited her. She had a party last night; I went up for a little while after I put you to bed. Helen is quite worried, and I thought looked miserable. I do want to help her if I can."

"I am sure you will," said Mrs. Brady, with her bright smile. "The old lady won't be able to resist you when you tell her about the waterfall and the ferns. Hadn't you better let her stay a week here, though, and then go on? Don't rush her. I'll stay, too, and take her along with me when I go."

"Will you really? That's great! I see that victory is coming. You are a find. Well, I must hurry now. I have some running around to do. I have borrowed my sister's car for the day. Would you like to come around with me? I may leave you sitting in the car for half an hour at a time, but you won't mind. I'll run in to see my friend, too," Miss Frank went on. "I am hoping she's feeling better this morning. These family complications are a bit wearing. I think I should bring you in, too, to let her see how sprightly and companionable an old lady can be. She doesn't know old ladies as well as I do."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Brady. "I was going to suggest that if you hadn't. You have made me interested in Helen and her impending visitor."

When they reached the gate Miss Frank said: "Maybe you had better stay in the car until I see how Helen is. She was certainly not like herself last night. I don't know what's wrong!"

The old lady proceeded to get out.

"Well, that's where I have the advantage of you, my dear Miss Frank, for I do know, and, if you don't mind, I am going in—or even if you do mind. I want to see Helen, too."

At that moment Helen, in a pink house dress, came running down the steps and flung her arms around the old lady.

"Oh, Mother," she cried, "you look good to me!"

"I came a day early," said the old lady, brazenly. "Reta was going to wire you, but she is so full of her trip to Europe she must have forgotten. But I am glad she did. Miss Frank and I have had a fine visit. I don't know when I've enjoyed anyone so much, and she has talked me into going to the mountains for the summer. But I told her I wanted to stay a week with you anyway. Speak up, Miss Frank, and tell Helen that a week is all I can spare just now. With Reta off my hands I must have my fling!"

THE BLACK CURSE

It was not Mary Borden's first school, nor was she easily frightened, but when her landlady went out of the room, still muttering her threat of vengeance, she had a momentary impulse of flight.

She looked about the well-furnished room, crisp and dainty in its cleanliness. Evidently Mrs. Taski had made preparations for her coming. But her words, and the gleam in her gypsy black eyes as she had shut the door and put her back to it, were rather terrifying.

"Now, Miss Teacher, listen to one strong word from me. You leave my man alone. He is good man if left alone. Other teacher was very bad girl, and so I make her go—I make her sick. Maybe I kill her, too. I hope so. And I kill you, too, quick like that," snapping her fingers, "if you take him from me."

Mary Borden's eyes opened to their full width.

"What do you think I am?" she exclaimed. "Do I look like a home-breaker? Why, I am older than you—and you are a pretty woman when you smile. You need have no fears of me, Mrs. Taski. No man was ever tempted to leave home on my account, I assure you!"

Mrs. Taski regarded her critically in the lamp-light.

"You have style," she said simply, "and you know so much. Teachers know so much. It is not fair. Every man wants two wives, one to cook and keep clean house and wash clothes, and one for joy, and go riding, and talk to... I busy at house and garden all the time, and that's how Miss Trent get him away from me. But," her face darkening down again like a thunder-storm, "I fix her pretty quick. She will some day die. Maybe you are good girl, maybe I will like you—hush—here comes Dan." Her voice changed. "Good night, Miss Teacher. I hope you will have one good sleep." Her eyes were glittering like sword-points as she went out, and her good-night greeting carried a sinister meaning.

Mary Borden sat on a covered chintz box and, recovering from her fright, began to laugh.

"What a perfect bed-time story," she thought. "I killed one already, and I may kill you, but good night, Teacher, and I hope you will have a good sleep'."

Before a week had gone by the new teacher knew the story, for the neighborhood rocked with it. Dan Taski had treated his wife very badly during the four months that Maizie Trent had board there; and the feeling of indignation in the settlement ran high. Maizie Trent, with her yellow hair and crimson lips, had seen in the big store-keeper someone to ease the monotony of country life and furnish week-end transportations to the City; and if a few smiles from her painted lips could put a car at her disposal Maizie considered it a good bargain. Tears and entreaties on the part of Mrs. Taski brought no results except to drive big Dan more certainly into the arms of the enemy. But in the last two months Mrs. Taski had forsaken women's ancient weapons and settled down into a dark tranquillity, and then it was that Maizie Trent grew frightened and changed her boarding-place. She said she was afraid Mrs. Taski was going to poison her. A month after she left she was stricken with erysipelas in her face and had to give up her school. The neighbors were of the opinion that Mrs. Taski had put the black curse upon her, and many conversations were carried on behind hands, and heads were shaken darkly. Miss Maizie Trent was one big fool to make Borska Taski her enemy, for Borska Taski could charm away warts, and cure headaches and fevers, and tell fortunes. Who was this young teacher to put herself up against Borska Taski?

Listening to all this, and seeing the moral state of her district, Mary Borden decided that she would start a Sunday-school. The older people might not benefit, but she knew she could do something for the children to lift them out of the hate and ignorance that surrounded them. She found everyone willing, and no one more anxious to help than Mrs. Taski.

Every Sunday saw the school-yard full of cars and buggies, and Mary Borden, with the young and old in one big class, did her best to expound the Scriptures. They had never had any religious service in the settlement, and so Mary's efforts had all the charm of novelty.

One Sunday evening, when she and Mrs. Taski had gone for a walk down by the river and were sitting on a violet-covered bank watching the June flood race by, Mrs. Taski suddenly began to cry. Dan had gone to the city the day before, and had not come back, and Miss Borden thought this was the cause of her tears.

"You must not be so suspicious, Borska," she said, kindly. "Trust Dan; he is all over his infatuation for that girl."

"Teacher, it is not that," she replied. "I am not mad any more. I want to get all that black hate out of my heart, like you say we must; but I am sorry for what I did to Miss Trent, Teacher."

"You didn't do anything, Borska, dear; you raged and threatened and cursed her, I know, and that hurt you, but it didn't hurt her. She took erysepelas; but anyone might get that."

"Teacher," said Borska earnestly, "I am very sick in my heart. I want to tell you, for you are my friend... I did something very bad. I made a little doll like Miss Trent when I was so crazy mad, yellow hair, red lips and all. I took piece of cloth like her coat, and put coat on it with pockets and all, just like hers. And little string of beads, and red

shoes. Hours and hours I work. Then I stick pins in its face to hurt her, so she get sick in the face... And then when Dan go to the City to see her I fix it so she will die in four months... I am sorry now, and wish..."

Mrs. Taski rocked herself in agony, and her tears flowed afresh. Mary Borden put her arms around her.

