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The Left Lady

By

Margaret Turnbull



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The Left Lady

To Eltse Van Saun Pierson

*That April should be shattered by a gust,
That August should be leveled by a rain,
I can endure, and that the lifted dust
Of man should settle to the earth again;
But that a dream can die, will be a thrust
Between my ribs forever of hot pain.*

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY.

For eighteen years Emmietta Weston had regarded her father as a clever, unscrupulous, not uninteresting combination of jailer and tyrant. Now, as she followed his body to the cemetery, she wondered vaguely how she would reconstruct her life without him.

The other members of the family with her in the limousine, her sister May and that sister's husband and grown son, were virtually strangers. Emmietta turned from them to the window and looked out on East Penniwell. After all, his village had been the only thing, except money, that Eli Weston had cared about.

Loungers stood thick on the post office side of Central Avenue. On week days they lined the corner next the barber shop. On Sundays, when the automobile rush through that town was at its height, they stood in front of the post office and played "motor poker."

Rob Butts had just scored with 333,033, three of a kind and a pair, when Ally Castner called out:

"Here comes old Eli's funeral."

They stopped their game and watched the automobiles cross the corners and go up the hill that led to the cemetery, two miles distant.

East Penniwell was that curious modern anomaly, a little village whose principal street had become part of the main artery of motor traffic between two large and distant cities. All day long East Penniwell's main street bore a constant stream of rapidly moving vehicles; but on either side of this stream the town lay placid and unstirred.

Its sons and daughters, catching glimpses of life as it is lived by the care-free and fashionable of the day, strove to emulate them in their clothes and general deportment, with more or less success. The radio in their homes, and the motion pictures at the county seat, seven miles away, aided and abetted them.

But the loungers on the corner lounged as their fathers had before them. Occasionally the even tenor of their leisurely lives was disturbed when some inconsiderate wife or daughter, whose patent washer, or job at the box factory kept things going, "turned sick," or "died on them." Odd jobs were then forced upon them, but they were only occasional.

The last of the funeral party disappeared over the crest of the hill.

"Well, Eli's left us," said Zebra Ballins. Zebra had grown old in this Quaker community, where his white neighbors treated him as an equal. "Half of them motors wasn't full."

"I guess all the friends Eli Weston ever had wouldn't crowd one motor none," asserted Ezra Schumacher, who was not a Quaker and showed his superiority and white blood by ignoring or contradicting Zebra's questions and observations, though he borrowed Zebra's plug tobacco.

"Speak kinda softly about the daid," advised Zebra.

"I always did speak my mind to and of Eli Weston, and he being dead ain't gonna laugh at me for a hypocrite. He wasn't loved none, though he was respected, on account of his money."

"Well, maybe Miss Emmietta was kinda fond of him."

"Emmietta did her duty all right by the old screw, but that ain't saying she enjoyed it none."

"Well," said Zebra, "you folks maybe knows more'n I do 'bout the feelings of white folks one to'd each other. I have wu'ked for Miss Emmietta all times off and on, when Asher Turkle was sick or somepin', and they wasn't so much love losted between her and the old man, though it was he that raised his voice—not she, never."

"Her looks went kinda early," observed Ira Austin. "Miss Emmietta was a far better looking girl than her sister May. Yet May, she got married to a regular New Yorker, more'n twenty years ago, and here's Miss Emmie, which was far more kinda attractive to the male sect, you might say, turning out one of these here left ladies."

Zebra, stared at him appreciatively and repeated the phrase. "'Left ladies'! Yeah, Ira Austin, that kinda explains her, don't

it?"

"It do," Ira answered importantly. "The way I looks at it, you see, is that there's three kinds of 'em when singled. There's them there mannish women, as are more'n content to be so. In fact, them that's so damned busy and bossy that a husband would only clutter up their houses, and wear the pants they prefers to wear themselves. Then there's them there old maids, that never coulda been anything else, so kinda homely, or so kinda without any seeduction or pleasant female ways, that no man wants them around. Then, there's the 'left ladies,' as I names them. Whether its be death or be jilting, or because some other female helped herself, by way of matiremony, to their man, there they are. Pretty girls they have been, like Miss Emmietta. Made for matiremony, as more'n one man would agree, but whether it's the contrariness that's in women that they won't take but the one they want, and be damned to the rest, or not, I can't say. Anyway, there they are—they're left. 'Left ladies' is what I names them."

"And a good name too, for such as them," rumbled Old Man Gillingham approvingly, without removing his pipe, which always seemed an integral part of his face. "And a 'left lady' Miss Emmietta's been ever since the day Tom Hastings took his departure from East Penniwell."

One of the younger loungers who had been losing, and was not anxious to have the "motor poker" game renewed, moved nearer to Old Man Gillingham. "Who was Tom Hastings?" he asked.

"In course you would ask that question, Lafayette Hicks, seeing that you was a kinda bow-legged babby when he left. Yeah, I remember your mother left ye outside the grocery for a minute and you was bawling blue murder and getting black in the face that very day."

"Maybe," Lafayette retorted disrespectfully. "I ain't in me second childhood yit, and can't remember all the old bums that usta hold up this wall twenty years ago."

"Eighteen," corrected Zebra. "Eighteen year it is since Tom Hastings and old Eli had their run-in. I was working for Eli that day when Tom came. He had a turrible determined look on his face. I says to myself, 'My, my, there Tom Hastings goes to git his yes or no from Miss Emmie'. But I was mistook. Twasn't more'n ten minutes before old Eli himself, all red and angry, showed him out. Tom he shouted: 'I'm never coming back, damn you!' and went off down this here very street and to the deepo."

"And hide nor hair of him ain't been seen since," old Ira finished off, "and from that very day seems as if Miss Emmie took a change."

"Never looked the same, she didn't," agreed another old man, "but she kep' a tight lip and nobody knew, for certain, how she felt. She wasn't a w'ine cat, like Miss May. Miss May now used to cry and w'ine everything outta old Eli. Regular w'ine cat she was."

"Thasso," Zebra agreed. "Of course it's up to you folks—you know more'n I do. But now you have named it, I kin bring in the c'roboration of the fac's. Miss Emmie never asked for nothing, and the consequences is she got nothing. Miss May got it all."

But old Ira had had enough of Zebra for the present. He ignored him and turned to Lafayette Hicks.

"If Tom Hastings did come back, the question is, would he look at Miss Emmie again?"

"Would she look at him?" thundered her champion, Ezra Schumacher. "The years may have thinned her, but again they may have puffed him out like a balleroon. How do you know they ain't leff him with a corporation?" he added, with a satisfied glance at his own thin, wizened frame.

"Ain't we got kinda sidetracked off'n the real thing?" asked Zebra. "Ain't the real question how old Eli's lef his money?"

The others paused and looked at him thoughtfully.

"Know anything?" queried old Ira.

Zebra shook his head.

The group stared at the Weston house. It stood in a triangular patch of green at the end of Central Avenue, which was the

main and indeed the only real street in East Penniwell. There were only about twenty houses in all, including the general store, the post office and the old inn which had been there since William Penn's time, and now was brilliant with white paint and signs to catch the motorist's eye and trade.

The Weston house was a typical Pennsylvania farm house, built of stone, planned on the simple lines adopted in those days of adding to the first tiny stone house a series of other stone houses, of the same shape but different sizes. If one had been a giant, with a giant cleaver in hand, the Weston house could have been divided into three small houses, each built on the beautifully simple plan of two rooms up and two rooms down. There were two stairways, one built in between the first and second house, and the other, in the living room, much more stately, with balusters and handrail of mahogany. There were no halls on the ground floor. The outer doors were all half, or "Dutch" doors, opening directly into the rooms.

It looked a farm house still, despite its village setting, and the triangle of ground about it represented only a tiny portion of the Weston land. The side road, once a cow path, cut it off from many level, cultivated fields, still Weston property. There was a look of meager neatness about the lovely old house and yard that spoke of toil and scanty expenditure.

Lib Candy, for many years the only female "hired help" permitted by Eli in his home, drew up the blinds.

"Cloud-a-Witnesses! Asher Turkle, get through redding up the foliage and get out before they come back."

"Well," answered Asher, "the heft of my work is done." He leisurely lifted his great frame, six feet two inches high, and about one hundred and ninety pounds in weight, from the floor, where he had been laboriously picking up one or two faded violets, tiny pieces of green vine, and a bit of black ribbon. His eyes twinkled as he put the scraps in the empty fireplace, but there was no answering twinkle in Lib Candy's keen green eyes. "There ain't much more an able-bodied man can do until mealtime."

He waited. Lib went about the room silently, pushing chairs back.

"Can't I help you none in the kitchen, Lib? They'll be back in no time. Cars make nuthin' of two miles and a half now. It's early days to stand out in a cold graveyard. Grief for Eli ain't apt to be so overpowering that people'll forget they have to preserve life, and are in need of some stummick comfort."

"They needn't hurry. They won't get anything here."

"What! Ain't Miss Emmie give any orders?"

"Not an order."

"Good gravy! Ain't Miss Emmietta taken any thought for the living? Sunday too, and the shops shut! You oughta reminded her, Lib."

"I dunno as she exactly forgot," Lib answered, arranging the cushions on an old horsehair sofa. The furniture was shabby and the cushions covered some of the rents in the seat. There was nothing in the room newer than 1890.

Asher leaned against the doorway and slowly chewed a carnation stem. "Well, God sends everything and it's best to take it as it comes, and make as little to-do about it as possible, but for twenty years never have I rose up from the table here feeling bloated with food. Never! I'm no man to lean toward females as you know."

Lib gave him a cold glance.

"I have always preferred the male sect, but by Gravy and Potatoes, this is a crusher! I thought, come Miss Emmie got the reins in her hands you and me, Lib, might see different times. Do you aim to stay?"

"If Miss Emmie wants me, I'm staying."

Asher looked at her oddly. "Whether I stay or not, I presoom?"

Lib nodded.

"Lib, hasn't Eli left nothing?"

"He has."

"Yeah, I thought he was a warm man, but I'm saying now that if he left anything to us—"

"He ain't. I was a witness to his will, and you can't witness a will if there's anything left you in it. That's the law, as Eli took good care to tell me."

"Well, maybe if he didn't leave anything to you, he left something to me—thinking—"

Lib shook her head.

Asher sat down suddenly. "For twenty years I've been—"

"A fool," snapped Lib.

Asher rose and took a step toward her. "Woman, do you remember why I came here?"

Lib nodded. "Very well, and Eli did too. He threw it up at me the day I signed the will. And why?" Lib looked up at Asher and considered; then made for her a momentous decision. "Eli knew you came here twenty years ago because you thought he being old you stood a chance to manage the farm, get the tenant house down along the wood road to live in, and marry me."

She made a gesture which stopped Asher from interrupting. It had a dignity of its own, that gesture, and so had Lib.

"Eli knew you'd never ask me without the house and farm, and you haven't—never. Wait," as Asher strove to speak. "I knew it as well as Eli. Things went on. You noticed nothing, just stayed on here, making a slave of yourself and never having the gumption to tell that hard old miser where he got off. And there was you, every Sunday passing the plate and smiling at all the pretty girls, a free and easy bachelor. And here was I—not but what there was two fellers, three if you count old Eli after his wife died, and he wanted to keep me slaving on, without wages."

"What!" roared Asher. "What! You mean to tell me that old Eli—"

"Don't yell. This is a house of mourning. I'm telling you that old Eli asked me to marry him. But I wouldn't."

"Why?"

The woman turned on him, ashen with rage.

"Why?" repeated Asher.

The doorbell rang.

"They're back." Asher moved toward the door. He turned as he reached it. "After they go, you and me has a telling, Lib Candy."

Lib, her head bent, went past him toward the kitchen.

Asher, a sardonic expression twisting a face that was meant by nature to be merely good-natured, opened the door and indicated, with a wave of the hand, the living room.

May Weston Kent, very handsome in her modish mourning, swept past him, followed by her husband and son. She sank down in the most comfortable chair in that uncomfortable room. Her husband and son went toward the closed window and stood looking out. The rest of the assemblage filed in, after the Misses Mink. They were all from the village or nearby farms. They grouped themselves about the room, staring at May Kent, who ignored them. Being country folk, they seemed able to maintain silence for a length of time that seemed interminable to the Kents.

The stillness was broken by the Misses Mink, who always found silence intolerable. It was unknown in the Mink household. When Miss Annie and Miss Susan were not talking together, they were talking to someone else, or telephoning. They were twins, who had never gotten beyond the pink and blue ribbon stage of girlhood. They still wore the ribbons; and still prattled sweetly of "Sister and I." Even to-day when they were in decorous black, as befitted the occasion, Miss Susan's ribbon was black grosgrain, while Miss Annie's was black moire, with a white edge.

"Where's Emmietta?" they asked each other, and then turned, like puppets on the same string, and asked the silent Asher at the doorway, "Asher Turkle, where's Miss Emmietta?"

"Search me," said Asher.

In the shocked silence that followed, the door opened and Emmietta Weston came in. She was a small woman. Her clothes were old and cheap. Her reddish brown hair, abundant enough, but dull and lifeless, was drawn from her brow, and her face set in lines that betokened resignation, achieved only after a hard struggle with naturally high spirits.

There was very little likeness between the faded Emmietta and the buxom, well groomed, and still blooming May. There was certainly no hint that Emmietta was the younger. Emmietta Weston was a drab woman, looking more than her thirty-seven years, whereas May Kent, had it not been for her tall son, might have claimed to be considerably under forty.

Behind Emmietta, like her shadow, appeared Lib. Emmietta turned to the waiting roomful.

"Friends," she said softly, "there will be no will reading here—and no dinner."

There was a swift interchange of astonished glances, and almost a murmur, which quickly subsided as Emmietta put up her hand to her hard black hat, and removed the antiquated silver hatpin that skewered it on.

"There is dinner for everyone at the Crossroads Inn. Asher Turkle will look after you, and the bill's paid."

She handed her hat to Lib, and drew a long breath. "As for the will—everything is left to me unconditionally, and those of you that are curious as to particulars can look it up at the county court house next week, or speak to Mr. Fair. He's attending to everything just now."

She looked at the wide eyes and open mouths of some of her guests. "I am too tired to talk—or to eat. Thank you all, and good-bye for the present."

She turned and went swiftly up the stairs. Lib went back to the kitchen.

Asher, his jaw dropped in astonishment, suddenly recollected that his was the honor of "bossing things" at the Crossroads Inn.

"Them that's set for eating, follow me," he said, "and they will git their meal hot."

"Hot victuals wait for no man," agreed the farmer nearest the door and rose to his feet. His wife, simpering a little, hung back, to show her neighbors that it was the rude male's hunger, not her own, that forced her to lead the procession. They were followed by the Misses Mink, who were whispering that since there was nothing at home, it was better to get their dinner at the Inn. They endeavored to conceal from everybody that a dinner at the Inn was an event in their lives.

"Even if she gets a reduction for numbers," said one mourner voicing the thoughts of the others, "it will set her back at least a dollar a head. What would old Eli have said to that?"