"Now, look here, Borska, that's all superstition and foolishness, and you must not think of it any more. You are a new creature now, in God's love, and you are going to fill your heart so full of kindness that all these black thoughts will be driven out. We'll pray every day, Borska, that you will forget all this, and you will burn this little figure, for you sewed all sorts of hatred in it."

Borska turned a white face of horror to her.

"Oh, no, we must not burn it. But I'll give it to you, Teacher, and then maybe the bad power will go out of it. But, oh, Teacher, I am afraid it will kill her when the time is up. I said in four months, and that will be soon."

"Borska, dear, when I go home for the holidays I will find out all about Miss Trent," said Miss Borden, "and write to you. You will feel better when you hear she is quite well. Maybe she is sorry, too. No one can do wrong and be happy over it. I will go to see her and tell her you forgive her... Now, dry your eyes, Borska; you have left all the old hatreds behind you, and are living a better life now."

Mary Borden began her investigations the day after her arrival in the City, and found that Maizie Trent had gone to the Coast for her holidays. So she wrote a letter to Borska Taski, a cheerful, encouraging letter, urging her to think no more of evil charms. "But I want to keep the little figure," she wrote. "It is so beautifully done, and I have taken out all the pins. I got a book for you on doll-making, Borska. I think you have a real gift for this. Now, don't worry any more. Just busy yourself in making pretty dolls for happy children, and we'll have a Christmas tree that will be a wonder."

In August Mary Borden drove to the Coast to visit her brother, the Rev. James Borden, of one of the Mission churches, and there one night, as she and her brother sat in his study, the conversation turned to quaint superstitions. Mary Borden told the story of her friend Borska and her repentance.

"I wish I could find Miss Trent," she said, "and deliver Borska's message of forgiveness. I think Borska will feel better if I can tell her I've seen the young lady in the flesh, and that she is sound and well. The spell will be lifted in a week now, and I hope nothing happens to Maizie Trent."

"This is a strange coincidence," he said gravely. "I was called on last week to bury a Maizie Trent who was killed in an automobile accident, she and her companion. They had been out at a drunken party at a road-house, and missed the turn at Oakella. She died as she lived, poor girl, young, beautiful, golden-haired, a sad case of misguided youth. The car rolled over the bank and was smashed, and though the man was unrecognizable, the girl had not a scratch; but her neck was broken."

They sat in awed silence for a few moments.

"It might not be the same girl," said Mary at last. "I hope it isn't. I'll show you the little doll. I happen to have it with me in my bag."

She handed it to him in its little box. "I have never taken it out of its box," she said. "This is just the way she gave it to me. There is something rather uncanny about it, it is so lifelike."

As the minister lifted it out the golden head dropped forward, horribly.

THE ALIBI

From the kitchen, where she hurried with the dinner, Mrs. Smith could hear the telephone in the doctor's office ringing with its clanging insistence. She was stirring the pudding sauce and could not leave it for a moment, for it was just at the point of thickening. It would be for the doctor, anyway, and he would surely hear it. It rang off—then on again. Still the doctor did not answer.

She put the pot on the top of the oven, then went into the office and took down the receiver.

"Oh, Mrs. Smith, is that you? I want the doctor to come at once. It's Mrs. Alverton, and Jim has another one of his bad spells of indigestion. I don't know what brought it on. Tell the doctor to come at once—is he there?"

"No, I do not know where he is—he was here about ten minutes ago. I'll see and call you back."

She turned from the 'phone. The doctor was standing in the door.

"It's Mrs. Alverton, Tom. She wants you to come out at once. Jim is sick again."

"He would be—he has been eating too much," said the doctor, lighting his pipe. "You call her and tell her you don't know where I am. She's a nurse; she knows how to give castor oil as well as I do. They always yelp before they are hurt, those two. Go on, Maggie, like a dear, and make a good alibi. You think I am out making calls—I am really saving them money by not going."

Mrs. Smith stood irresolute. He had been out all night, and she knew he was tired and wanted to have an hour's rest.

"Tell her yourself, Tom. Explain to her you are tired. I hate lying; there's no luck in it."

"Go on, Maggie. Don't give yourself airs at this late date. You are the world's best little friendly liar. Step right up there and let me hear you. I know your ability, and yet even I am continually being surprised. Throw in some of that local color of yours, bright, breezy human guff. Be my rubber tire again, Maggie, and save me from the jolts. Go on, I tell you—will I have to get cross?"

"You old fraud," she laughed, "if people knew you as I do they would not think so much of you."

"The same to you, Maggie, that's just what I am saying. You and I will have to hang together or we'll hang separately. Do your stuff now. Don't you know poor Jim Alverton is in the throes of a stomach-ache? Have you no bowels of compassion, woman?"

Mrs. Smith telephoned.

When she went back to her pudding sauce Mrs. Smith was disturbed in her mind. Supposing Jim Alverton should die? Tom did lead a hard life, as every doctor does, but surely he could be more direct and honest when he did not want to go. There must be some way without this continuous deception.

She mashed the potatoes and creamed the carrots. Everything was ready now if Alice and Ronald would come. The irregularity of a doctor's house was reflected in their easy-going habits. It had been her fault, and she knew it. She had bribed them to be quiet to let their father sleep; she had let them stay out longer than she should to keep them out of his way when he was tired and nervous; and now it seemed impossible to make them punctual or orderly.

As she waited in the bright kitchen her thoughts were full of remorse. She had always followed the path of least resistance, and had failed to shape her children's characters. She had thus wronged them—wronged them, her own children. Surely the development of character was a mother's first duty, for character is destiny. Alice was the first to arrive.

"Mother, write me a note. I did not do my essay last night. Just say I had to run an errand for you, and it will be all right. I will have to stay in if you don't, and tonight is my music lesson."

Alice went for the paper and pencil, and thoughtfully brought a magazine for her mother to write on.

"Dash it off, Mother, in your own sweet way."

"But you didn't run an errand for me, Alice," said her mother.

"And what of it? That will do as well as anything, won't it?" Alice wrinkled her smooth forehead and smiled her dimpling smile.

"Not for me," said her mother, firmly. "I am not going to make excuses for you any more. I have done you an injury helping you out of every scrape you ever got into. You'll never learn life's lessons this way, and I am ashamed of the excuses I've made."

"Oh, but Mother," Alice protested, "I think women, especially women with families, all have to do some of this, and you do it so well. You smoothe out all Dad's troubles with tactful words. He wouldn't have a patient only for you. You can't quit now. We can't get on without you. When that silly girl 'phones Ronald so often you have to tell her he is out. They're only little white lies, anyway, Mother, and will never be held against you."

At dinner Mrs. Smith made the announcement.

"I want to give notice," she said, looking around the family circle, "I am resigning from my official position of the family alibi. Henceforth I am going to tell the truth."

"Mother, you will ruin us!" exclaimed curly-haired Ronald, the beloved of women, who worked in the drugstore.

"I am ruining you now," said his mother. "You'll grow up to be the sort of man who will pad your expense account, turn back the mileage gauge on your car when you go to sell it, and tell your wife you are at a conference when you are playing pool. At this late date I give notice of change of policy. I will tell nothing but the truth—maybe not all of it, but what I tell will be the truth."

"Don't worry, kids," said the doctor, laughing. "Our mamma will not leave us cold like this. She is too good an adjuster, and has been at it too long. She will continue to be the shock-absorber. Between ourselves, I believe she enjoys it, just as anyone enjoys the thing he can do well. Now I am off for an afternoon in the woods, far from measles and mumps. Here's wishing good health to the village of Brent and its environs."

When Alice was leaving she asked again for the note. Her mother handed it to her. On the way Alice read it, for the conversation at the table had disturbed her.

"Dear Mr. Thorn," she read. "Alice did not write her essay last night. She is forgetful, as no doubt you know. She has her music lessons at 4:30, and I am writing this note, not to excuse her, but to prevent Miss Grant from being delayed. Will you keep her in tomorrow night instead of tonight? Too bad to bother you. Sincerely,—MARGARET SMITH."

Alice read it with surprise. "She means it," she thought, with consternation. "I wonder what Dad will do?—and Ronald? Oh, well, this is all right. I know I have to do the essay sometime. Mother may be right."

The telephone rang just as Ronald was leaving. It was the flaxen-haired girl to whom he did not want to speak. Mrs. Smith ran to the door and called him back.

"O, it is you, Slim.... No, I haven't.... No, I can't go, or at least, well, maybe.... Anyway, I won't—I don't want to. No, don't 'phone to the store—business reasons. Maybe I am mean, but that's how it stands...."

Ronald turned from the 'phone in a rage.

"Why didn't you tell me it was that freak? There, now, I had to hurt her feelings. I told you I would not talk to her. I feel like a cad—"

His mother smiled at him.

"The truth is best, Ronald, and kindest always. Get over that old notion that because you are a man you can't be square with a woman. You should have told her weeks ago that you didn't want her to 'phone. It's far more cruel to keep her dangling. You are like the people who are altogether too tender-hearted to chloroform their cat, so they simply turn it out to starve to death."

"Mother," said Ronald, "what's got into you?"

The next afternoon the doctor was in the back-yard, happily at work on a new chicken-coop. He had had a good time on his fishing trip the day before, and had made his morning calls. Mrs. Smith, looking through the kitchen window as she washed the dishes, shook her head.

"Dear old Tom," she said, "I am glad to see him so happy—but he has been the one doctor too long. He's too casual with his patients. I am afraid he'll get a jolt some day. And they love him so—no one could help loving him with that Irish tongue of his."

The 'phone rang. Mrs. Smith took the call.

"Yes, he is here. I will get him. Is that you, Mrs. Alverton? How is Mr. Alverton? That's good. I'll get the doctor."

She went out and called her husband.

"It's Mrs. Alverton, Tom. She wants to speak to you. Jim is better. Come on, she's waiting. Hurry!"

The doctor was fitting a window.

"Oh, tell her to jump in the lake. I'm busy."

Mrs. Smith went back to the 'phone. The doctor worked on. Then, suddenly remembering his wife's ultimatum, he came in just in time to see her hang up the receiver.

"Maggie, what did you say to her? You didn't?—"

"No, I didn't get a chance. She beat me to it. She told me to tell you to go on with your fishing and drown for all she cares."

"She never did! She never said that!" said the doctor's startled voice.

"She did. Jim had appendicitis, and they had to get Dr. Sales from the City, who operated at three o'clock this morning. She says you've been their doctor all these years, and there's no one in the world they would rather have, but what's the good if you won't come when you're sent for. She did all the talking. She said Jim might have died for all you cared."

Dr. Thomas Smith hastily reached for the 'phone.

THE NEPHEW FROM SCOTLAND

When Miss Abbie Allen heard from her brother's son in Scotland that he wanted to come to Canada and go into chicken farming, she wrote to him without a day's delay that she would gladly help him, for she was all alone in the world, and would be glad to have someone belonging to her.

Then she began to look for a location and found a lovely spot on the outskirts of the City, where a good little house, though in need of paint, stood on an acre of ground. The woman who owned it was willing to sell at a sacrifice because of the distance from a street-car.

"When I go in to see a picture-show I don't want to walk half a mile to the car," she said.

Miss Abbie, looking at the rolling country that flowed away to the west, rising in the folds of the foothills, which, in turn, were caught up into the mountains all blue and silver in their magical beauty, wondered why anyone who lived in daily contact with such a majestic panorama ever wanted to go to a picture-show; but she kept her enthusiasm to herself and paid over the purchase price from her savings; then proudly placed the deed of her land in her safety deposit-box. Another letter went to her nephew, telling him she would give him a half interest in everything, and advising him to come at once.

Miss Abbie moved into her house and began its reclamation. She papered and painted, washed windows and hung curtains, hired a man to paint the outside and build a new chimney; and soon brought to the premises an air of tidiness and order.

It chanced about the first week of May that a wayfaring man named James Watson, of no known address, stopped at her neat gate and debated the question of going in to ask for a meal. In Mr. Watson's experience the place was too tidy to be hospitable.

"Clean house—cross woman," said Mr. Watson, shaking his unkept gray head. "Still, all signs fail in a dry spell ... that last house I tried was dirty enough in all conscience, and I got nothing but 'Go to the porridge kitchen'... Nothing venture nothing win... 'we know not which will thrive, the late or early sown'."

Mr. Watson followed the new board walk to the back door, stood with his muddy boots on Miss Abbie's pearl gray steps, knocked on the cream and green door, and was admitted.

Two hours later James Watson came into the common room of the Salvation Army and told his story.

"Believe it or not," he began, in a voice that quivered with emotion, "but I found a place today where I was asked to come back." He had the attention of the room at once. Readers looked up from their magazines, and the man who was treating his friend's ingrowing toe-nail with a piece of broken glass carelessly let his instrument fall to the floor.

"You hadn't finished your work, I suppose; or maybe you had borrowed a hoe or something?" he said, being of a suspicious nature and given to caustic speech. "I have been asked back, too."

Mr. Watson resumed: "I was invited to come back, as I was saying when someone rudely interrupted me; asked in all friendliness by a very estimable lady, who cooked me the best meal I have had since I gave up my suite at the Rex... And she asked my advice.

"This lady is expecting her nephew, eighteen years old, whom she has never seen, from Scotland. Indeed, he is overdue now, and she is rather anxious. His room is ready for him—off the kitchen, done in pale green, with basket quilt on bed, and Saint Cecelia with halo round her head playing piano in gold frame on wall. I don't expect the mass of you to appreciate fine touches like this, but I mention them to prove the loving attitude of the lady for her nephew.... Gentlemen, there is a chance here for someone."