The room was clear of all but the Kents, when May, an angry flush showing beneath her delicately applied powder and rouge, rose to her feet and, disregarding the efforts of her husband and son to stop her, called up the stairway, "Emmie! Emmie! Come here! It's May."

There was silence for a moment and then Emmietta appeared at the top of the stairway.

"It's no use, May. I am worn out. I cook for nobody, not even you."

"But the will?"

"Mr. Fair will send you a copy, but you will find it's just as I said. Father left everything to me, stating that at the time of your marriage he gave you your portion. That's true, and you know that Father never forgave you for insisting on having it in cash. The rest is—mine."

"How much—is it?"

"Ask Mr. Fair. Quite a large sum, I believe, but I've earned it. Eighteen years of slavery, insufficient food, scraping,

quarrelling. No amount of money can pay me back—my youth."

"But Weston," May began. "Surely he left something to Weston?"

"Mother!" Weston Kent called.

"May!" her husband warned.

"Oh, don't mind," Emmietta said, looking down at brother-in-law and nephew without rancor.

May burst into loud sobs.

Emmie's face hardened. "Father was never harsh with you, May, and yet you didn't weep like that over his grave. His death meant freedom to me, but I would willingly have endured a little more drudgery, just to buy him a few years of the life he liked so well, and hated so to leave."

Her eyes filled. She turned slowly to go toward her room. "Mr. Fair will answer any questions you like to ask, and there's dinner in a private dining room for you. Lib and I are quite done. We have got to rest."

With a wave of her hand May turned to her husband and son. "Go over to the Inn and begin your dinner. I'll join you."

"Mother!" exclaimed Weston, then "Good-bye Aunt Emmie." He ran lightly up the steps and kissed her. "Take it easy, and have a good time for once in your life. Don't let Mother bulldoze you into doing anything you don't want to."

For the first time Emmie relaxed as she patted his shoulder. "Good boy, Weston, I'll remember that."

"Good-bye," said her brother-in-law. "You have had a damned hard time, old girl. Buck up and get some good out of the money, and, whatever May says, I can support my family."

He turned to his wife. She was frowning now. "If you take my advice, May, you will leave Emmie alone, but if you must talk make it snappy. She's in no mood to be bothered."

He paused a moment at the open door and then as May, her back toward him, stubbornly waited for him to close it, he looked up at Emmie quizzically, raised his eyebrows, and shut the door upon himself and his son.

Outside the two men looked at each other.

"Better let Mother get it off her chest," Weston advised. "Her return to normal will be all the quicker."

His father nodded, lighted a cigarette, and they went toward the Inn.

Emmietta sank on the step next the first landing, and leaned her head against the stair rail.

"Emmie do you think it's just that you should have everything?"

"Everything that you left? Why yes, May, I do."

"Emmie, don't you love my boy?"

"How can I? I'm prejudiced in his favor, but I don't really know him and neither did his grandfather. That's where you made a mistake, May. You had no use for the man who made the money you were so eager to have and spend. It would have made all the difference in the world if you had cared enough to come down here oftener; or, if you had asked me to your house, I think Father might have let me go. But you never did. Father spoke of it several times. We had a queer, crabbed stick for a father, but his blood was the blue blood you boast about. He had some of the instincts of a gentleman, though his love of money stunted most of them, otherwise I couldn't have borne—what I had to bear."

"It was your own fault. You might have managed him."

"I couldn't. You wouldn't understand, but I—I couldn't."

"Emmie, are you going to be Father all over again—about money?"

"I won't talk about the money."

"Emmie, we look prosperous, but it's been hard these last few years. I'm anxious for my boy's welfare. He's threatening to leave Princeton because of a girl he's in love with. There's an older man with more money."

"Well, if she's that sort of girl," and Emmie closed her eyes wearily, "isn't it the best thing that he finds it out now?"

"It isn't the girl, it's her mother. Emmie, I don't want you to give me anything, now, or ever, but if you would make a will making Weston your heir, I could tell the girl's mother—"

Emmietta rose and clutching the balusters looked at her sister.

"No, I'm through. I'm through being used. I'm going to live as I choose. Understand me once for all, I'm through—through being a doormat."

She sank down in a heap on the stair. May gave a loud cry and ran toward her. Emmie straightened up and, her hand on the rail, started toward her room. "I'm not even going to faint about it. It's no use your having hysterics. I mean to be left alone."

As May went down the steps and toward the Crossroads Inn, Lib came up the stairs with a cup of tea, and a soda cracker on a plate.

"Miss Emmie, it's Lib. Let me in."

"Come in." Emmie was sitting at the window. Her hands lay listlessly in her lap.

"Just a cup of tea, Miss Emmie. After awhile, you and me'll have something to eat."

Emmie took the cup mechanically, and began stirring the tea. Lib watched her. Just so, without appetite, had Miss Emmie accepted food during the weeks of her father's illness. Lib watched her apprehensively.

When she began to sip the hot tea, Lib's face cleared. She moved a little nearer, and spoke softly, as though she feared the four walls might hear.

"Miss Emmie. He's back."

Emmietta turned toward her amazed. "He's back! Lib, you aren't going off your head are you? We saw him buried."

"I wasn't speaking of Eli Weston. I was speaking of somebody else. Somebody that went away from here eighteen years ago."

"Eighteen years ago!" Emmietta repeated blankly. Then slowly there came into her face a look that approached terror. She put down her cup and grasped Lib's arm.

"Lib, do you mean *him*?"

Lib nodded.

Emmietta began to tremble. "It isn't possible. How do you know?"

Lib sniffed. "Well, I guess I'd know Tom Hastings' face anywhere. You can't fool me. He's back and he's here."

"Tom here?" Emmietta shook from head to foot. "Why does he come back now?"

Lib stared at her. "Don't *you* know, Miss Emmie? Didn't *you* send for him to come?"

"Me? Send for Tom Hastings! Ask Tom Hastings to come? Why, Lib, as God hears me, I hoped never to see his face again."



A man never knows what he has left behind him, until he comes back to it.

Without misgivings, Tom Hastings had stopped his car at the Crossroads Inn garage and asked for five gallons of gasoline. After the gas had been supplied, he parked the car, and went along Central Avenue, glancing about him with a roving eye that saw its Sunday aspect, and noted the changes that eighteen years had made.

Eighteen years had made more changes in the Tom Hastings who had left East Penniwell, but, of course, Tom was not so keen to note those. He had grown up with himself, as he would have put it, whereas East Penniwell had been practically standing still for all those years. The same houses, the same name on the general store and the Inn, but the garage, its brilliant oil signs and the "hot dog" stand just beyond the post office, were new. Some of the houses had been painted a different color, some of them added to, but as a rule they were easily recognized.

Tom Hastings was not given to sentimentalizing, but it did give him an odd feeling to note how East Penniwell had waited for him, while he had been out in the world changing and watching changes. He went his leisurely way toward the Weston house, quite unaware that behind every window of the main street he was being watched, mostly by faded feminine eyes that had been young and flashing when he left East Penniwell.

"Tom Hastings is back!" Already the report had run through the little town, for of course Tom had been recognized at the garage. Indeed his name had been noted on his wallet by John Smith, who kept the garage, and he had sent his son and heir posting home to tell his mother. Mrs. Smith had gone to the party-line telephone at once, and used it to good effect. All up and down the street they were waiting to see Tom Hastings, how he looked and where he was going.

The verdict was that he was looking "pretty fair for a feller that had been gone from East Penniwell so many years." As to his direction, the whole town felt romantically certain. It was only right and proper that Tom Hastings' first call should be on Miss Emmietta Weston, though some "kinda thought it was a little untasty, his picking out the funeral day."

On the whole, however, it was conceded that a man, having stayed away eighteen years and having arrived too late to attend her father's funeral, should make haste to the house of his lady, and show her that eighteen years had had no effect on his devotion.

"Ain't it romantic?" exulted one stout matron, who had gone to primary school with Tom and Emmietta. "Ain't it for all the world like a novel, that Tom Hastings should be so faithful and come arunning back to Emmietta on this here very day of her bereavement."

"He ain't running, Mom. He's walking slow and poking with his stick at the road."

"That's only his kinda natural embarrassment."

"He's staring round a good bit too. He don't look shy, that bird don't."

"Harvey, you dry up! A man like that can't show any feelings in front of people."

"Well, he ain't any moving pitcher hero, that I should stand here agaping at him."

But Harvey's older sister was entranced. "Mom, ain't it wonderful. Here's Miss Emmie so quiet. Everybody thinking she was forever going on keeping house for her stingy old Pop, and her so sweet about it. Always the nicest kinda ideas if you told her about any kinda little affairs—"

"H'mm, and what little affairs have you been confiding in her, Miss? I'd like to know. You ain't any age to be having affairs, Gerty, and if I catch you—"

"Oh, Mom, I don't mean just myself, I mean all us girls could easy go to Miss Emmie and talk about fellows and things. She kinda seemed so interested, and she knew a good many things to tell about when her and you was at school. She told me you was awful popular and it was a wonder to her that Pop ever got you to say 'Yes'—so many was after you."

"H'mm," but the "h'mm" was an extremely gratified and mollified one this time. "Emmie told you that, did she? Well Emmie was no wallflower herself. I'll say that. A prettier girl nor a jollier one than Emmietta Weston nobody wanted to

see, until that fellow walking up the street—left."

"That's just it. Why, it's kinda the village romance, ain't it, Mom?"

"Oh my land, Gert, I don't know. I just hope it turns out all right for Emmie, poor thing. My, I'm that nervous."

"Well, he ain't," said Gerty, disappointed. "Ain't it provoking the way men acts, Mom? You'd think he was going to a business meeting or somepin'."

And that was precisely what Tom Hastings thought he was going toward. The brick company, of which he was president, wished to extend its holdings in the East. There had come to Tom a vision of the red shale roads and fields of his native town. He had sent out scouts, who confirmed his memory. The lands behind the Osage orange hedge of Randall's farm, and those of some outlying farms, owned by Eli Weston, were ideal for brick making.

The report having been favorable, Tom decided to motor down Sunday, and look over the ground himself. It would amuse him to return to the home of his youth as a benefactor and promoter, and it might be that, as one of themselves, his old friends and neighbors, ignorant of what the years had done toward lining his pocket book and making him a power in his financial world, would give him better terms than a stranger.

As to where he was going to learn the truth about present values and possibilities, Tom Hastings had not the slightest doubt. Unhesitatingly he made his way toward Eli Weston's house. The old man held mortgages on half the farms Tom wanted to buy. Indeed, Eli Weston held mortgages on half the farms in the county. If Tom had Weston backing him, the rest would be easy.

Eli Weston had been Tom's guardian, and Tom smiled to himself as he thought of his last interview with him. Tom looked forward with pleasure to proving the old man wrong. Eli had prophesied, as he slammed the door in Tom's face, that the day would come when Tom would be begging him for help. Well, to-day Tom was in a fair way to make Eli richer than ever, and Eli would appreciate that.

That he would find Eli waiting for him, Tom never had the slightest doubt. Eli was the mean and wiry kind that lived forever. Tom had not inquired, feeling sure that if anything had happened he would be notified. There were old matters involving Eli and Tom's father's estate that made this certain. Eli had been living when his scouts were here three weeks ago, but Tom had told them specifically to leave him alone. Eli's death had been sudden, so Tom, ignorant, strode confidently on, thinking, with quiet humor, that it would give old Eli quite a turn to see him, and that, for several reasons, terms ought to be easy.

Tom went up the path, and lifted the knocker on the old-fashioned door. As he waited for a response, he tried to remember the household, as it must be nowadays, so that he might be properly ingratiating and polite. Oh yes, two girls, one of them at least married. Yes, May was married before he left. There remained one girl, who must be married too by this time, and that old sister of Eli's who was the housekeeper. What was it they called her? "Aunt Em." That was the name. He must remember that, and several other names, in order to make this visit pleasant and profitable. It would make a hit with the oldest inhabitants, if he could manage to remember names.

The door had not yet opened, so Tom knocked again. It seemed to him that far off in the interior he heard steps and a voice.

The essential difference between men and women is never more strangely shown than by the memories that survive of the same period—the same event. Tom Hastings' busy life in the outer world had crowded East Penniwell and Emmietta Weston into the dim background. Emmietta, shut in, as she had been for years, to a dull routine of household cares, unrelieved by any touch with the outside world, save through the few books that she had been able to borrow or beg, had long since committed to memory every speech, every action of the Tom Hastings who had occupied a place in the foreground of her life. East Penniwell's people and days were a mere memory to Tom Hastings and not always a pleasant one. Among these memories Emmietta Weston was so far in the background that he gave her no more than a passing thought.

At last the door was opened by Emmietta, herself. Lib, in an agony of embarrassment, had refused. "You should be the first, Miss Emmie," she had insisted.

It was dusky in the living room. All the blinds were not up and it was late afternoon. There was light enough for Tom

Hastings to be seen by the woman who opened the door, but Tom saw only a faded, washed-out looking female, in an unbecoming, ill-fitting black dress, who motioned to him to enter.

"Is Mr. Weston at home?" he asked her as he stepped inside.

"No," Emmie managed to say, as she closed the door hurriedly, fearful of East Penniwell's eyes. This was so dreadfully unlike what her first meeting with Tom Hastings should be that she was utterly at sea.

He followed her in. "When will he be home?" asked Tom, disliking the room. It was dim, unlighted and heavy with some sort of perfume. Afterwards he knew it must have been the funeral flowers.

Then, as she continued silent, he remembered patiently that it was not East Penniwell's way to give much small change in the way of speech, and turning to her he began, "If he—"

"He'll never be home again," the woman said, in an odd choked voice. "He—he was buried to-day."

"What!" Tom exclaimed. "To-day! I beg your pardon, Aunt Em." Then, as the woman started, almost shivered and drew back, he continued, hurriedly, embarrassed, and without looking at her again, "I would never have intruded, if I had known. You see I've been away so long."

"Yes," said the woman, "it's a long time—eighteen years."

"I haven't had much news of East Penniwell."

"No."

"So, I thought I'd stop in, as I was motoring through to-day and ask—ask Mr. Weston about some business. I hope you will accept my sincere apologies."

He paused, but there was no response from Emmie. She could not speak.

"I have been West, you know, for a long time," explained Tom.

"Yes," Emmie managed to say, and motioned toward a chair.

But Tom did not sit. He walked toward the doorway. "I am simply without words to express my regret at having intruded on you, to-day."

Again Emmie waited, then said slowly, "Lawyer Fair's the executor. He has charge of the estate."

"Thank you. I'll see him later. I'll be down again. If there is anything I can do—"

"Nothing," the woman standing there in the shadow, watching him, answered.

"Well, if there should be, remember I am at your service, and glad to do anything." Tom opened the door himself, the woman seemed so slow, or stupid. Stupefied with grief, he corrected himself, fatigue of course, and no longer young. Yet, how wonderful these country people were! Positively Aunt Em didn't seem a day older than when he had turned his back on East Penniwell. He looked again at the silent figure, in the shadow.