"Would I do?" asked the chiropodist's patient. "I feel years younger since Bill did my feet."

"Decidedly no," said Mr. Watson. "Nephew must be young, able-bodied, pink-cheeked—the kind preferred by mosquitoes—and must answer to the name of Jimmy Coles."

At that moment the door opened and a boy entered, a shabbily dressed boy with a battered cap and old waterproof. He carried a yellow tin box. Mr. Watson went to meet him.

"Are you from Scotland by any chance?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes, I did come from Scotland—but it was some——"

"Hush! Not a word till you hear all," said Mr. Watson. "It might be used against you!"

The next day Miss Abbie had two guests, whom she received at her front door and led into her tiny parlor. Her cheeks were pink with excitement.

"And to think you found Jimmy the very first day!... It was clever of you, Mr. Watson... He might have had some trouble finding me away out here, and him not knowing the town, nor feeling so well. The poor lad looks white and thin. I will never be done thanking you ... and now, Jimmy, dear, come away to your room, and I'll fix a bath for you—we haven't got the tub yet, but I have lots of hot water... Sit down, Mr. Watson, the dinner is all but ready."

The boy who answered to the name of Jimmy Coles fitted into his new life easily and well, and worked early and late. In the evenings he was content to sit by the table, in the circle of light cast by the coal-oil lamp, and listen to Miss Abbie, who told him many stories of his father's early years; for Miss Abbie, like most people who have lived alone, loved to talk, and was glad to have such an interested listener.

Then one day came a letter from Scotland.

"Dear Aunt Abbie," she read, "I hope you will not be disappointed, but I have changed my mind about coming to Canada. I hear the times are bad out there, and so think it best for me not to venture for a while, anyway. I am sorry if you went to any expense. Your loving nephew,—JAMES COLES."

Miss Abbie, with the letter in her hand, went to the door, but stopped there looking at her smiling garden lined with shoots of green. Jimmy, in his blue overalls, was setting out young cabbage plants with quick, deft movements. She watched him with a tightened feeling around her heart. Surely a boy couldn't be real bad who knows so well how to put in cabbage plants.

Suddenly Jimmy rose to his feet, looked toward the house, wavered a moment, and then went back to his work.

When he came in at night she noticed that his face bore a troubled look, but he washed as usual and came to the table. When she helped him to his share of the meal he pushed the plate away and said quickly: "Miss Allen, I've something I've got to tell you. I have no right to be here at all. I am not Jimmy Coles.... I was out of work and broke ... and when I heard about you looking for your nephew I jumped at the chance to get a clean bed and good meals, even if it only lasted a day or two... I was so fed up on being dirty ... but I'll go, of course, when the real Jimmy comes ... and I surely feel mean ... you've been so good to me ... and I do love to work for you."

Miss Abbie leaned over the corner of the little table and put her hand on that of the boy.

"Jimmy, dear lad, don't fash yoursel'—he's no comin' at all, and he can stay for all o' me... I just want you... I haven't a soul belongin' to me ... and I need you so. This is our little secret, Jimmy, and we'll just keep it. It's a nice way to pick relatives, don't you think?"

Jimmy got up and came around to her.

"Miss Allen," he said, huskily, "I'll tell you everything. I was in jail for a month—picked up for a vag; but I've never stole or cheated in my life. That's what made me so white and thin when I came. It was such a disgrace, and I didn't deserve it. But I want to work for you. You'll find me on the level."

Abbie Allen's face showed a startled look, but the boy's hand on her's was warm and reassuring, and his eyes met her's steadily.

"That's another secret, Jimmy, that we are no telling... There's been many fine people in jail. Jimmy—John Bunyan,

and Mrs. Pankhurst, and Flora Drummond ... and there's a lot that ought to be there ... so that isn't going to come between us. Now, eat your supper, dear, while it's hot!"

THIS CHANGING WORLD

Without having a definite understanding, it happened that Jerry Rambler from the Furniture and Sally Snider from the Patterns frequently met in and about the City Hall corner on Saturday afternoon, shortly after the closing of the store; and on two occasions in the last month they had gone together to the twenty-five cent matinee on a straight fifty-fifty basis.

On this Saturday Sally deliberately waited. Jerry might come again. It was a pleasant place to wait, anyway—in front of the market, with its window display of oranges in pyramids, greenish yellow grapefruit graduated in size and price, curly heads of crisp lettuce with drops of water on their leaves and sprigs of parsley scattered over them, and a plate of cottage cheese of ivory whiteness in the centre. Sally watched the women coming out, with their bulging string bags dropsical with parcels, on their way home to feed their hungry children. Not very attractive were they with their overrun heels and broken chin lines; but Sally knew they had their pleasures, too, and their ambitions, in clever children bringing home good reports; freshly papered rooms, paid for by the boarders' money, and the comforting assurance that as a family they were getting on. She wished them well, every one of them. She watched for Jerry's gray hat. The last time she had seen it a block away, riding high above the traffic. The clock struck half-past one, but Sally waited. The cheap admission lasted until two ... he might come. She hoped he would.

At twelve o'clock, as Jerry finished with a customer, the Manager came to him and said: "Jerry, I want you to do something for me, and it won't be hard. My little ward is in town, over at the hotel, and I want you to take her to the theatre this afternoon. She's a dainty little thing, just the sort of girl you will like, not a bit spoiled for all she has lots of money; not like these hard-boiled, shingled, sexless creatures, who know it all and need no help. She is the sort of girl that brings out the protective instinct in a man, Jerry. I couldn't take her, but told her I'd send some nice boy along, and I've picked on you. Give her a good time, Jerry, and I'll make it right. You are free, aren't you?"

Yes, Jerry was free.

He 'phoned the hotel. Miss Dean was in, and would be delighted to go to the theatre. Could she be ready by two? Miss Dean thought not. Perhaps at two-thirty. She told him she would be wearing a pale green dress so as he would know her.

Jerry, freshened by a hair-cut, shave and shoeshine, waited in the lounge of the hotel for Miss Dean, and watched the elevator for a little pale green girl whose coming seemed to be unreasonably delayed. Jerry waited impatiently. Saturday afternoon was too precious to be wasted in waiting. It was then he thought of Sally, and tried to 'phone her. But Sally had not come in, her mother said. She thought she had gone to the theatre, the early....

At three-fifteen Miss Dean appeared, and Jerry found his words of reproof leaving him as he went to meet her. She was so small and sweet and apologetic.

"I slept too long," she said, dimpling. "I have no one to look after me now, and I never know the time."

When they went through the street door the dark clouds threatened rain, and drops fell on the pavement.

"Oh, my poor dress and hat!" she cried. "It's raining. Must we walk?"

Jerry hailed a taxi. It was only three blocks, but the fluffy green dress and hat would surely crumple in the dampness.

Jerry did not enjoy the picture. It was costing too much, and his young companion found fault with it all through. She had seen the real play in Toronto, and she never could get accustomed to mechanical music. She said that she was old-fashioned and peculiar, but she couldn't help it. Would he mind very much if they didn't stay for the last act. She could tell him how it ended...

It was really raining when they came out, and again Jerry got a taxi. When they reached the hotel his charming little friend insisted on his coming in.

"Do come and have dinner with me. I am really starving," she said, sweetly. "Do come so we can have a talk. I want to know you better. You have been so lovely to me. Oh, must you go? And will I have to eat all alone in that big room?"

There was a quiver in the voice, and the pansy brown eyes were clouding over. Jerry relented.

At ten o'clock that night Jerry 'phoned to Sally. Could he come right over? He could.

Sally answered the door herself, and brought her guest out into the kitchen, where she was cutting out a dress on the table.

"My two sisters are entertaining in the living-room," she said in explanation, "but you can have the rocking-chair. Now, what's on your mind, Jerry?"

"I deserted you to-day," he began. Sally nodded, with her mouth full of pins. "I took another girl to the Palace!"

Sally adjusted the pattern and put in two pins before she replied. "That was nice—for a change!" she said. "Tell me about her."

Jerry told the story, concluding: "She's a sweet kid, all right, with eyes of brown and purple and gold, and two little dimples, and dresses in ruffles—and she said I had been wonderful to her, and she is going to write to me every week."

"Is she, now?" Sally stopped pinning and looked at him. "I might have known," she said, with a sigh, shaking her head, "with that wave in your hair, and those square shoulders, and the idealism of youth in your blue eyes, you would be picked up like this and sold down the river. You were surely born to pay some woman's bills. There are two kinds of women—lifters and leaners. It is generally supposed that the best men prefer leaners. That's rather too bad, Jerry. I had a different future mapped out for you... But we can't go against fate."

"Now, listen, Sally," said Jerry, drawing the rocking-chair up to the table, "and stop your dress-making. You do not need a new dress, anyway, and I want all your attention... The boss said to me to-day that his young ward is the sort of a girl who brings out the best in a man—his protective instinct—and that noble emotion makes men do their bravest and best, and brings life's greatest happiness.... But I did not get one bit of a thrill today in protecting this little fluffy thing. I was mad at her for coming out in mosquito netting and holding me up for a taxi twice... And she chattered when I wanted to enjoy the picture. My little adventure today in the world of true romance cost me forty per cent. of my week's salary, and I had other plans for that eight dollars. I wanted socks and a new hat. This one has a shade of green, which does not betoken youth. And all I have for my eight dollars is the memory of deep brown pansy eyes and dancing dimples, and the taxi-driver's prolonged wink when I got stung the second time. I am not one of the best men, if your classification is right, for I do not want a leaner. I am not a hero.... I don't want to be a sacrifice! I want a fair break. That's not the way a gentleman of the old school would feel, so you see I am lacking in the manly virtues...."

"I am not much of a lady, either," said Sally, "for this afternoon, when you didn't come, I concluded something else had come your way. So I went myself—alone, mind you, and unprotected—and enjoyed every minute of the play; and even when Tommy, my young brother, told me he saw you going in with a very pretty girl I did not grow pale, or tremble, or feel my heart stop beating, or call down curses on her head... I decided to make myself a dress ... which brings up to the present... But, Jerry, this episode of the little girl in pale green has brought one truth home to me. I will have to watch you more carefully. You are far too good-looking to be left running around. Someone will nab you ... and then I will feel mean. Your manager is right about the protective instinct, but it is women who have it... I want to see you marry some girl who will give you that fair break you spoke of, and just to be sure there is no mistake..."

THE CHISELLER

Mrs. Lane, graciously farewelling her parting guests, saw them drift out in bright swarms to their waiting cars at the curb, and noted with satisfaction the fine array of motors assembled there—blue, black, green road-dragons with gleaming bodies and barrel lamps, heralds of power, wealth and elegance. No one could say she did not help to further her husband's business.

She was a handsome woman, in a black sheathe dress, and dieted to the last ounce. Her black hair, parted in the middle, flowed down her shapely head and met at the nape of the white neck in a shiny roll. Long crystal earrings flanked her narrow cheeks, and twinkled as she moved like Chinese wind-bells. Her hands were long, with pointed nails dyed to match the burning crimson of her lips.

Now that the rooms were cleared the most enjoyable time of the tea had come, when the helpers, pourers and servers assembled at the table to eat and talk free from restraint. There were still sandwiches on the trays, olives in the glass dishes, a whole log of ice-cream, brownbaked with rolled nuts, a little bit warped with the heat of the room, but all the sweeter for that, and someone had brought in a fresh pot of tea.

Mrs. Lane sat down among her admiring friends and took their homage. It was the peak of the day for her, when compliments would be showered on her. She knew her tea had been a perfect performance, and she was ready to take her curtain calls.

"My dear," said Mrs. Potter, who had been on point duty, directing the traffic from the living-room to the tea-table all afternoon, "I do envy you your cleverness in entertaining. You do it so easily, and have so many original ideas. Now, this tea-table, with its darling little bungalow centre—the perfect little house set in a plot of real growing grass, with red winding path and little flower-beds—is so appealing. How did you think of it?"

Mrs. Lane, eating one of her own good sandwiches, explained.

"I got the little house from one of the displays used at the Exhibition last year by our Company, and I grew the grass on a shallow pan, and made the little flowers and shrubs. It was really nothing; I made it all in one evening—after the grass grew."

Helen Marks, bringing in a plate of angel cake torn into portions, intervened.

"Our hostess is the best little advertiser I know. This cute bungalow might well bear a card 'For Sale Exclusively by the Western Realty Company. Robert Lane, Representative!' Just to look at it makes one want to own one. But that's legitimate advertising. Advertising is a form of art, anyway, and Marie is an artist."

"Don't mention the word 'advertising,' Helen," said the four-to-five pourer. "Marie is a true artist, and we might as well admit it."

"She has far more business sense than an artist is entitled to," Helen protested. "I think Marie's line should be second-hand furniture and antiques. If there is one bargain in the whole place she can grab it. I never see anything but wardrobes, or old high chairs and cracked dishes, in a second-hand store, but Marie finds old lustre jugs and rosewood stools."

"I only got one lustre jug," said Marie, "and I feel a little mean about it, for the proprietor was out and I bought it from the girl, who didn't know lustre from blue enamel. It's a beauty, and I only paid a quarter for it."

"You didn't feel mean enough to return it the next day to make restitution, though," Helen said.

"No, not that mean. I have certain scruples, but they are under control." Marie's laugh was silvered over with the

musical tinkle of her crystals.