"I shall be back in a day or two, and in the mean-time my respects to the daughters. May was married, I remember, and Emmie?"

"Emmie hasn't married," the woman murmured, and then with a little gulp, "I—I'll give—her—your respects."

Tom closed the door and went down the steps.

Emmie sank down in a heap. Lib heard her and came running down the stairs.

On either side of the street the faces at the window reflected oddly different disappointments and conclusions:

"Found out it was no time at all to call."

"Don't look none too pleased."

"H'mm, pretty short call, after eighteen years stay-away."

"What do you expect when he comes on such a day as this?"

"D'ye think Miss Emmie's given him his come-uppance?"

"Started in early. Musta heard old Eli left a heap of money."

"Maybe Miss Emmie thinks she don't need to take him back, but she'd better go slow. There's so many left-over females since this here war, that a woman on the upper slope of thirty better take heed what she's doing."

But the younger portion of East Penniwell—its girls—sighed romantically, despite bobbed hair and lip sticks. They wondered what Miss Emmie would do, now that Tom Hastings had come back to her.

Lib helped Emmie to rise to her feet and put an arm about her shaking frame. Lib's face, hard and lined as it was, expressed acute sympathy—until she discovered that Miss Emmie was laughing.

"Miss Emmie, are you crazy?"

"No," Emmie managed to say, between gusts of painful laughter. "For the first time in years, Lib, I'm completely sane. All my illusions are gone."

Lib looked at her as she leaned against the wall.

"Miss Emmie, that *was* him, wasn't it?"

"Yes," Emmie answered, as soon as she could get her breath, "that was Tom and this is Emmie Weston. Only he didn't think it was." She stopped laughing and her whole face changed. "Lib," she said, and she held her ancient friend and servant's arm in a hard clutch, "he thought I was Aunt Em!"

"Cloud-a-Witnesses!"

"Lib, on your sacred word, do I look like *that*?"

"It was dark in the hall," Lib began.

"The truth, Lib. The truth, so help you."

"Well, Miss Emmie," Lib faltered, "with all you have been through, the nursing and all—lately. Maybe—let me give you a cup of tea."

But Emmie held her fast.

"The truth, Lib, as you hope for Heaven."

"Well, then, Miss Emmie, yes. You do favor her some. As she was—say eighteen years ago."

"Answered." Emmie sank down on the floor again. She said nothing for a long time, then, "And Aunt Em was sixty, eighteen years ago!"

She rose determinedly. "Lib, go into the kitchen and get me something to eat. Is Asher back?"

"Not yet, Miss Emmie."

"Then as soon as he comes send him to me." But before Lib could leave, Emmie called again. "No. Lib, go over to the Crossroads Inn now, and if my sister hasn't gone, get from her the name and address of the woman who does her hair."

"My Saints! Miss Emmie, have you gone off?"

"No."

"This day of all days!"

"Never mind what day it is. Father understands me now, better than any of you. But don't let May come near me. Tell her my hair's coming out, and I want to send for a tonic. Tell her you have to do something to keep me quiet—and that's true."

"Yes, Miss Emmie." Lib turned and went without looking back.

Emmie stood motionless for a few moments and then resolutely walked into the front room and started to light the big oil hanging lamp in the middle of the room. She decided that it wouldn't do. All East Penniwell would see it and stare. She took a candle from the mantel shelf and lit it. Candle in hand she went to the long greenish mirror, in a gold frame, hanging over the tip-table. Emmie held the candle close to the glass and surveyed herself.

"Tom was right," she admitted finally, blowing out the candle. "Aunt Em and worse, because Aunt Em was resigned and I'm not."

She went to the passage between the dining room and the kitchen and began to grind the handle of the old-fashioned party-line telephone that was against the wall. She called up 436 J and, while she waited for a response, endeavored to get her thoughts under control. She must not betray undue agitation. Emmie knew her East Penniwell. It would get every detail. She must not tell too much, for half the receivers on her line were down, as she knew by the muffled sound of John Smith's voice. John was tired and hurried. He had been very busy that day, for he himself had driven her to the cemetery, because he thought it was "due Miss Emmietta." She knew she could rely on John.

Quickly, and with as little excitement as possible, and yet with enough to show him that it was a matter of importance, she asked if he could give her a closed car and a driver to go all the way to New York, that night.

John was astonished. "Now look ahere, Miss Emmie, nobody could want to accommodate you more'n I do, but there ain't a man here I could get to undertake such a journey at such short notice. My Guy, Miss Emmie, New York's New York, and it takes some going and some brains to get about in that town. To-morrow now, Miss Emmie, would give us some time to look about us."

"John, I've got to go to-night."

"Well, then that's that, Miss Emmie. I got to admit I got the car. You give me, say half an hour, to look up Bill Sladen and see if so be he'll undertake the job. Bill's a good, careful driver. I'll call you back in—say half an hour—and let you know. But, my Guy, Miss Emmie, that's some order you've given me and it'll cost you some."

"I don't care what you charge me, John, as long as I get there to-night."

"Miss Emmie, I'll do my damndest, seeing it's you."

John Smith hung up the receiver and returned to his supper table and the cup of coffee that was getting cold. He surveyed his waiting wife with uplifted eyebrows. "It's enough to make old Eli turn in his grave. Here's Miss Emmie determined to go to New York at any cost. Any cost, mind you! And to-night!"

He reached out and helped himself to a big slice of bread and butter, and held out his plate for some preserves.

"I gotta reach round and get things started. Hen," to his peaceful and somnolent son of twelve, "you stop eating and go over to Sladen's and tell Bill I got an order to drive to New York to-night, and will he stop round and see me about it. Try to tell him in the entry, so his wife won't hear everything and start a row. Let her think it's just a 'mergency about some bust-up machine down the road a piece, if you can, without akshally lying. Now, Mother, I know what I'm 'bout. Teenie Sladen 'ull throw a fit about New York."

He took another piece of steak, as Hen protested.

"Aw, I ain't half finished. Mom, don't let Pop eat my pie."

"Dear me," said the excited Mrs. Smith, as Hen got up slowly from the table. "You'll be wore out, John, with things coming on you as they have to-day. Do eat all you can, before you begin rushing round, so's you'll have something in your stummick to work on. Ain't it awful the way things jist whirl? Tom Hastings leaving his car in the garage one minit, the next minit taking it off and rushing out. Then Emmietta Weston, right on the heels of his coming, calling up like that! My gracious, John, it has a kinda flavor of an elopement, ain't it?"

John Smith paused, balancing the rest of his steak and a few fried potatoes on his fork. "My Guy! Women's certainly the en-tire limit! An elopement, and Tom Hastings goes off in his car looking no more like a bridegroom than I do. Why, there's as many as ten things might call Miss Emmie to town, and none of them be Tom Hastings. There's settlements, and things about her father's estate between her sister May and herself, for one thing."

"Oh, you say so! Then why ain't she going to New York in May's car? May ain't started yet, and there's plenty room in her car."

"That's so," agreed John, open-mouthed.

"Ain't you heard about the estate? Everything left to Emmie, and nothing to May or her boy at all."

"How'd you hear that?"

"The Mink girls stopped in."

"My Guy!" John stopped. "If May ain't gone home, I'm a good mind to—"

"John, don't you dare say anything to May Kent. The nasty, stuck-up thing! Never came near her father or her own sister for years, and now all ready to make a fuss because Emmie's got the money. Believe me, John, if Emmie wants to go to New York ahead of May she's got her reasons."

Before John could reply, Hen came back from his errand.

"Bill's coming. Mis' Sladen, she didn't ask me anything on account of being at the telefoam, talking to Annie Mink. Annie Mink says Tom Hastings left the house, and just after he left Lib went a dashing over to the hotel and spoke to Mis' Kent, just as Mis' Kent was getting into her car, and right after that Miss Emmie she 'foamed you, Pop, and right after that she 'foamed Lawyer Fair to come over immejitly and he's on his way across the street now."

He paused for breath. "Gimme my pie, Mom. Annie Mink knowed all 'bout Miss Emmie 'foaming you, Pop, and she asked if Bill was going, and advised Mis' Sladen to leave him go for Miss Emmie's sake, because he was better'n that Oxel Johnson any day. Here's Bill coming now."

"My Good Peanuts!" John Smith rose. "You women's got me all tewed up about me own business." He went slowly toward the garage, but turned to call out: "Mom, you keep away from that there receiver until I get Miss Emmie settled, is all I ask you."

Emmietta and Lib faced each other.

"Here's the address, but Miss May says everything the woman does or makes is terrible dear," said Lib.

"I know." Emmie took the slip of paper. "I'm going to New York. I'd like you to go with me, Lib. I'll need you."

Lib was aghast. "My Saints! Where we going to stay when we get to that God forsaken city in the middle of the night?"

Emmie's eyes lit up with amusement. She looked a quite different person, when she smiled. "Oh, Lib, brace up! We're not two young girls going to be 'lost in the great city.'"

"I rode once to Trenton," Lib told her, and shivered. "Asher took me." And then as she saw the amusement in Emmie's eyes, she said her say: "Maybe you'n me ain't young fools, but there's old fools, and middle-aged fools, that gits lost in the city. Where we going to spend the night?"

"There are hotels."

"Miss Emmie, do you know what kinda hotel we'll land in?"

"There's one I heard May say some friend of hers stayed in. It's all right, Lib. We'll be safe."

"H'mm, safe." Lib sniffed. "How about our pocket books?"

"We don't have to think about them."

Lib's face took on a white and frightened look. "Miss Emmie, it's the last time I'll allude to it, but while God gives me breath I feel that I should say at least this to you, and you know it's no thought of myself makes me say it. It's just my thought for you. Miss Emmie, Eli Weston was a mean man and a mean man's somethin' awful. A mean woman's something worse. But, Miss Emmie, there's such a thing as being foolish, and there's old age. You promise me you'll hold on to somethin'. Put money in the savings bank—for your old age."

"I have already done it, Lib. Mr. Fair is looking after the money. There's enough put by for your old age and mine, so don't worry, Lib."

"I shall worry," Lib told her mistress honestly, "and it's but natural that I should, seeing that I have you to look after and everything strange about me, but I won't fret. I should be fretted to death if I thought we was spending our last cent to put up a kinda bold front."

Emmie turned and regarded Lib with astonishment. "Who told you we were going to do that?"

"Oh, Miss Emmie, I ain't blind. What else would make you dash off to New York after all that's happened, specially after Tom Hastings' visit, except to put a good face on a bad business?"

"Lib, don't get in my way. I'm going to be out of this house and on my way in an hour's time, if I can get the car. I don't care who's against it."

"Miss Emmie, listen."

"Lib, you know this town and you know what they'll say about me and Tom Hastings now. Well, are you standing by me, or are you siding with Tom and the town? Lib, what would they say in East Penniwell if they knew what you and I know about Tom Hastings' home-coming?"

"Oh, Miss Emmie, you can't do anything. It's all in Tom Hastings' hands."

"Is it? Just you wait and see."

When a man fronts catastrophe on the road, he looks in his purse—but a woman looks in her mirror.

Emmietta's mirror told her, distinctly, that there was no time to lose in consulting Mrs. Calla Lilley, beauty specialist, at the address obtained by Lib.

The first impulsive plunge toward freedom had carried her successfully out of East Penniwell, but here in New York, the magnificent but unknown, the thought of what lay before her in her effort to regain some portion of her lost looks terrified Emmietta.

Visions of placing herself, beyond recall, in the hands of some one who would relentlessly proceed to make upon her all the experiments which she had read of in books and magazines, haunted Emmie, waking and sleeping.

She could see herself delivered over to some autocratic, intolerant, beauty doctor, who would peroxide her hair, "lift" her face, change the shape of her nose, pluck out her eyebrows, put belladonna in her eyes, give her a permanent wave and rouge, powder and paint her—without listening to her protests that all she wanted was to remain herself, plus a little of what she had lost.

Emmie felt peculiarly inarticulate when she tried to formulate just what she did want done. The trouble was she did not really know what could, or should, be done. She must place herself in somebody's hands.

It was an uncertain business at the best, and here was Lib—her green eyes narrowed to slits by her terror of the new and strange, and the complications that arise from suddenly finding oneself sitting in luxury's lap—watching her like a cat.

Emmie's heart failed her. Lib was so overwhelmed by the big hotel and the city that Emmietta would have to take her with her. And what if, after all, Emmie came out of the beauty shop worse than when she went in?

Emmie, who was waiting in the hotel lobby for a taxicab to take her to Calla Lilley's establishment, cast a wary glance at Lib, who, with her head thrust before her, and an expression on her face that told the stranger nothing and Emmie everything, came toward her. Emmie noted idly that Lib was clutching a bit of yellow paper convulsively in one of her hands, but as Lib volunteered no comment, and Emmie wanted her to approach the coming trial in as amiable a frame of mind as possible, Emmie did not question her about it.

"Are you sure you want to come, Lib?" she began, as the doorman indicated the cab was ready, but Lib swept on toward the door, without waiting.

"Nuthin' would make me stay here alone," was Lib's reply, as they went through the revolving doors, which always so rattled Lib that she went round more than once, unless rescued.

In the cab, Lib shook so visibly, and emitted such mouse-like cries of terror at their hairbreadth escapes from certain death in the ride from the hotel to Madison Avenue, that involuntarily Emmie braced herself. Other people did this every day. She must take her chance. When there is nothing to look back for, it is as well to go on.

Emmie stole a slightly contemptuous look at Lib, who was still clutching in her hand the yellow paper, which Emmietta never doubted contained their names and addresses in case of fatal accident. She might be in little better case than Lib, she reminded herself, but at least she would keep it to herself. "Brace up! Lib," Emmie said, with the kindly impatience one uses in cases of hysteria. "Come, here we are!"

It was characteristic of Mrs. Lilley's shop that it was never spoken of as a "beauty shop," a "hairdressing parlor," or a "manicure place," although all three industries were carried on there. It was to a great number of well-known people just "Calla Lilley's." Hair, face and nails were beautifully attended to, it is true, but all those things one could get elsewhere. It was Calla's personality that made her place unique, combining all the delightful chattiness of an old-time barber shop, with up-to-date sanitary methods, and a private cell to yourself.

A tall, strong, handsome woman, her Saxon origin showing in the strength of her arms and her fair hair, Calla had an abiding interest in other people's affairs, and an enthusiasm for her trade that made her literally priceless. She believed so firmly in the tonic she sprinkled on your hair and rubbed in with strong fingers, that you could not help but believe it would perform all the marvelous things she promised.

It was not Calla's way to tell you that your hair was splendid when it was not. No, she admitted it was in a sad way, but in the next breath, while she rubbed your head with her wonderful hands, she so filled you with hope that what could be done would be done that you went out looking far better than when you came in.