"And now, when we are all here in one charmed circle," said Helen, "just six of us, who know the worst of each other, just tell us the story of the walnut desk that you purloined and pirated from our leading departmental store in broad daylight, and under the eyes of the full staff, one floor-walker and two doormen."

Marie's eyes kindled.

"Now, I will admit, without argument, that this was a fairly smooth transaction. But I swear you to secrecy. If Bob knew this he would disown me. Bob prides himself on the fairness of his dealing—he gives the other fellow all the breaks all the time. I don't—I believe in the motto, 'Let the buyer beware,' and everyone else. I believe a person has to be ruthless to get anywhere in this world. Theoretically, bread cast on the water comes back, but who would want it then? But here's the story: I went to the furniture sale at Brenton's to buy an end table, but my eyes detected a beautiful walnut desk among the sales stuff—which you may have noticed in the living-room. A card lay on it stating the sale price was thirty dollars. I looked around to get a clerk who didn't belong to the department—they had brought down the rug and drapery clerks—and I picked on one who looked green and awkward and easy, and I paid him the money and got my slip. I knew they never intended to sell that desk for thirty dollars. It looked like one hundred and thirty. But that was not my business, and if Brenton's don't know their's that's just too bad for them.

"That afternoon the assistant manager phoned me that the card had been left on that desk by mistake—the clerk came to see me and expostulated—and the manager of the department came as well. I was sweet but unyielding, meek but unmoved. If a reputable store makes a mistake it must abide by it—that was the theme song of my replies; my anthem which I sung in many different ways, always remembering about the soft answer, but never relinquishing my hold on the desk for one moment. At last they sent it to me—and here it is! The assistant manager, who was in charge of the sale, was inclined to be a bit nasty. He said he did not think a woman in my position would stoop to such chiselling. But don't ever let Bob know."

"No wonder the Western Realty Company is prospering even in these hard times," said Helen.

Mrs. Lane threw out her long hands in protest.

"Oh, but they are not—that's the worst of it. Do you know, Bob hasn't made a sale for a month. He has a good prospect now—some people from the country have come in—retired farmers with money in the bank—and they are looking at one of Bob's houses. It seemed to suit the women of the family, the mother and the two daughters. The old gentleman doesn't say much, but they're waiting for the final O.K. from the son, who lives in the City here, and Bob was taking him out this afternoon. I am hoping so much he'll close the deal. There's a big commission in it, and we certainly need it. We've really been embarrassed lately. There's Bob, now, just driving in. I wonder if he has the cheque? It is to be a cash sale."

"We must go," said Mrs. Porter. "Bob will want his dinner now... I should have been home half an hour ago. Women always hang around too long after a tea. They forget in their fullness of stomach that other people are hungry. Come on, Helen."

Helen was not ready. "Let's wait and see if Bob closed the deal," she said. "I can't go home without knowing." They waited.

Robert Lane came in, greeting his wife's guests cordially.

"Did you sell the house, Bob?" Helen asked. "I can't go home until I know. If you did it will make the end of a perfect day, for Marie has had a wonderful tea."

Bob sat down before he answered.

"I never came so near to selling anything. It was a curious case, and I don't understand it. The sale was made, practically. We discussed everything, and it was all clear. 'How shall I make out the cheque?' the old gentleman asked me, and I handed our business card to him so he could see the exact name of the company, 'Western Realty Company,

Limited.' My hand may have shaken a little—we do not see many cheques for ten thousand dollars these days. The young man took the card from me to hand it to his father, and read it aloud. My name was on it, of course—Robert Lane, representative. He turned to me like a flash and said, 'Are you the Robert Lane who lives on Somerset Crescent?' and I said I was. In my simplicity I thought he was going to compliment me on my tennis championship. He went over to his father and actually took the cheque out of his hand. There was a whispered conversation, and then the old gentleman said apologetically, 'I am sorry, Mr. Lane, but the deal is off.' I asked for an explanation, but I could not get it. They assured me they had no fault to find with me. The young man was especially emphatic in his protestations that he had nothing against me—but evidently the name Lane had unpleasant memories."

"Is this Friday, the thirteenth, or something?" asked Helen.

"No, it had to do with me, I am convinced," said Bob. "I can't think it out. I don't think I ever did anyone a mean trick. The young man is a fine, smart chap, in a good position. He wouldn't have any silly prejudices. He is assistant manager in the furniture department at Brenton's."

The silence in the room became almost vocal. Nobody moved.

"It's a long lane," said Helen, absently.

KEEP A THING FOR SEVEN YEARS

Ellen Coulter was not called a maiden lady, business woman, modiste or costumier, or any such felicitous name, though she was all of these. She was said to be an old maid who sewed by the day, for her lot was cast among plain, blunt folk of lowland Scotch ancestry who despised high-sounding words. But Ellen Coulter did not mind; she was a contented woman, who lived quite happily in her own world, and kept a diary, carrying it about with her in a black bag, the key of which hung around her neck. She knew she could make dresses, and she also knew she could have been married if she had been as easily pleased as some; and in both these assurances her soul was sustained and comforted. She was a sentimental little thing, too, and loved to make wedding dresses. Her pincushion, heart-shaped, of red felt, was suspended from her waist, but the pins for immediate use she kept in her mouth.

The women of the neighborhood all liked Ellen, she was so safe and silent. They could tell her anything and know that it would go "no further." And besides, she kept them up with the fashions, for Miss Coulter made two trips a year to the City to see what was being worn, and, when she returned, introduced circular skirts, sheathe dresses, boleros, or irregular hem lines, with an unerring hand. But she tempered fashion with mercy, and had due regard for the general contour of her clients. Her gift for silence won her many admirers, even among the men, who had not thought any woman capable of such reticence.

It happened, about two years ago now, that the placid atmosphere of Iron Springs was disturbed by the coming of a new proprietor to the general store, which stood at the head of the one short street. Owen Fisher had lost no time in remodeling the premises, painting the outside a shade of flame with black trimming, which Alex Morrison, the postmaster across the street, said would increase the fire insurance rate. The next week Mr. Fisher put in a gasoline pump and started a service station. At the end of three months the Fisher restaurant had been opened, too, and Mrs. Fowler, who had made her living by giving meals to farmers and others on the long oilcloth-covered table in her big room, looked with dismay at her empty chairs.

When the Fisher invasion had been going on for perhaps six months, and Mrs. Fisher was now the President of the Institute, and had been to the school twice to complain of Miss Morrison's treatment of her son Reggie, it happened that she was getting some sewing done by Miss Coulter, and on the first afternoon she conceived the kind idea of giving a cup of tea to the small, pale dressmaker. Dressmakers going from house to house must know many things. So, carrying a tin tray with a cup tea-stained and cracked and a plate of store biscuits, she set it before Miss Coulter and invited her to eat and drink. Miss Coulter stopped her work of pinning a pattern on the goods, removed several pins from her mouth, and

prepared to do so.

Ellen Coulter knew all the gossip about the Fishers, and so the friendly overture of a cup of tea came as a surprise; but when she saw the bare tray she was convinced that there was no kindness in it—a cracked cup of weak tea and a "dog biscuit" could not carry much friendliness. Mrs. Fisher sat down, but did not eat anything.

"Going about as you do, Miss Coulter, you must know people very well. Now, I have just taken over the Institute, and I want to get something done—this little place is dead, if it only knew it. We need new blood in this town. Now, there's Miss Morrison, she is hopelessly out of date; I want to get a good strong executive, and then we will get a few much-needed reforms here. Who are really the best people here?"

Miss Coulter laid the cup down carefully. She seemed to be thinking of something else.

"Strange, isn't it," she said, in her gentle voice, "how long a cracked cup will last? Everyone who sees the crack is doubly careful. Oh, you were asking me about the best people in Iron Springs. I can tell you who are the most easily fitted, of course, but that would not answer your purpose. I really could not classify them without considerable thought—and my list would not likely be of value."

Mrs. Fisher had a new baffled feeling, and a dull anger showed in her face. She would see that the store carried a full line of ready-to-wear after this. Just then her son Reggie came in from school with loud complaints of the teacher.

As Miss Coulter went on her rounds she heard much about the new storekeeper and his aggressive wife. They were getting a stranglehold on the community. Alex. Morrison, who had been the postmaster since Iron Springs began, had lost his position with the change of Government, and Mr. Fisher had the office now in his store, and would not even hire the old man to look after it, but brought one of his friends from the City.

And what could anyone say? With no market for the wheat everyone was getting credit at the store. Iron Springs felt its independence slipping away.

Miss Coulter was sewing at the hotel one day in the little room off the parlor where the Institute members were gathering. The first members who came in were greatly excited over the news just released by the baker's wife. The Fishers were demanding that Miss Morrison be dismissed! There was to be a meeting on Friday night. Wasn't it awful? They said she had put Reggie out to play when he had a cold. Poor Miss Morrison, who was so kind to every child! Miss Coulter stopped her sewing and listened attentively.

"What can we do?" said the baker's wife. "They're threatening to bring bread from the City, too. They want her sister for the teacher—that's what's at the bottom of it—hush! here she comes."

The meeting was held in the school on Friday night, and everyone was there except Miss Coulter. Mrs. Fisher, with Reggie beside her, quite enjoying the excitement, led the attack.

"It is no reflection on a teacher's work to say it is out of date," she began, diplomatically. "We will all be out of date some time—but schools exist for children, not for any teacher, however worthy. New methods in education show that the child must be studied, and less attention be given to rules. Now, I have a direct complaint to make. One day last April—the 16th it was—my boy had a cold and he told Miss Morrison he did not want to go out to play at recess. She has a rule that all children must put on their things and go out. So she made my boy go out, and she told him he ate too much candy and that is why he has so many colds. He was quite sick the next day, and I had to have the doctor. I claim she is too hard a women to be dealing with children."

There was a rustle in the room. It might have been either agreement or dissent. The chairman wiped his face with a red handkerchief.

Suddenly the door opened and someone came quickly to the front of the room. Every head turned and turned again. Miss Coulter stood before the audience with a large black book in her hand.

"Mr. Chairman, may I speak?" she asked. "I keep a diary, as you know. It is a little harmless hobby of mine. I like to

record conversations. My business makes it imperative for me to refrain from speech, and everyone craves expression. So I write in my book each day, and have here an entry for April sixteenth, the day on which Miss Morrison is alleged to have sent Reggie Fisher out to play. Here is my entry.

"I was sewing for Mrs. Fisher to-day. Reggie Fisher came in, a bright, attractive lad of loud voice, and somewhat overweight. He told his mother, with some indignation, that Miss Morrison had sent him out when he wanted to stay in and trade marbles with Roy Baker. "And I told her I had a cold, too," he said, "and she said the air was good for a cold; and she said if I didn't eat so many candies I wouldn't have so many colds. Is that so?" he asked his mother. To this she replied, "It is true enough, but it's none of her business, and I will tell her so—and now I want you to get on your pony and go to Kelly's and bring in the cream. Never mind your cold—it's a nice day. And DO it this time. Don't come back and say they are not at home."

Miss Coulter laid down the book and addressed the chair. "You will note the perfect agreement between the home and school, the two great factors in the life of the child. Both mother and teacher agree that (a) Reggie's colds come from over indulgence in candy; (b) Exercise is good when taken in the fresh air. Ladies and gentlemen, you will see there is no disagreement; Miss Morrison's diagnosis of Reggie's case was endorsed by Reggie's mother. I am glad to be a peacemaker," she concluded, looking around the room with her pleasant smile.

Mrs. Fisher stood up, breathing heavily, but did not speak. The chairman pounded his hand on the desk, though there was no need to ask for silence.

"The meeting is dismissed," he said.

O CANADA!

Mr. Felix Martin opened the door and bade us enter. "You will have to take us as you find us," he said, grandly. "We are rather rough and ready; but I told my wife when we came to Canada that she must adopt Canadian ways and forget the formality of Maida Vale."

It seemed to us as we looked about us at the incredible confusion that she had forgotten more than that. The chairs were all full of garments, cooking utensils and papers; but Mrs. Martin arose with the baby in her arms and evicted a flock of children from the old couch that had been serving as a teeter. Mrs. Burton sat on the high arm, and I found a place on the listing end of it. Between us stretched a no-man's land where the cover was broken by an outcropping of iron springs, twisted and rusty, from which the stuffing oozed dustily.

"Yes," said Mr. Martin, pulling out a chair from under a miscellaneous load, "we are typical Canadians now, and are glad to do our part in building up this great empire within the Empire. We came here but seven short years ago, and already five little olive branches have come to bless our union."

The evidence was there, eighty per cent. of it, behind the stove, watching us with bright eyes gleaming under their tangled locks, and the remainder on Mrs. Martin's knee asleep.

"Five little olive branches," he said, indicating them proudly, with his yellow fingers outspread, "and I can say it to you, ladies, without offence, in my wife's presence, the gods are about to bless us again."

We knew it. We knew it when we got his letter at the Institute meeting asking us to come to see them.

Mrs. Burton, President of the Institute, who had been sitting gingerly on the high end of the couch, now sat down heavily in her excitement, with the result that I was thrown upward, causing a slight interruption, but Mr. Martin's monologue went on.

"Five little native-born Canadians, steeped in British traditions, and loving the old flag ... and another on its way to this land of opportunity!... And now, ladies, I will tell you why I asked you to come... Your society has been helpful to us, and we are grateful. Gratitude has ever been one of the attributes of my family, and in some degree an attitude of my wife's family."