With the aid of her clever husband, Calla was amassing a fortune, for fortunes are to be made by anyone who will aid, or pretend to aid, women to look with satisfaction in their mirrors. Calla's honesty, her splendid enthusiasm and her skillful hands had built for her a clientele that required the hiring of half a dozen assistants in the shop itself, to say nothing of an equal number in the laboratory, whence Calla's preparations, with the famous golden lily on the label, went far and wide.

Her customers numbered not only the rich and pampered, who wished to be freshened after a night at the hard work of amusing themselves, and of whom she had many, but artists, authors, business men and women, who found it paid them to relax and let Calla rub the tired wrinkles from their faces and the cobwebs from their brains.

Not every one who could pay the price could enter Calla's door. There was a "Sorry, no appointment possible. Our books are full," ready for any customer whom Calla did not like, or whom she had ceased to desire.

Into this discreet temple, dedicated to the art of beauty, came the two odd-looking women from East Penniwell.

The appearance of the two having been observed carefully through the partly opened office door, Miss Boldar, Calla's secretary, advanced and asked their business. Emmie, without looking at Lib, said that Mrs. Kent, Mrs. Horace Kent, had sent her. The secretary, asking them to wait, went in search of Calla, herself.

"Two people, sent by Mrs. Kent, want to see you."

Calla sighed. This had been a rush day and few of her assistants seemed to realize that she was human. It took time and tact to leave one customer, yet keep her satisfied, while she took a look at another's scalp, and jollied a third along by telling her that she would be "there in a minute." Calla had every desire to send these people away with the statement that she was too busy to see anyone, but she was a business woman, and Mrs. Kent, though trying at times, was a good customer, and had sent her several desirable people.

"What do they look like?"

"Queer and countrified."

Calla looked at her in secret disgust. The blockhead! Was that all she could see? Mrs. Van Dieman was rolling in money, and one of Calla's best customers, yet she looked like a ragbag.

"Ask them to wait a minute. I'll be out just as soon as I get Mrs. Hemming's hair in the curlers."

That done, Calla called the colored maid to hold the electric dryer and went out to interview Mrs. Kent's friends.

There was something about Calla that appealed to tired, worn-out Emmie the moment she saw that erect, vital personage coming toward her. Equally there was something about Emmietta that made Calla desire to get her hands on her at once. Never would she let that woman go out of her shop, provided she had money enough to pay for all that ought to be done! Calla would even give her cheaper rates, if necessary, for the pleasure of seeing it done. Within Calla surged the urge of the creator. She itched to have her hands on that hat and drag it from the lusterless hair. Where the average person would have passed Emmietta as an overworked, middle-aged woman, Calla saw great possibilities. Emmie's hair, though dry and lifeless now, was reddish brown and needed only a little polishing to gleam again. Her face was drawn and lined, but it was not too old to yield to face creams and massage. She might be just a little too wiry, but exercise and diet, and again massage would take care of that. There were possibilities in Emmie—an Emmie properly looked after and dressed.

"My sister, Mrs. Kent, sent me. I want you to look at my hair, and let me talk to you a little about what I want done."

It had taken all Emmie's courage to get so far, but Calla immediately caught her up.

"Just a minute, Mrs.—"

"Miss Weston."

"Just a minute, Miss Weston. Berry"—this to the maid slowly crawling toward the booth with the electric dryer—"give me that. I'll dry Mrs. Hemming's hair myself while you fix Booth 7 for Miss Weston. Just go in there when Berry tells you it's ready, Miss Weston. Your friend? Make her comfortable here, and I'll be with you in a jiffy."

She went swiftly, but she made Emmie feel quite safe, though Emmie had yet to face Lib, who was looking with disapproval at everything in the shop, and especially at the transformations, the powder, lip sticks and other preparations that filled the glass cases in the waiting room.

"Miss Emmie, you ain't gonna—"

"Now, Lib, do I need false hair? Use your good sense. Would I be bothered with lip sticks? I'm going to get a good shampoo and you'd better stay here. The booth would be too crowded. Take a magazine and wait for me, or go back to the hotel."

"Back to the hotel!" Lib looked at her despairingly. "Miss Emmie, it took us all our time finding it, when you and me and Bill Sladen drove in last night, and several of them sarcastic policemen lost their tempers at Bill, too, before he got the right of it. How do you think I'm going to find it—alone?"

"Take a taxicab," Miss Emmie told her cruelly, and followed the beckoning maid, as though she did not know that Lib would rather face the day of judgment than hail a taxi on a New York street.

Emmie felt a little ashamed of herself, as she saw Lib sink back in her chair and reach for a magazine, but she could not bear Lib's eyes, or ears for that matter, in the booth. There were a lot of things she meant to ask this Mrs. Lilley and they would be said much more easily without a witness.

Lib, who was not nearly as stupid as she looked, had guessed that Miss Emmie did not want her about, and felt a little bitter about the whole business. First, this rushing off to the city the very night of Eli Weston's funeral, and then the awful hotel! There was no doubt Miss Emmie was treating her like a queen and spending all kinds of money, but kiting off the very next morning to this sorta place, instead of going to a good shop and getting some decent black clothes, was terrible!

Lib pursed up her mouth and looked about her, regarding with interest the show cases, the opening and shutting of the tiny elevator as it took down and brought up the constant stream of customers. Each was greeted by the particular assistant to whom she belonged for an hour or so, and disappeared into a booth. Lib turned, as the elevator door opened to allow a lovely girl to step out. Fresh as paint, Lib said to herself, and no need to come here. No fixing could make her prettier.

The girl evidently did not agree with Lib. She asked for Miss Elsie, and when that young woman arrived and greeted her as Miss Lansing, she averred that she was filthy and needed a wash, a curl and a manicure at once. Her appointment, she announced, as she pulled the smart little hat from her sleek blonde head, was for that very minute, and she could not wait.

The assistant, who seemed accustomed to her rapid orders, followed her toward the booth, smiling, and saying, "It must be something wonderful, Miss Lansing, that makes you come here on the dot."

And then the door of the booth closed on them and Lib could only hear a murmur, added to the other murmurs from the other booths, which made the place hum like a beehive, with only here and there a distinguishable word or phrase, when some one's voice was raised above the general pitch.

In her own booth, Emmie, having had her hair unpinned by an attendant, had been invited to turn the neck of her dress in, or take the dress off, and a long piece of figured muslin, with a place hollowed out for her neck, was thrown over her, and pinned at the back of the neck. Her hair had been smartly brushed and she had been left to wait for Mrs. Lilley. Nothing had been said about prices, but Emmie felt reckless. Cost what it might, she was going through with it.

Calla Lilley came through the doorway, with her infectious smile, and bent over Emmie's hair to scrutinize her scalp. "Fine," was her verdict. "I'll wash you first and then see what we can do with it. It's pretty dry, and the scalp looks as though it needed a tonic, but it's good hair, and we'll have it looking—Guess I'll rub in the oil first."

Calla reached for a gay bottle and took a piece of cotton from a glass case, poured the tonic into a scarlet saucer, began

dipping the cotton into it and rubbing it into the partings of Emmie's hair. Her strong fingers, which seemed to know what they were about so well, had a soothing effect. "We'll have you looking like your old self in no time."

Miss Emmie said nothing, but looking at her Calla saw, in the mirror, tears rolling down Emmie's cheek.

"Are you feeling faint?"

"No, no," Emmie begged. "Don't notice me. I—I have had a trying time. My father—"

"Yes, of course," Calla agreed sympathetically, with a quick look at the obsolete and ugly black frock. "Mrs. Kent did say, the last time she was in, that her father had died."

"Yes," Emmie openly wiped her eyes. She could talk to this woman. It wouldn't matter to Calla what she said. "I had all the care of him—the nursing, you know. It's—it's the let-down afterward, and what you said about looking like my old self. Oh, Mrs. Lilley, can I—could I—get back something—something of what I used to look like?"

It was the universal cry, world-old, but it was Mrs. Lilley's call to battle. She rose to it now.

"Why, my dear, we'll get right after this thing. We'll get after this hair, and as to your complexion—it's just fatigued. That's what's wrong. You're just tired, nothing more. You come to me for the next week or so. We'll say the next two or three weeks. Can you do it?"

"Of course, I can, and I will. I'll stay on at the hotel."

"Good, we'll get to work right now, and every day you'll spend some time here. Come, brace up! I'm going to brush your hair and then I want to cut the ends. I'll just brush, and rub to-day and we'll try a new style of doing it to-morrow. Dress come off?"

"Yes," said Emmie, hesitating and glancing around.

"Then off it comes. I want to get a good look at your neck and arms, and rub your back a little."

"Berry," she called, "bring me the alcohol and salt rub."

"How long can you stay here, Miss Weston? This is going to take time as well as money."

"For as long as I need to." Miss Emmie hesitated, and, conquering her father's spirit which rose up within her, added, "I don't care what it costs."

"Give me a month," breathed Mrs. Lilley. This was a customer after her own heart. "Give me just a month, and I promise you won't know yourself."

The door of Booth 7 opened hurriedly and Lib put her head in.

"Miss Emmie," she began, excited and breathless, "this came just when you was getting your check cashed in the lobby. The boy yelled out your name, and I says 'Here' for you, and signed. In the excitement of gitting the taxi and all, I just kep' it clenched-like in my hand, and forgot to give it to you."

Emmie took the telegram, with the little thrill of apprehension which the sight of its yellow envelope always gives to country-bred people. She read:

"Tom Hastings anxious to see you regarding property. When will you be home so that we can all three meet? John Fair."

Emmie let the telegram fall on the dressing table, and stared at it.

"Well," said Lib. "Anybody dead?"

"No," said Emmie, "not yet. It's from Lawyer Fair."

"We gotta go home?" asked Lib, with a gleam of joy in her eyes.

All Emmie's new-found independence rose up to oppose the thought. "No," she said as quietly as she could, for her heart was beating tempestuously at her own daring. "seeing that Tom Hastings took eighteen years to get round to East Penniwell, we'll take our time coming back."

Lib watched open-mouthed while Emmie, at Mrs. Lilley's suggestion, wrote a return message, which Lib was to give to Mrs. Lilley's secretary to send.

When she had finished writing, Lib's imploring eyes were more than Emmie could stand.

"You may read it," she said, taking some money from her purse, "before you give it to the secretary, with this."

Lib took the yellow form in her hand and read:

"Stay indefinite. Will notify you in time so that you can advise Mr. Hastings."

Resolutely Lib turned on her mistress. They were alone. Calla had gone out of the booth to respond to a telephone call.

"Miss Emmie, that won't do. It'll be read over the 'foam at East Penniwell, you know."

"Well?" questioned Emmie, defiantly.

"Well," returned Lib, "do you want to make 'em think that Tom Hastings *did* give you the go-by? Git a little suttelty into it, Miss Emmie, for the sake of women."

Emmie looked at her quickly. "Lib, I believe you're right."

"Miss Emmie, never lower yer flag."

Emmie thought for a moment and then wrote:

"Business here important. Notify you when we are ready to return. You can then inform Hastings. Emmietta Weston."

"Better," said Lib judicially. "Not all it might be, but still a lot better. It'll keep 'em guessing what the important business is, anyway."

The fundamental difference between the sexes is never more clearly shown than when a castle in Spain collapses. The man says: "What's past is past. Let's start anew." But the woman invariably pokes among the ruins, to see if there's any good building material left.

So Tom Hastings, having read the telegram offered him by Mr. Fair, put it on the desk and leaned back in his chair, gazing with a dissatisfied air at the lawyer and the office, while he turned over in his mind a new method of attack.

It was a quaint office, a one-story addition tacked onto the dignified old Fair house. It made a big, comfortable room with two windows. A stove, open bookcases with law books, none of them very new, about the walls, a large table-topped desk, a desk chair, a typewriter on which Mr. Fair himself sometimes tapped out a document, several comfortable wooden armchairs, and a wooden settee completed the furniture—save for three portraits of county judges, a calendar and, inevitably, a brass spittoon.

"What does that telegram mean?" Tom asked finally, having arranged his plan.

John Fair's eyebrows climbed, and his eyes twinkled. "Miss Emmie's inherited some of her father's business sense, I guess. Leastways, that's what it means to me."

He glanced at the other man with a look that showed little of the curiosity that was rampant within him. He was just as much in the dark as to what Emmie Weston and this man had said to each other as the rest of the community, and he wanted to know quite as badly. John Fair's legal training had made him conceal the curiosity that helped make him one of the best lawyers in his county. He might have been one of the best known in his state, had not his wife died leaving him with an only child, a son, who was badly crippled. To shield his boy, to keep him in the country and among friends, had anchored John Fair to East Penniwell for life. The struggle to make enough money to leave his son well cared for, should he die first, had made Fair the cleverest lawyer in the county.

He remembered Tom Hastings eighteen years ago, when Tom had been Eli Weston's ward. He looked at him now, while Tom gazed out of the window, his fingers playing with the telegram, and wondered just what Tom had been doing those eighteen years. The result before him was a man of forty, well built, who had not apparently abused his health and strength, who stood straight and was not in the least flabby. "Fine looking," was Fair's summing up. Tom was also exceedingly prosperous. He was shrewd, too—every move he had made in this brickyard game proved that; but here Fair chuckled to himself. It might be that old Eli's daughter, with Fair as her lawyer, would prove Tom's equal when it came to a deal.

The thought struck Fair that Tom had not been used to being balked by any woman, and that he would not take kindly to any change in his plans, be the cause a woman or a man.

Tom turned from the window. "Can I reach Miss Weston in town?"

John Fair shook his head. "Fraid not. She doesn't want her address known. She wants to be left alone to rest for a while. Emmie had a long siege of nursing her father and she needs a rest."

Though he spoke calmly, Tom's question had enlightened him on one point. The fellow did not know where Emmie was.

Tom considered a moment. "Is she the only one concerned? How about that aunt of hers? Has the aunt no interest in the property?"

John Fair's jaw dropped. "My Guy!" he exclaimed, relapsing into a common expression in that part of the country. "Don't you know that Emmie's aunt died seventeen years ago?"

"No," Tom replied, "I didn't," and knew at that moment, with a blinding flash of illumination, just what he had done.

"Oh the devil!" he said to himself. "The woman'll never forgive me for thinking she was her aunt." His next thought was that she would queer the deal.

He spoke quickly, before Fair, who was busy putting two and two together, could see the situation clearly:

"Is there any way of getting an answer about this land before Tuesday?"

Fair shook his head. "I don't know of any, except to write again to Emmie, telling her the matter is urgent, and see if she'll either write or see you."

Tom leaned back in the chair and surveyed Fair with a moody eye. "Couldn't she give you a power of attorney and let you act for her now?"

Fair smiled. "She could, but would she? She's a woman and she's Eli Weston's girl. 'Tisn't likely on either ground that she'll give up much authority to any one."

The two men sat silent on that, thinking. Tom stared straight before him out of the window, where he could see a corner of those green fields, with the deep red earth that he coveted beneath the green. Fair gazed at Tom. This was the most interesting human problem that had come his way in some months.

"Well," Tom rose slowly, "it looks as though I must go further in my search."

"Doubt if you'll fare so well," said Fair shortly.

Tom smiled. "Good earth here, and no mistake, but there are other sections of the country, Fair, besides East Penniwell, that would make equally good brick."

"Maybe," admitted Fair slowly, for he hated to see profits slipping between his fingers. "You can try, of course, and meanwhile I'll see what I can do with Miss Weston."

"Yes, do," but Tom said it without much hope in his voice, "and if she comes down here, let me know. Surely, as an old friend, she'll be willing to talk it over."

"Ought to, ought to; but women are women, Hastings. She may not want the place messed up that way, and a brick plant sure does mess things up."

As though such sentimental reasons were utterly foolish, Tom said shortly, "The plant would be two miles out, and wouldn't change things near East Penniwell or the Weston house." With that, he swung himself out of the office and into his car, and the car went up the New York road at tremendous speed.

Tom was furious. By his own blunder, it was just possible he had placed this splendid land outside of the company's grasp forever. "Damn women!" he muttered.

Left to himself, John Fair leaned back in his chair, and thought hard. Here was a pretty puzzle for a man to solve! Emmie Weston had for years been considered the town's greatest romance, because her father had driven young Tom Hastings from the house and town. Now Eli was dead and Tom Hastings had come back, but interested only, it seemed, in acquiring some of the Weston land for a brickyard. Emmie Weston had fled the town and remained away, refusing to return, even when the man who implored her to see him was Tom Hastings.

Fair shook his head and took up his pipe. The puzzle was beyond him yet, but he would telephone and see if Emmie didn't want to sell the fields. They were two miles and more up the road, right away from the village and off toward the creek. It wouldn't hurt the town's looks if they planted a brickyard there, and when one considered that for more years than Fair liked to remember forty dollars an acre had been the highest price for farming land near East Penniwell, and one hundred dollars a lot in the village, Tom's offer of three hundred an acre, first bid, seemed to him a miracle. If he offered three hundred, there was every chance they could get more. It could make Emmie an even richer woman than she was, if she listened to Fair and sold it; but if she didn't want to, she still had enough.

Fair sighed, but it was not entirely with envy. He sighed for Emmie, the girl he once knew, who had turned into a faded woman. If Eli had only let the girl have some of the money while she was young!

From her fifteenth story hotel-window, Emmie Weston looked down on a crowded street, not knowing that she was looking on Tom Hastings, who, with wrath in his heart, was hurrying home. He must send out scouts looking for other

fields, in case he should be permanently blocked from the East Penniwell proposition by this woman. Without Emmie's consent he could do nothing in East Penniwell. She either owned the land he wanted outright, or had mortgages on it.

Tom had made an exhaustive search that day, and this was the result. He was hurrying back now to the city, resolved to think out his problem. He meant to evolve some plan to approach this woman that would wipe out, if it were possible to wipe out, the fatal beginning he had made.

"I did think she was the aunt," he assured himself, "and Lord knows she looked it! I wonder if there's any way to make a woman forget a thing like that?"

He turned his car over to his chauffeur, who was waiting for him at the entrance to the apartment house. Tom went up to the roof of the building. There he entered an apartment that seemed to be on the top of the world, and from which the view of the city and harbor was famous. Its beauty and its luxury were lost on Tom to-day, though it had both in no small degree, having been built especially for a Western millionaire, who had loaned it to Tom, before going on a European trip.

"I'll have to get another woman in on this to help me out," said Tom to himself, and went rapidly over his feminine acquaintances. In this great Eastern city, where he himself had been domiciled only a few months, the list was not as great as he meant it to be. He thought of Lee Lansing. She was a clever girl; she might help him out.

At her window, Emmie was thinking of the same woman, only she did not know her name was Lee Lansing. She was speculating on the woman who interested Tom Hastings now.

Lib called shrilly, "Miss Emmie, you're wanted on long distance 'foam. I think it's Lawyer Fair."

Emmie turned from her window and went to the telephone, wondering what had happened. Lib, moving about the room, pretending to be occupied in hanging up Emmie's clothes, tried to patch up, from what she heard, the substance of the conversation.

"Yes, I hear you," Emmie said. "Yes, I remember Father bought Ben Harris' eighty acres and there's a heavy mortgage on Jim Cortright's ninety acres. Oh, you think it a good offer? H'mm, we can do better. Oh, I see. Well, then of course we can get more. Let Tom Hastings alone for two or three days and then call him up and say I want to know what he offers. And, oh, John, did he say anything—about anything else? Yes, I know that isn't very definite, but *did* he? No—all right, go ahead. Don't promise anything. I'm not sure yet whether I'll sell. I may open the house presently. I'll let you know in time. Good-bye."

Lib could wait no longer. "Miss Emmie, you going back?"

Emmie shook her head. "Not yet." But she was evidently troubled and as evidently did not wish Lib's advice.

"You'd best stay home this afternoon, Lib," Emmie said finally, "to answer the telephone in case Tom Hastings finds out where I am. If he does, I am out, and you don't know when I'll be back."

"Yes'm, Miss Emmie," Lib answered, evidently not at all satisfied but as evidently aware that just now she would get nothing more.

Emmie, her mind in a curious maze, went to Calla Lilley. She admitted to herself that she was afraid to go back to East Penniwell. Tom Hastings seemed bent on making life harder than it need be. It was not enough that he should have come back, as he had, but to be so callous, so lost to common decency as to persist in hanging about East Penniwell! If she went back now, the village would know the truth—that not only had Tom Hastings *not come back to her*, but that he had apparently no earthly idea of doing so. He had forgotten all about her.

Now that she admitted it freely to herself, Emmie breathed more easily. The present gossip that she had sent him away would not hold if Tom hung around the village looking for brick land. Truly, Emmie thought, she had cause to hate the sight of bricks. She had equal cause, she reminded herself, to hate her own silly self. What was it really to her that Tom Hastings had come back as he had? What did it matter to her? Her heart was not broken.

It was now possible for her to leave East Penniwell and Tom Hastings far behind her and seek fresh fields and new faces. But Emmie, like most women, was conservative and with but one idea, when it came to what she wanted of life.

She wanted Tom Hastings, changed or unchanged, good, bad, or indifferent, *to want her*. She wanted her village to admire her. When Emmie was thoroughly honest with herself she admitted that she had more money and, when she chose to use it, wider knowledge of the world than the majority of East Penniwell's inhabitants. She also admitted that she did not care what East Penniwell thought about her, as long as her conscience was clear, *except as to this affair with Tom Hastings*. It was really, in the country idiom, "very small potatoes" to feel, to act as she did, as she was doing now.

Emmie admitted all this, but also acknowledged sadly that she could not help it. She had received a cruel hurt, because Tom had come back. He had shattered her dream. It was what she had dreamed about Tom and herself that had kept her soul alive, through all the dreary years that lay behind her, through all the long years of her father's iron rule, while her youth had faded from her. It was Tom's return that had shattered her dream.

Emmie shivered as she took the elevator. She gazed in the mirror as the car went up and saw that Calla was living up to her promise. Already Emmie's hair began to look "alive," burnished and soft; already her weathered complexion was beginning to look smoother and clearer, and all this by exercise and massage, without the use of cosmetics, of which Calla did not approve for Emmie, if she could get results without them.

Emmie's wardrobe also was undergoing a complete and pleasing transformation. Calla, after one or two shrewd questions, gathered that Mrs. Kent neither knew nor suspected that her sister was in town and surmised that the country mouse wished to appear as thoroughly sophisticated as her city sister, when she made herself known. Learning this, Calla had guided Emmie in her choice of milliners and modistes. Now, Emmie was beginning to dress as well as other carefully groomed women—better than most. All her starved sense of beauty and color was blossoming forth, for Emmie, like many daughters of Puritans, had a love and a sense of color that made her clothes delightful to the eye.

Calla was well satisfied with the progress of her client. Each visit to Booth 7 was a fresh revelation to her of undeveloped beauties, as far as Emmietta's skin and hair were concerned. Calla was experimenting just now with styles of hairdressing. She felt that this rejuvenated Emmietta could "carry off" a new and effective style and she was bent on evoking it.

Calla received Emmie very quietly this time. There was, Emmie noticed, no announcement of her arrival. She was shown into her booth by the silent but efficient Berry, and Calla appeared without delay. She put Emmietta's hair, after it had been vigorously brushed and rubbed with tonic, into "curlers," gave her a new magazine to read and then, before she left the booth, to allow the curlers to do their work, leaned over and said:

"Does your sister, Mrs. Kent, know you're in town?"

Emmie shook her head.

Calla's eyes twinkled. "I thought not. You want to spring it on her later?"

Again Emmie nodded.

"Well, keep perfectly quiet and you're safe. She's in Booth 4, but she's going in a minute. I've given orders you're not to be mentioned."

When Calla closed the door, Emmie heard May's voice:

"You don't mean to tell me you *liked* that play?"

"Non, not exact what you call likeed," came the attendant's voice, with a strong French accent, "but awfullee amuse."

"I thought it very, very vulgar," May said virtuously.

"Oh, yes, eet ees vulgaire, *bot* the vulgaire he often amuse."

"I can't bear *the* slightest vulgarity," May solemnly declared. "Mercy, look at my hair, before I put on my hat! Don't you think it's a little *too red*? Of course, I've got a sister with naturally reddish hair, but—look, isn't there just a little bit of gray showing through there? Oh, dear, I'd never go to all this trouble myself, but my husband just can't stand gray hair."

"Oh, these hoosband! What a trouble he make!"

"I wouldn't care if it went all white at once, you know, but this pepper and salty hair, you just can't do anything with."

Through the attendant's running comment, principally composed of soothing sounds, May continued to talk. Emmie could visualize her at the glass, peering anxiously at her image.

"We haf here a lofely French dye," the attendant began.

May gave a little scream. "Dye! Oh, the idea! Don't speak to me about dyes! No indeed, no dyes for me! All I want, or need, is a little henna rinse. With a little *more* henna in it, next time remember, Mademoiselle René. But no *dye*. A rinse is not a dye, you know."

"Oh, non, non, a ranee is—well, he is rancece, that is all he is."

"Precisely. Oh, Mademoiselle René, you have me down for next Tuesday, a facial—and aren't my eyebrows thick, a little? I hate plucked eyebrows, but thick eyebrows don't suit my face at all. It needs thin eyebrows to give it expression. My husband hates thick eyebrows."

The eyebrows lasted all the way down the corridor, as a topic of conversation, or rather as a monologue.

Emmie heard the elevator door slam and drew a breath of relief. Her head was too full of thoughts to admit anyone else's ideas entering it through the medium of the printed word. She dropped the magazine, closed her eyes, and leaned back in the chair.

She could hear plainly now the voices in the other booths, and in Booth 6 especially. Calla was talking. The woman was evidently an old customer, someone whom Calla knew and liked. They talked for a while about face and hair treatments, how tired the woman was, and how much it rested her to come there. All of it amused Emmie. She was beginning to understand that these women came to Calla for rest, counting on Calla's strength, her soothing hands and voice quite as much, if not more, than her toilet preparations.

Emmie looked at herself, and tried to keep a frown from marring the face which Calla declared, and truly, was "smoothing itself out" every day.

Then she heard the woman in Booth 6 say:

"My husband wants me to go abroad this year, and of course, if we go, the place must be closed. And what will my Two Grenadiers do then?"

"They will miss you, won't they?"

"It isn't missing me," the other woman answered with a little sigh, "it's missing their summer together out in the country. I would give them the use of the gardener's cottage, but that won't do. The Second Grenadier isn't very strong just now, and can't have everything to do. They need looking after, and they will not permit me to look after them. If I were there I could do it and they wouldn't notice it. They are such dear fellows. I hate to go abroad and leave them." She laughed. "But equally I would hate to have my husband go without me. It's a puzzle and so far I don't see the solution."

Calla evidently suggested something, which Emmie didn't get, because just then the customer in Booth 5 told some exquisitely merry jest and the sound of laughter drowned everything else.

Then: "You see, the First Grenadier has lost his job. The architects he was with have gone out of business."

Calla's voice was full of sympathy.

"Oh, positively not!" The other voice again. "They are as proud as Lucifer himself. Oh, well, I'll think of something yet. I just won't go abroad unless my Two Grenadiers are comfortable."

Suddenly Emmie sat bolt upright and gazed at herself in the mirror excitedly. She had had a vision of what she might do. Well, it was worth trying. Nothing would so distract the village from gossiping about one man as the appearance of one or two other men. She determined to test it.

When Calla came in to remove the curlers, she said nothing further about May Kent, though her shrewd eyes took in the very silent Emmie who waited for her. Emmie listened to Calla's enthusiastic comments about her hair and the way it

curled and the new coiffure she was about to try, and said merely "yes" and "no," as the case required. Finally she interrupted Calla in the middle of a hair rhapsody with:

"I'm wondering whether you could help me with another problem, as well as you have with my clothes."

Calla laughed. "Put your troubles right down on the dressing table, Miss Weston, along with your hairpins. That's what we're here for—mental and physical comfort."

Emmie smiled. "It's not such a terrible trouble. Possibly it would be a joy to some people. You see, I've a nice old house in the country. I want it modernized, without being spoiled, and I want an architect who understands, so that my house won't be pulled about to make it look like something he imagines it ought to look like and not what it is. You understand my trouble, don't you, Mrs. Lilley? I could go to a firm of merely good or merely well-known architects, but how would I know what they would do with it?"

Calla's brows were drawn together in concentration.

"If I could get some one who was really clever, really good, and yet not too fashionable, so that he would be willing to come down and stay awhile in the house, I could put him up and Lib would look after him wonderfully. He could study out his plan, and how to use the workmen down there, so that my town would reap the benefit of the money I mean to spend. You see, my main difficulty—to find some one with time enough, and talent enough to do this."

Calla's face had cleared. "You wait just one minute," she answered, with suppressed excitement in her air and voice, "until I speak to a customer here of mine. She's just about going, and I want to catch her. I think—but wait till I speak to her." In the doorway of the booth she paused again. "If this man had a—a friend, an assistant he always travels about with, what then?"

"That would be quite all right," Emmie assured her. "There's room for more than one guest." She emphasized the guest, purposely, and felt that Calla got her meaning. Then she leaned back and closed her eyes. She could hear the low conversation, sinking almost to a whisper, between Calla and the woman in the next booth.

Emmie waited, unconsciously praying that what she hoped for might be true. It was a great scheme, and if it worked—that is, if these men were what the woman's estimate of them would lead one to believe—Emmietta thought she saw her chance to go home with honor. Her problem was complicated. She loved East Penniwell, and her own home, but to return to them was impossible just now, with Tom Hastings bent on showing the whole town that he had no thought of Emmie Weston or of anything but brickyards.

Emmie's face burned. She saw how impossible life in East Penniwell would be for her if East Penniwell knew this. That Tom had come and she had gone, she knew had excited the town. Just so long as nobody really knew what had happened, they could put any complexion they chose upon their meeting. Emmie meant they never should know.