We knew what was coming. We had heard this before. Gratitude in Mr. Felix Martin's heart was a lively sense of favors yet to come.

"Our circumstances have changed somewhat since the last time we asked you for help and you so kindly rendered it." Then, turning to his wife, he said, "Do you think, my dear Edith, you had better send the three eldest children out to play. They could have a happy time in the ladies' car."

"My car is locked," said Mrs. Burton, quickly.

"No, no, we won't go. We want to stay. Let's stay," came from behind the stove.

"Very well, then, you must be very quiet and not interrupt Papa.

"As I said, we are in different circumstances this time ... happier circumstances."

"Not happier, Felix," corrected his wife, gently. She was a faded little thing, with blue lips and stringy, greasy hair, which I longed to wash in rain water and plenty of white castile soap.

"We cannot stay the hand of death," he said to her, reproachfully. "We would not if we could."

"I am sure we are not wishing dear Auntie away—we will be very grieved when we hear she is gone. You know you will, Felix, too. You have said so."

He motioned for silence.

"My aunt is now an aged woman, and her end draws near. She has always promised that my brother and I shall be her heirs. She named me Felix because her lover, who was drowned, bore that name. She is now nearing the shore. Yesterday a letter came from my brother which has changed our outlook on life."

He opened his coat and produced a letter and read:

"Dear Felix: I have just come from Aunt Cynthia, and think you should know that a change is coming. She talks rather strangely, and does not seem quite herself. The curate goes to see her every day, and it seems like the end. She said she was sending you fifty pounds, and expressed a wish to see you and your five children. I hope everything is all right. I thought I had better write. Your loving brother, CYRIL."

Mr. Martin replaced the letter and looked at us with a little gleam of triumph.

"I have not boasted of my expectations," he said, modestly. "I deemed it best to walk among my companions here as one of them, a bread-winner and a worker, even as they are. But now I want you and your admirable members to know that your kindness will be repaid, every cent and more. You notice my dear aunt expressed a desire to see me and my family. That, of course, is impossible. But Mrs. Martin and I have decided that I should go. My dear aunt's dying wish is sacred. But how to leave Mrs. Martin in her delicate health is a matter that wrings my heart."

Mrs. Burton interrupted.

"Have you received the fifty pounds?"

"Not yet," he said, just a trifle irritably, "but what is a paltry fifty pounds?"

"It's nearly two hundred and fifty dollars," replied Mrs. Burton, "and if applied on your debts would be very welcome to the people who have supplied you with meat and groceries and clothing for the past seven years. I would

think that would be your first duty."

Mr. Martin drew himself up stiffly, but the President of the Institute refused to quail.

"All in good time," he said, "they will get their money.... I will cable it to them."

"A bank draft is cheaper," I ventured.

"Enough of this," said Mr. Martin, feeling that the meeting was getting out of hand. "I called you in, ladies, to tell you our plans and ask for your endorsement."

"My duty is to be by my aunt's bedside, that is plain. But my wife and little ones! Let no one say I have not provided for them.... I could have gone to other societies, but the Women's Institute is my choice. I have had some little experience with service clubs.... Before little Tootie was born I asked one of the clubs here to help us. I attended one of their luncheons at considerable inconvenience to myself, and listened to their ghastly songs about gray mares and hard-boiled eggs ... and they sent us books of bread and milk tickets; and to my wife an invitation to come to their clinic. But what we needed was ready cash.... I was working for the City at the time, but at a miserable pittance. I was really in need. And when I went to another society here, which shall be nameless, the President told me to my face it was a crime to bring children into the world like rabbits—those were her words!"

He lifted Winky on his knee and wiped her little sore nose with a piece of newspaper. "Bad lady, to call my Winky a rabbit..."

"What I want you to do for me now, for I am a direct man, and do not believe in beating about the bush... I want you to come with me to the bank and get me a loan sufficient for my needs on the journey, and then take Mrs. Martin and the children away from this depressing little house while certain repairs are being made. We made a plan of it last night. It is a good chance to get it done while I am away. I am anxious to be off—every day is precious... You helped me when we had nothing... So now, when I can repay you handsomely, I have chosen you from all the societies in this city! I am not the sort of a man who would forget his friends."

Mrs. Martin smiled at us in turn, a sweet little congratulatory smile. She was glad for our sakes.

"No bank will give you a loan," said Mrs. Burton. "Your aunt is not dead, and you have nothing to show that you have any money coming to you."

"I am amazed at you, Mrs. Burton," he said, "and you a banker's wife! Must I go over all this again? You don't understand... I am not a pauper to be spoken to in this way."

Mrs. Martin dabbed her eyes with a very dirty handkerchief: "Don't chew the lady's handbag, Winky," she said, wearily; "the color may run and poison you."

The tension was broken by the arrival of the postman, who threw in a letter. The children came at the sound and scrambled for it. The baby wakened and cried lumpily. Tottie darted under my feet to get the comfort, which, when found, Mrs. Martin licked and put in the baby's mouth. While this was in progress Mr. Martin secured the letter from Winky.

Mrs. Burton and I rose to go.

"Stay!" commanded Mr. Martin, "this letter may settle the matter and quiet every doubting voice. You shall know all."

He opened the letter with a flourish and began to read. His eyes grew wild with some emotion, and the letter shook in his hands. Then he sat down suddenly and moaned, and the baby, losing its comfort, joined its wails with his.

"My curses on her, perfidious woman!" he hissed. "And on that damnable villain!"

"Felix! Felix! the children!" expostulated his wife, dancing the crying baby on her knee.

The letter had fallen to the floor at my feet. I handed it to Mrs. Martin, but she, busy with the baby, motioned me to read it. I read:

"My dear Nephew: You will be surprised to hear I have married the curate, who has been so very kind to me in my recent illness. By a curious coincidence, his name is Felix. Happiness has quite restored me, and I know I shall live a very long time. But I am sending you fifty pounds with my love. Tell darling Edith to send me a photo of those precious lambs. Lovingly, AUNT CYNTHIA. P.S.—I will send you a clipping from the *Post re* the wedding."

We took a hurried farewell of Mrs. Martin, a noisy farewell, for the comfort was lost again and the four children were wildly searching for it, seeming to think we were concealing it.

When we were at the door Mr. Martin raised his head and placed his hand on it as if in blessing. "I am not beaten," he said, tapping his head; "bloody but unbowed! Mrs. Martin, I will provide for you—my marriage vows shall hold. I have a plan, my dear. These filthy tradesmen shall not see a penny of this money—not a penny. My wife and babes come first. I will lay it on the races; I have always been lucky with the ponies. Darling, dry your eyes, trust me. We can do without their help. Tell the wretched banks to keep their loans. Tottie, come and kiss Papa."

The family's fortunes were rising; the comfort had been found. It seemed a good time to withdraw.

[End of *Flowers for the Living* by Nellie L. McClung]