It was her own fault, she admitted, as she cooled her burning cheeks with her cold hands. She had let the real world go for a dream. That was understandable, but she had also let the whole world know her dream. That was the dreadful mistake she had made. Tom Hastings had killed the dream. This was a stabbing pain that she could bear, if she bore it alone. To have the whole town know, and eventually, to have Tom himself told it—as a joke—would be a crown of shame and pain that she did not intend to wear publicly.

While she waited for Calla, Emmie analyzed herself, for though she had led a secluded life she had read and thought. She realized now that she had thrown away substance for shadow, and that her father had known it. Emmie shivered. It must have been because Eli Weston had guessed what was in store for her some day, if Tom Hastings ever came back, that he had so often regarded her with shrewd and cynical glances: that he had refrained from mentioning Tom Hastings' name: that he had frequently discussed with her his financial schemes. He had given her the benefit of his biting analysis of human nature, as he saw it, and all the time he had known she had a blind side, and had been laughing at her. Or did she do him an injustice? Had he been sorry for her? Whichever it was, it was painful to remember and Emmie writhed.

There was only one way in which she could face her village again, and face it she meant to. She dared not run away now on the trip to Europe which she had so often promised herself, and had never expected to be able to take. Her father had been so careful of his purse, and so tough of frame and heart, that she had never been able to envisage either his softening to the extent of giving her money to go away, or of his dying and leaving it to her. Even now the trip must wait, for

Emmie's fighting blood was up.

She admitted to herself that she cared immensely about public opinion, as it was represented by East Penniwell. Cared for it enough, at least, to fight it out with Tom Hastings. He should not leave her facing the pitying eyes of her neighbors, while he made desolate her lands with his brickmaking. Bricks she might possibly permit him to make, if in the long run it was good for the place and her neighbors, but it would not be immediately. Meanwhile, she would plan and plot to throw dust in the eyes of East Penniwell, until either Tom Hastings was routed from the field, his brickyard scheme wrecked, or she left him in the midst of his bricks, and went to Europe for her trip, banners flying.

Calla came back into Booth 7, her face radiant with the sense of a good deed done.

"Miss Weston, I've got it fixed for you. I've got the very man, I'm sure, and Mrs. Montgomery's going to call him up on the telephone to-night and send him to see you at the hotel to-morrow. Then you can decide for yourself."

Emmie gasped. Things were moving faster than her country mind had expected or hoped.

"Is he—is he a young man?" she asked.

"Young enough," said Calla, regarding her coiffure building, her head on one side. "No baby boy, or lounge lizard, is being sent you, Miss Weston—don't you fret. Mrs. Montgomery knows a man when she sees him. She's married to one of the best, and both she and her husband think an awful lot of these men."

She inserted another hairpin and said with a pleased little murmur of satisfaction:

"Miss Weston, it seems like an act of God, like a miracle, your asking for just such a man this morning."

"It will be a miracle, an act of Providence, for me," and Emmie smiled at her improved image in the glass, "if he is—I mean they are—the men I need."



To court obscurity is to invite detection.

Emmie Weston looked up fearfully. Lib was at the telephone, and from the tone of her "What say?" Emmie feared the worst. It was one thing to feel brave and courageous under Calla Lilley's encouragement. It was quite a different thing to brave Lib Candy's cold and searching eye—if that should be Tom Hastings on the telephone.

"Miss Emmie, they say there's a feller down stairs, name of Landon. Says he's an a'pintment with you. Shall I send him packin'? Some book agent likely, or one of them brokers with oil stock or Florida lands."

"No Lib. Say I'll come down to the mezzanine floor at once."

While Lib, scowling, delivered this message in her own terms, Emmietta, after a quick glance at the mirror, hastily closed the door behind her and went toward the elevator.

In the twilight atmosphere of the mezzanine floor, Bob Landon walked nervously up and down, wondering why people chose to stay in so vast and busy a caravansary and, having landed therein, how they conducted the business of their lives.

It's a small city under one roof, he thought to himself, looking down on the great lobby, thronged with people. A long line of guests waited at the room clerk's desk to register. The elevators were moving up and down continually, distributing people all through the twenty odd stories of the hotel. As he watched, an elevator stopped at the mezzanine floor and a bronze-haired woman left it and stood looking about her.

"Must be my client," Bob Landon thought, and went toward her.

"Must be the architect," Emmie thought as he approached. "Much, much better than I dared hope."

After his, "Is this Miss Weston?" and her, "This must be Mr. Landon," they moved toward the settees, chairs and small tables, which furnished the mezzanine. Emmie wondered how she could make her proposal sound cool and business-like, as it must to this man. She must not show any anxiety about his acceptance, though on it depended the success of her plan.

They found a vacant settee and Emmie watched him draw a chair toward her, while she made up her mind. She decided he was handsome, and that he was over thirty.

Emmie opened her purse and took from it a kodak picture of the Weston house. "That's the place." She watched him as he looked at it.

"It's a lovely old house."

Emmie smiled. "That's why I am anxious to have someone who will understand and care about it, as though—well as though the house had feelings of its own which we were bound to respect. I want all sorts of things done to it, bathrooms, a new and better heating system, and I hope you will uncover fireplaces that have long been boarded up. But when all this is done, it must still be my dear old home, or—well, it just shan't be touched at all."

Bob Landon smiled. "You can trust me to feel and defend its original charm, but I'll have to see it, and go over it thoroughly, Miss Weston, before I can form any idea of what there is to do, how it is to be done, and how much it will cost you."

Emmie looked at him hesitatingly. "I—I wanted to ask you about that. I will be detained here in town for some time. I don't know just how long, but I want this work done, or at least commenced, immediately I am satisfied with the plans. Could you go down to East Penniwell and stay there for as long as need be—to make plans? After they are made, I should like you to stay there and superintend the work—as my guest of course. Is it impossible, that is, are you too busy just now, to consider such an engagement?"

Emmie looked at him anxiously. He must not—this nice, proud man—dream that she knew anything about his circumstances.

But Bob Landon had his own pride—the pride that shames the devil by telling the truth, and is not abashed by poverty. "I have no other job, at present, Miss Weston," he said gravely, wondering if to tell this woman the exact truth, might cheapen him in her eyes, even lose him the job—and there was Bunny to be considered.

"You see," he continued levelly, "I have just lost my job, which was an indoor one, through the failure of my firm. I haven't enough money to set up in business here in New York by myself. Your offer, Miss Weston, is very acceptable to me, save for one thing. I can't go alone."

He hesitated, and then seeing Emmie's big eyes fixed on him, laughed.

"Oh, I don't mean I want to bring a wife and seven small children. I have a crippled friend who lives with me, and I can't very well leave him alone. That doesn't mean he is a weight or a burden. He's a wonder at doing for himself, but we've always stuck together through war and peace. He's a clever chap, too, knows all about periods and furniture. He was a corking decorator before trouble struck him. We used to work together."

"But I should want you to have him with you," Emmie said so earnestly that the man smiled. This was a new sort of client. "And there may be work for him, too. Anyway, the house is large, and—and empty. I shall be glad to have some one there besides myself, some one to talk to about the house, who will understand how I feel about it."

Landon wondered how a woman with money enough to suggest the job she had offered him could have lived so out of the world that she should have such pleasant manners and demand so little.

"We couldn't think of troubling you, if there's an inn, or hotel," Landon began.

But Emmie interrupted him eagerly. "You must believe me, Mr. Landon, when I tell you that there is plenty of room. The house seems terribly empty, since my father's death. I would like you to live there for awhile anyway, and study it thoroughly. You and your friend will be far more comfortable at Weston House than you could possibly be at the Crossroads Inn, but you can look the Inn over, too, and make your own arrangements with the landlord, if you want to stay there, when the house is torn up by workmen. But do go down this week-end. Lib Candy will take care of you and Asher Turkle will meet your train."

Landon still demurred a little, but it sounded tremendously attractive, and it would be a godsend to Bunny to get out of town. He could only thank Miss Weston and say that he would be ready on Friday to meet Miss Candy at the train.

"Your friend's injury, is it incurable?" Emmie asked with softened voice.

"Oh, quite. It's not a deformity. He simply cannot use one foot. He will always have to use a cane or a crutch. Just now he uses two," Landon told her. His face grew dark, as though the very mention of his friend's injury roused a passion of angry pity.

"In East Penniwell," Emmie told him gently, "we are proud of our soldiers."

Landon gave her a wary look and a little bow that silenced her completely.

"Thinks I want to ask him things, I suppose," Emmie thought. "How much he must have been bothered by some people to act like that with me."

As a matter of fact Emmie did not realize that her country upbringing had made her manner friendly to a degree that bewildered the average New Yorker. Landon's look was unconscious, but it served his purpose. Emmie came back to business.

"Shall I give you a 'down payment,' as we say in the country, to bind our bargain and cover your first traveling expenses?" asked Emmie Weston, in something that closely resembled Eli Weston's business voice.

Landon saw what he had done, but was not sorry. He wanted no muddling sentiment about war, or Bunny, from any woman, be she client or not. His first impulse was to refuse the money, then: "Just as you like," he said, indifferently, remembering that if he had money he would think nothing of her offer. It was his present financial position that made him so sensitive.

Emmie had taken out her check book and unscrewed her fountain pen. "Will two hundred and fifty do?"

"Oh, more than enough," Landon told her, hastily. "I may not do at all for the job, Miss Weston. We may not agree about what is to be done, I mean."

"Well, I'll chance that," and Emmie wrote the check.

It was the first one she had drawn in her new check book. Of course, Landon could not know that Emmietta had arrived at her present age without having had a check book of her own, and that it was mildly exciting. She wished she might tell him, but it would probably bring another of "those looks" upon her, and Emmie decided she had better not.

There was silence as she slowly made it out and signed it. Landon, who had been scribbling a form of receipt on the hotel letterhead, handed it to her.

"Will you," he asked formally, "will you want any references as security?"

"Oh, no. The person who recommended you to me is security enough for—anything."

They shook hands, and then Landon said, "I'll go to East Penniwell on Friday. When will you be down, Miss Weston?"

"I'm not quite sure," Emmie told him, "but Miss Candy will tell you."

"How am I to know *her*, when I see her?"

"Oh, that's so. You don't know Lib. Well, I will go with her to the railroad station and see that you are properly introduced."

They both smiled but Emmie, knowing Lib, felt she had the best of the joke.

They walked to the elevator, and as Miss Weston went up to the fifteenth floor, Bob Landon took the stairs to the first floor, bounding down them two at a time, a very good imitation of a man hurrying for his train. It was all he could do to keep from running along the street and shouting for pure joy. Money in his pocket, and a chance to take Bunny out of town!

In Patchen Place, on the lower floor of an old house that had been remodeled with the least possible expense, Bunny Wells sat in the sunshine, waiting for Bob to get back before he opened a can of baked beans for their luncheon. He had almost made up his mind that Bob was not coming back until night.

Sitting there, broad-shouldered and erect, Bunny looked like an athlete. There was, however, an effect of delicacy about his handsome, strongly modeled face—that look of suffering patiently borne, which makes a man's face so heart-breakingly appealing.

When Bunny rose, the look was explained, for he reached for the crutches that leaned against his chair and swung himself toward the two-burner gas stove on which he prepared the mid-day meal.

The door opened and Bob, gay, excited, shouting—utterly unlike the grave young architect who had been talking to Emmie Weston—came in. He turned off the gas, swung Bunny away from the stove and toward the window with one arm, and flourished before him a roll of bills.

"Look at that my gentle Peter Rabat," which was Bunny's real name—Peter Rabat Wells.

Bunny looked, and tried to grab, but expert as he was with his delicate long hands, Bob had him at his mercy, holding the bills, just out of reach.

"Is it real?"

Bob nodded.

"Whom did you hold up?" Bunny asked, with a quick scowl. He hated to have Bob borrow, especially as he knew it was mainly for him. His devilish pension was small, and his wants were many.

"No hold up. Just sheer, damned luck. Somebody, I don't know who, but I suspect it was Mrs. Montgomery, bless her, mentioned me to a nice woman with a peach of an old house on her hands."

Bunny broke into a string of curses.

"I say, Bunny," Bob ventured at last, when he could make himself heard, "it's true. We go on Friday to see the house. In proof whereof I show you the picture postal of the house, which I did not give back to the lady."

He held it out to Bunny.

Bunny wouldn't look at it.

"I'm afraid to look. Something will happen. It won't come true."

"Oh, I say, Bunny," Bob was genuinely distressed, "was it as bad as all that?"

Bunny cursed again.

Bob took him by the shoulders, determinedly: "Comb that mop, and come out. We'll dine largely and well. No more beans, hateful veg., reminiscent of army life."

"I have always liked them," said Bunny, in the same softly modulated voice in which he had sworn. "I have always liked beans. I was all for them during the war and now I'm for Peace with Beans."

"We'll dine at Louis' Place," Bob told him with authority, "and I'll tell you there all about East Penniwell and the William Penn-Quaker-Pennsylvania dream of a house. To that house we're going, to live the life of Riley, while we bring the dream up-to-date."

While Bunny brushed his hair, Emmietta came out of Booth 7 and met her sister May, face to face.

It was probable that Calla thought by this time, so great was the improvement, that Emmie had taken her sister into her confidence. This, however, was far from being either Emmietta's intention or the truth.

The sisters stood looking at each other for a minute that seemed long to Emmie, before May gasped: "Emmie!"

"Yes," said Emmie composedly, though her heart gave an extra beat of mingled excitement and terror. One never knew just how May would take things, or rather one knew only too well that May would take nothing quietly.

"I had no idea," May began, the signs of coming storm showing in eyes and brow, "that you were here."

"Let's go into your booth, May, and talk it over. I didn't want you to know until I had finished my shopping," Emmie added, as May led the way. "I wanted to have something decent to wear and to get a little rest before I came to see you."

"Well!" May finally breathed, rather taken aback by so matter of fact tone, "I must say you have—"

"Yes, I do look better in more ways than one. Don't you think so, May?"

"Where—" began May.

"At The Commodore. Lib Candy is with me," Emmie said hurriedly, thinking it was best to switch May from any supposed grievance by rapidly supplying her with all necessary information. "I came directly to Mrs. Lilley and put myself in her hands. She's been giving me massage and hair treatment."

This had the desired effect. May bent forward and looked at Emmie searchingly.

Emmie knew it was to see whether she had been using dye and cosmetics and faced it. Anything, even such unfounded suspicions, were welcome if they held May's attention. She was bound to grow tearful if she thought Emmie was neglecting her.

"And my clothes, too," Emmie added. "Don't you think they are an improvement?"

May's attention was again claimed. She looked over Emmie's apparel. Black, but not too densely, grimly black, touches

of white at the throat and sleeves. Undoubtedly it set off Emmie's much improved complexion. Why, she looked years younger and—May had to admit it—decidedly good-looking. It was difficult to recognize in this Emmie the downtrodden, homely drudge that May had seen at the funeral. May's lips tightened. Not for worlds would she tell Emmie this.

But Emmie had already shrewdly guessed. May's eyes had always betrayed her to Emmie. May's greedy eyes would never drink in her appearance to this extent if Emmie was not far more attractive than May cared to see.

"You must have been spending money," May's small mean mouth, so like the late Eli's, opened far enough to say.

"Oh yes, but to advantage, don't you think, May? I can come to see you now without blushing, or causing you to blush, for your country sister."

"I never—" May began.

"Of course not. You were too considerate of my feelings, May, yet I must have been a trial to see, and it would have been unbearable—if I had gone to you as I came from the country."

May was tremendously annoyed, but also not a little intrigued. There was no excuse for tears. May was meant to feel that, and felt it, and there was no way of getting at this Emmie, in this public place where May could not successfully stage a scene. Emmie was not to escape utterly, but she was not to be antagonized.

May realized that she must keep a tight rein on her private prejudices and feelings as far as Emmie was concerned, for a little while. There was too much at stake to allow Emmie to withdraw herself. There was Weston to be considered. His aunt was a wealthy woman, and there was no one save Weston to whom Emmietta would naturally and legitimately leave her money. A horrid fear seized May, as she looked on this blooming, well-dressed Emmie. Suppose she got "notions" about men. May felt it incumbent upon her to do her best to keep Emmie "out of mischief."

"You'll come up to the house for dinner, won't you, Emmie?" she said, in that silky tone that Emmie had long ago learned to fear. It foretold May's campaign for something she wanted. "Both Weston and my husband will want to see you."

"I have an engagement for to-morrow," Emmie said quickly, her embarrassment at the thought of meeting people making her voice stern and abrupt.

May frowned. Whom on earth did Emmie know in New York? A man? "Well, Wednesday at 7:30."

Her glance at Emmie so plainly questioned whether Emmie had anything decent to wear that Emmie had hard work to keep from outlining her present wardrobe, or at least saying, "I have a dinner dress." But she knew that was precisely what May wanted to know, so perversely kept from saying it.

"Just ourselves, possibly one or two friends," May said. "I'd like you to know some of my friends, Emmie, since you are in town—for how long?"

"I don't know." Emmie said. It had come. May would try to interfere. May offering to entertain Emmie! To introduce her to her friends! May wanting to know for how long she was in town! Truly money has a marvelously softening power upon certain individuals.

"Well, you'll come Wednesday, anyway."

May's manner of taking anything she wanted for granted had always irritated Emmie. Dearly would she love to refuse, but discretion urged her to say "Yes," and to murmur that she had to keep another appointment, as May's white robed attendant came in to take down May's hair. Emmie gave May a sisterly kiss and was gone before May could ask any more questions.

Emmie breathed freedom with the air, when she reached Madison Avenue and walked toward her hotel. Why need May be so formidable? Emmie reminded herself that she was not accountable to May for her money or her actions. She did not feel quite so care free as she neared Forty Second Street. Lib was waiting for her, and she had yet to explain to Lib Candy that Lib must return to East Penniwell without her, and entertain Mr. Robert Landon and his companion.

Lib received the news anything but graciously. She pursed her thin lips, looked at Emmie with steely eyes and waited.

Emmie came to the end of her sentence, and began again. "You might put Mr. Landon in the south room and his friend in the room next to him."

"Both of 'em could git in the south room and save work. It's as big as three of these that we're paying a ransom for."

Glad of any excuse to keep Lib from asking her questions, Emmie said with authority, "Both rooms ready, Lib, and then let them decide for themselves. But both rooms ready."

There was a painful silence, and then Lib said:

"When you coming down yourself, Miss Emmie?"

"I don't know," Emmie said. "As soon as I finish my treatments at Mrs. Lilley's—and a little business I have to do."

Lib coughed.

"I'm visiting my sister, May, on Wednesday."

Lib coughed again.

Emmie hesitated. "Don't tell Asher, or East Penniwell, anything about these two men," she said, "except that they are—just two friends of mine."

Lib nodded.

Emmie made a desperate effort. "Of course, I'm awfully sorry to have you go, Lib, but I can't think of the house without you there to look after it."

Lib sniffed. "'Course the house needs me, Miss Emmie. I can see that."

"I shall feel so much more comfortable about it," Emmie added softly.

Lib looked at her again, meditating. Finally she said, slowly, "Miss Emmie, how'm I gonna know these men?"

"I'm going with you to the station," Emmie said patiently. It was the third time she had told Lib this.

Lib sniffed again. "Miss Emmie, what am I to keep East Penniwell going on, if Tom Hastings comes down before you do?"

Emmie's eyes twinkled, but she used Lib's own tactics. "I leave it to you."

For the first time, Lib smiled. "Miss Emmie, you are a smart one. Can't get any change outter you, can I?"

Emmie looked at her. After all, clamped lips or no, there was nobody like Lib. She understood. Sometimes she understood too much, but still and all she was Lib, who had stood by her for long years.

Lib waited, complacently, smoothing down the new dress she was wearing.

"Want I should keep up as much style as possible, I suppose, Miss Emmie?"

Emmie nodded, smiling.

"Well, might as well git some use outter the dress you bought me. Asher'll open his eyes some."

Again they exchanged significant smiles.

"Lib, get in young Andy's second daughter to do the dishes and help with the housework. Remember you're the housekeeper now."

Lib frowned. "Don't know as I want anything so young, flighty and white as young Andy's second daughter round me. She'll be wasting my time leaning against the door jamb gossiping with Asher." Lib thought a moment, gazing past Emmie out of the window. "I guess I'd better git Zebra's granddaughter, Morphy Ballins. She's a good cleaner."

"Suit yourself," said Emmie, who saw Lib's point, when she remembered Asher's frankness of conversation and proneness for the neighborhood of anything in petticoats, under twenty.

"Yes, I guess Zebra's Morphy would just about do," Lib said. "Of course, there'll be a sight of dusting after her to count on, but she's as near a good worker as any I've known, white or black."

"Then that's settled," Emmie murmured.

"Miss Emmie," Lib began absentmindedly, "would you—if you was me—wear my new blue, or my new red hat, or the black with the pink roses? My land! I never had so many new ones to oncet in my life. I'd feel dredful if two of them wasn't yours that you give me. They're new to me. As woman to woman, Miss Emmie, which one do you think would kinda stagger Asher the most?"

"The red."

Lib beamed at her. "Red it is then," she said, "and red it should be too," she added, looking severely at her mistress, "seeing that East Penniwell ought to get some kinda danger signal, for what you are up to, Miss Emmie—that you ain't telling me—and mind you that I ain't asking—is likely to shake up East Penniwell worsen a earthquake."

Emmie, standing with Lib in the Pennsylvania station and waiting with that faint stir of excitement that a railway station always gave her with its groups of travelers hurrying from ticket office to train, had a sinking of the heart as the hands of the clock stole nearer and nearer the hour of departure to East Penniwell, and no Bob Landon came toward her.

Lib, who had the country woman's impatience to be on board train long ahead of time in order not to miss it, began fidgeting.

"Put not your trust in architects or any other man for that matter," she said, glancing at the new wrist watch which Miss Emmie had presented her with, and then at the station clock, to see if they agreed. "It's likely he just talked up to you, Miss Emmie, for the sake of the down payment and never had any intention of hiring himself out in a little country town like East Penniwell. He'll never come in time now. If he doesn't come, do I go right along? Do I?"

"Oh yes, I suppose so," Emmie said, worn out with the task of keeping Lib from asking every porter and trainman that passed where the train was, and if it was ready to go yet.

Bob Landon's tall figure came toward them. He was walking very slowly, for beside him was Bunny.

Emmie saw Bob's eyes full of solicitude fixed on his companion. He was carefully keeping himself between Bunny and careless, hurrying travelers. A colored porter guarded Bunny's other crutch.

Impulsively Emmie moved toward them. Bunny saw her and smiled. If this was Bob's lady, they were surely in luck.

"Why, Bob she's lovely!" he said. "Why didn't you tell me she was so good-looking?"

"Is she? I never noticed anything except her money. Look out Bunny! What floundering idiots some men are!" he exclaimed, as he elbowed between Bunny and a harassed immigrant father with five dirty, confused children and a bewildered wife, carrying a baby.

But Emmie had seen Bunny's approving eyes, and all her diffidence had disappeared. She went eagerly toward them. She could have laughed aloud with relief and thankfulness. She saw Lib's eyes contract as she watched the men.

"That them?"

Emmie nodded.

Lib looked at her with admiration. "I'll say for you, Miss Emmie, you're a good picker. Two classy-looking fellers, even if one of 'em's lame."

Miss Emmie did not respond. She was wondering what had made Bob's companion lame. There was no apparent

deformity or shortening of leg or foot. She had little time for speculation. She must introduce Lib Candy, and watch Bob introduce her to Bunny.

Introductions over, they made their way to the train gate, Bob shouldering his way ahead to make a safe path for Bunny.

Lib clutched Emmie's arm. "If he gets a notion to act kinda interested in you, Miss Emmie, don't shake him off, because East Penniwell would kinda believe a woman'd give Tom Hastings the go-by for *him*. Your plan's clear to me now—and it's a good one."

Before the amazed Emmietta could speak Lib had followed Bob and Bunny through the gate.

We eat to live, but we dine, or are dined, to pay our social debts. Never was this more apparent than at May Kent's table, for she followed the rule of cutlet for cutlet ruthlessly.

May Kent was an excellent housekeeper. Her rooms were attractive, her servants well trained and her food good, though there was never more than just enough, not quite enough some people thought. May's best friends had formed the habit of taking a glass of milk, or a cocktail and a sandwich before going to May's dinners, if their appetites were rude. Many a man and wife came home, after a dinner at the Kent's, and rummaged through the ice box, before going to bed.

May Kent had inherited so much of the frugality of her father that, while she rigidly observed the rule of cutlet for cutlet, it was a very small cutlet, under all its trimmings, that one got at her dinner table.

Emmie's heart sank as she passed along the hall of May's apartment. The hall ran directly through the middle of the apartment. On one side was the dining room, on the other side the drawing room and the library.

As Emmie glanced toward the drawing room door, she had a glimpse of her brother-in-law and Weston talking to a very lovely young person, and May to another man. Emmie did not see the man plainly, yet her heart sank even lower. Was it possible that she was growing morbid, or was she right and the man Tom Hastings? It did not seem that May could have done such a thing! May must remember something about the past, although she had married and left East Penniwell before Tom's departure. Was it a devilish little scheme on May's part to bring them together under her roof, to see with her own eyes what the dangers of the situation were?

Emmie thoughtfully looked in the mirror and flung back her head. May must never know what an ordeal it was for Emmie to face new people. May should see just exactly as much as Emmie chose to let her see, and no more. Emmie's evening dress was exceedingly becoming, and fortified by that fact Emmie's head was again high, as she went toward the drawing room.

As a matter of fact, May had met Tom Hastings some weeks ago and had greeted him with small friendliness, until she learned, from his attitude, that he had apparently forgotten everything about Emmie and was only interested in brickyards. Then May had laughed. Not only was Emmie's romance shattered, but Tom was apparently unconscious that there had been any romance. It was rich—to a mean woman—and May was essentially mean. She rejoiced in a purely unsisterly manner, calculating shrewdly all the while that if Emmie was flicked, while the wound was raw, at exactly the right moment, she would naturally cut Tom out of her plans as far as matrimony was concerned.

Though she pretended, even to herself, to be deeply sorry for Emmie, in her heart May could not help a little feeling of scorn. Surely now Emmie would realize that romance was not for her, and settle down to middle-age, with Weston as her sole heir.

Weston liked his aunt. It needed only a little prodding now to make him play the dutiful nephew. The dinner to-night was to show Emmie, herself, Tom's admiration for Lee Lansing and Weston's handicap. Surely, Emmie could not fail to back her own flesh and blood!

Emmie, forewarned and forearmed by that glimpse of Tom and her knowledge of May's character, came calmly into the drawing room. Her first glance told her that it was Tom. Could this be the girl May had spoken of—the girl Weston liked?

As she walked across the room, with a smile, to greet her brother-in-law and Weston, Emmie's mind was rapidly sorting over these facts, and wondering if Tom was the middle-aged lover who May had hinted was making Weston's life difficult.

If he was, May's scheme was sufficiently clear. It was a mean and unsisterly trick, and yet May might do—just that. She had deliberately brought Emmie face to face with her young rival. What luck that Emmie had been prepared for "something," before she came into the room! May would never know, nor should Tom, just how it made her feel. Emmie turned to greet the girl.

Lee Lansing, who always gave the effect of ignoring her own beauty, even while she used it ruthlessly, looked with interest upon Emmie. She had heard Weston's indignant description of his poor little old aunt, whom his miserly

grandfather had so used and suppressed. This woman did not look so awfully held down, nor in the least repressed. She was obviously good-looking, and her dress was in the very latest mode, even if it was black.

Involuntarily Emmie smiled, as she stretched out her hand. What a pretty girl! And how very modern, from her bobbed locks to the ultra short dress that draped her slim, youthful figure. No wonder Weston had lost his head. No wonder Tom was fascinated! Yet Tom was not young, but that, thought Emmie bitterly, never stopped a man.

Dinner was announced immediately, so that Emmie had time for no more than to indicate her pleasure at seeing Tom Hastings there. She had, for the moment, Tom's entire attention. He was hastily revising his program. He had come to this dinner in order to enlist Lee Lansing's aid. He had meant to ask Lee to help him reach this woman, whom he had mistaken for her own aunt. Now he saw that would never do. He could not even indirectly mention that particular mistake to another woman. How could he have been so blind as to make it?

Emmie sat beside him, outwardly composed, inwardly a prey to half a dozen different emotions at once, and praying that she would have sense enough to keep them entirely to herself or, here at May's beautifully appointed table, she might meet her Waterloo. Tom Hastings would undoubtedly try to influence her to look favorably upon his scheme for buying her land. She must keep him from speaking of that before May, if she could. May was so avid, if one spoke of money. It sickened Emmie to see her father's least attractive look reproduced on May's smooth face. May was busy spreading nets for her feet, Emmie knew, and if she was not careful May would trap her.

Resolutely Emmie put behind her all thought of how strange it was to sit beside Tom Hastings, after all these years, and feel not only utterly different from any and all of the ways she had imagined she would feel, but actually be watching out warily for pitfalls and for gins. Her hand trembled a little as she lifted her fork to taste the lobster cocktail which the waitress placed before her.

And then Tom spoke: "I couldn't find out where you were in this town."

"I didn't want anyone to know for awhile. I wanted to rest. As a matter of fact I didn't even tell May. We stumbled upon each other by chance."

Tom glanced at her quickly.

Emmie bore the glance serenely, sure that Calla Lilley's efforts would be justified. She had made the delightful discovery that though Tom Hastings sat beside her she could eat with enjoyment. The years brought their compensation. There had been a day when mere proximity to Tom Hastings destroyed her appetite utterly, and set her heart beating at such a rate that she could neither eat nor talk.

She looked up from her lobster now and glanced quickly across the table, where the vivacious Lee was engrossing the attention of both father and son.

"Isn't she a charmingly pretty girl?" exclaimed the generous Emmie.

"Very," said Tom enthusiastically, "and so clever, such a lot of temperament. She sings, you know, and designs and rides and skates and dances. It's wonderful what girls do nowadays."

Emmie assented, while her mind went back to the days when she had been Lee's age, and she glanced at the man beside her, wondering if the least flash of memory came to him of by-gone days, of pretty girls, and one in particular, the young Emmietta Weston, who seemed now as great a stranger, as lost to Emmie Weston, herself, as to Tom Hastings. Apparently Tom never gave by-gone times or girls a thought, for he leaned across the table to answer some laughing remark of Lee's.

Emmie looked up to find Weston regarding her with solemn but friendly eyes. He caught her glance and leaned toward her.

"My hat, Aunt Emmie, you've taken my advice with a vengeance! You look twenty years younger."

"It was good advice, Weston, if it has that effect."

"Surest thing you know. Only keep sweet, Aunt Emmie. Don't go any further."

"Weston!" Emmie laughed. "What on earth do you mean?"

"What I say," Weston said darkly and without glancing at his mother. "Get busy with diet and fresh air and new clothes but leave the rouge and dye pots to those older—" he lifted his voice and glanced at Lee, who apparently did not hear him—"or younger. Go on your own, Aunt Emmie, your own looks and spirits—you've got 'em—and let the rest go."

Emmie's laughter made Tom turn toward her. He was conscious that she should receive a little more attention if he wished to carry through, successfully, a certain scheme.

"Are you going back to East Penniwell soon?" he asked.

Conversation seemed to cease for the moment. Everybody listened as though all their plans hung on Emmie's answer.

"I don't know," Emmie deliberated, "but I think it will have to be soon. Lib went down yesterday to open the house and look after two friends of mine, who went with her. I must, at least, go down to see if they are comfortable and content."

Emmie could see May's plucked eyebrows travel upward. A question was forming on May's lips. Weston saw it too and, with a quick glance at his father, as though fearing an outburst from his mother, leaned toward Emmie.

"But I say, Aunt Emmie, you must be glad to have some one in that big house."

"I am," Emmie smiled back at the boy. "It's a big place for just one woman."

Lee Lansing turned to her. "Is yours the lovely old Pennsylvania house Wes raves about? The house at—"

"East Penniwell," supplied Emmie and gave a pleased glance at her nephew. "I'm so glad you care about it, Weston."

Weston laughed. "Who could help it. It's an old beauty, Aunt Emmie."

"I'm going to have it remodeled."

"Oh, Emmie!" gasped May.

"Aunt Emmie!" Weston spoke in quite a different tone, but looked equally distressed. "Don't spoil it. It's perfect as it is."

"Outside," admitted Emmie cheerfully, "but not inside. It wants a lot done to it. Trust me, Weston, I won't spoil it."

"Got a good man?" Weston inquired.

"The best," Emmie said steadily and then added daringly, "come down with me and meet him, Weston, when I go to talk over the plans." Emmie's heart had warmed to the boy, her own kin, who had liked the old house. It was wonderful to have some one care.

"I dote on old houses," Lee Lansing announced. She smiled winningly at Emmie.

Dazzled, Emmie ventured: "Would you come too?"

"Like a shot. I'm sick of this old city anyway, just now. I'm dying to get away."

"Yes, you are!" Weston jibed. "A little dance-cat like you! Why, you'd get tired of country life in five hours—no jazz, no theatres—"

"Of course," Lee said, selecting an olive, "I didn't say permanently sick of the town. I like the old place fairly well and my dancing days are not over yet. But just for a ride down, dear Wes. To give the old place the once-over, and back the same day. I'd like it."

Emmie saw the hungry, smoldering light in the boy's eyes, as they dwelt on the delicately painted face and the cropped golden head.

"Then come down, my dear," she urged impulsively. "Come down for the day and look it over and if you like it come down again, and for as long as you please."

"Aunt Emmie," Wes broke in a little hurriedly, his voice sharp and eager, "why can't I drive you down?"

Tom Hastings saw his chance. "I say, Wes, let me. My car will hold us all and I have to go there on business anyway. What do you say Miss Weston—or is it Emmie as it used to be?"

"To-morrow," said Emmie, triumph in her heart. "To-morrow, Tom."

All East Penniwell would see her coming home in Tom Hastings' car.

May's voice, sharp and edgy, broke in on this pleasant planning. "You were going to meet Holly Bannister, and buy some new furnishings for your rooms at Princeton, Weston."

"Plenty of time for that," Weston told her, reddening. He had seen Tom smile across the table at Lee. Why must his mother always parade the fact that he was still a student, before this heavy business man?

"Princeton's very near," Emmie said, instinctively coming to the rescue. "If Weston wants to go there—"

May interrupted with: "Holly doesn't live in Princeton yet." Her voice was heavily sarcastic, insinuating that Emmie was too rustic, too old maidish, to know much about college men, or terms.

"Well, Aunt Emmie doesn't know Holly," Weston declared, defending this aunt who was so quick to aid him. "It's a matter of no importance, anyway. We won't need the new things if I should decide not to go back this fall."

It was a threat that never failed to make his mother wince in public and rail in private. May winced now, and Emmie was sorry for her. She saw May look appealingly at Lee, and Lee deliberately turn to Tom, without returning the look.

Weston glanced at his aunt, and met her sympathetic eyes.

"Can we all come, Aunt Emmie? Sure it's all right?"

"Absolutely," Emmie told him delightedly. "Weston, I can't tell you how pleased I am that you are interested in the house."

"It's a grand old house." Weston's eyes strayed toward Lee. They were rising now, leaving the dining table. He bent toward his aunt and whispered swiftly, "Cinch it up, Aunt Emmie, now, so that it can't be changed. Lee's slippery. I'm keen to have her down there." The boy's eyes rested on his kinswoman with an appeal she could not resist. "The telephone's in the hall. Let's fix it up with Lib Candy now, before mother thinks up any more objections."

Emmie would have done much more for him than that. It gave her a distinctly warm and friendly feeling to be able to do anything for one who, in some degree, belonged to her.

True to type, after leading her to the telephone and giving the instructions to the long distance operator, Weston drifted off to the library to detach Lee from Tom. He left Emmie waiting for the number, but Emmie did not mind. She leaned her head against the back of the telephone chair, which was so like May in being solid mahogany, ornate and uncomfortable. Emmie looked through the open library door. Lee, May, her husband, and Weston. How odd it was to be with them and odder still to be in this house with Tom!

The telephone bell rang sharply. Emmie answered it. It was difficult to hear the operator. Emmie, complaining of this, asked for a better connection. She was aware of the interchange of opinion between the New York and the East Penniwell operators. She heard the East Penniwell operator say wearily: "Can't do any better. Every time that number is called the whole line takes off the receivers and listens."

Emmie forgot herself and giggled. Then she heard Lib Candy's voice, "My good Gravy, Miss Emmie! That you? Anything wrong?"

Miss Emmie assured her all was well and began to explain. She could hear Lib's gasp of astonishment as she said:

"I'm motoring down to-morrow, Lib, with Miss Lansing, Weston and Tom Hastings. Just for the day. Can you have a specially nice luncheon ready by one-thirty?"

"My Land of Love! Yes," came Lib's excited voice, "I'd do more'n that, Miss Emmie, to have you—and—and Tom Hastings under the same roof. G'by!"

Lib hung up before Emmie could take her to task.

Emmie rose, thinking guiltily to herself that, as she had planned, the news would be all over East Penniwell in a few minutes. She was still smiling to herself as she went toward the library door.

Tom Hastings was standing there looking at her. For the twentieth time that night he asked himself how he could ever have taken this radiant woman for poor old Aunt Em.

Emmie looked up at him.

"What's the joke?" Tom asked.

Emmie laughed. "The joke is on you, Mr. Thomas Hastings," she said, "but rest easy, I'll never tell it."

She went past him into the room. Tom followed her, puzzled.

Did she mean that confounded Aunt Em business, or was there something else? He followed Emmie with his eyes, he listened to her conversation with Lee and Weston, seeking to solve the puzzle. He wondered why he didn't come out into the open and ask her if she bore malice about his "Aunt Em" slip, but she gave him no opportunity. Neither would she talk business with him. Adroitly, she put him off. "When we are in East Penniwell, not before," she said, and all the time there was a twinkle in her eyes that kept him guessing.

If Emmie had been one of the most guileful of women, she could not have intrigued Tom more successfully. A joke "on" him, which she would not tell! He was determined to be her shadow until he learned what it was!

Pity the man who wounds a woman's vanity. The bill for damages which she will insist on collecting will be far greater than if he had run over her with his motor.

Sweetly, but very firmly, Emmie refused the seat of honor beside the driver in Tom's car. Not so easily would he get a chance to wipe out his initial mistake, or that speech with her about his brickyards, which she had skillfully avoided the night of May's dinner and since.

Without a single twinge, Emmie watched Lee climb into the front seat, and saw Tom's appreciative eyes, as the lovely young thing settled down beside him.

On the rear seat Weston Kent was a prey to jealousy. His gentle aunt had deliberately sacrificed him in order to carry out her own schemes. She glanced now at her good-looking kinsman and wondered at herself. Then she hardened her heart. Weston was young, plenty of time for him to chop and change, and wring his heart's desire out of life. Emmie had wasted so much time that she had absolutely none to lose. She sighed, and glanced at Lee. A jealous fear, beyond anything Weston felt, reached out to clutch her. Resolutely she turned her eyes away from the front seat and brought her mind to bear upon East Penniwell and the problem that awaited her there.

East Penniwell was already agog over the reappearance of Lib Candy, "dressed up to the minute." Then there were the two strange men who had come with Lib and taken up their abode in the Weston house. The party wire had not rested. It had been especially active after Miss Emmie's telephone message to Lib.

Lib, moving about the house with her mouth set in grim amusement, listened to the rings thoughtfully until the whole eighteen were accounted for.

Asher Turkle took every opportunity to listen in, and report:

"Miss Mink and Miss Annie Mink surmise we're taking in boarders."

Lib said nothing.

"Are we?"

"What do you think?"

Asher retired again to the telephone, only partially defeated, to return later with:

"Mrs. John Smith says it's plain to her that Miss Emmie's entertaining some society folk that she met in New York."

"Well?"

"Mrs. Adam Misener says that she thinks they are Tom Hastings' brick men. What say?"

"Nothing," said Lib. "Form your own opinions, and bring me up some coal for the kitchen range."

Asher trotted away obediently, but shaking his head. The Lib Candy, from New York, was scarcely the Lib Candy who had left East Penniwell so reluctantly. Was this the woman who had served Eli Weston so meekly all those years? Look at the clothes she had come back in, and her new way of doing her hair! More than that, she was changing her dress every afternoon, and every afternoon she went out for a walk or a call!

Much as Asher would like to set Lib in her place, and give her a piece of his mind, he felt that discretion was the better part of valor, until Miss Emmie came home. It might be that Lib and Miss Emmie had come to some agreement about money, which was why the woman was so contrary.

Asher sighed, but not from the weight of the scuttle. It was rather from the weight of suspicion that held him down. Home was scarcely home to Asher with these two strange men in the house. Lib had given him no explanation, merely said, "Miss Emmie said these gentlemen are to have the best in the house, and in East Penniwell."

Despite every opportunity, Lib had declined to explain further, or to divulge her instructions. Asher could put but one

construction on this attitude. One of the men was "after" Miss Emmie, or Miss Emmie was "after" one of them. Disinterested friendship between male and female is not believed in, or countenanced, by men of Asher's type and caliber.

The two men were all right, themselves. Asher would have liked nothing better than a long intimate conversation with them, which would result in his saying nothing of importance while they made plain to him their purpose in East Penniwell. But Lib did her best to keep them apart. Never, even in Eli's days, had Asher had to trot about so. Everything he had done, during Lib's absence, was apparently wrong, and either had to be done all over again or changed in some way. Moreover, Lib, and the visitor who wasn't lame—Mr. Landon—were all over the house, tapping, measuring, while Mr. Landon asked questions and put down figures on paper.

A horrid fear pursued Asher. These two females, Miss Emmie and Lib, were going to sell the house! Asher's heart shrank. He hated change and especially he hated the unknown, or, as he put it, "the onknowable." Why couldn't Lib explain and consult with him? What had he done to be suddenly shut out in this way?

He puzzled over it and finally triumphantly came to the conclusion that Lib was trying to force his hand. Well, two people could play at that game. An "asking" was what the woman wanted. It was what they all wanted, to get a man completely in their power. Well then, a proposal was something she should not have until Miss Emmie came home. Miss Emmie had some sense.

Asher was the only unhappy man in the house. Bob and Bunny were entranced. The house was as treasure-trove to Bob. He went singing and whistling about it, as he planned. The longer Miss Emmie stayed away the more the house seemed his own, and he could dream over plans to keep its character intact, yet have everything in it that a modern man or woman could desire. He wanted nothing else. He was indifferent as to Emmie's return. All he wanted was the house.

But Bunny, like Asher, longed for Emmie's return, and not merely that Bob might propose that the handling of the interior decorating be given to Bunny. He wanted to do it and could, easily, with Bob's help. It was Emmie, herself, Bunny was anxious to see. He longed to thank this woman, who had made life bloom again for Bob. Emmie's face had charmed him and Emmie's house had still further intrigued him. He went about it trying to fit the woman he had seen in the railroad station to this environment. He treasured all he heard of her, as he walked about her town, as he read her books, looked at her pictures, and out of her windows. He waited to see Emmie again with an intensity of interest that surprised him.

The first intimation of Emmie's approach was her long distance message from New York. Lib had at once called upon Asher and Zebra's granddaughter, Morphinia Ballins, whom she was breaking in to wash dishes and wait on table, for aid. Asher had shaken his head over the news. He gave the information, in solemn tones that presaged the worst, to Bob and Bunny, as Lib began operations.

Bob, who had been blissfully replanning the library, was driven forth, by Morphy. "'Scuse me, Mr. Landon, but could you kinda keep outen from under ma' feet? Wif Miss Libby so rambunctious this morning, ain't nuthin' a'tall suit her, lessen I sweep right blam fru the house."

Bob immediately proposed a walk to Bunny and together they went down East Penniwell's main street at a pace suited to Bunny's power of locomotion.

It had been a pleasant ride down to East Penniwell for Lee Lansing, driven by one suitor and conscious that another was jealously watching her. Pleasant also, but puzzling for Tom Hastings, who wondered what the devil that Weston woman was up to, calmly relinquishing him to the girl, and quietly pleasant but uncommunicative. Not once had he been able to get the proposed brickyard into the conversation, even in the way of a mild pleasantry. And now he could never explain taking her for her Aunt Em. Positively the woman grew handsomer and younger each minute, and he had not yet discovered the joke that was "on" him.

As for Emmie, it was a revelation to her, this ride. Here she was, actually in Tom Hastings' motor, Tom on the front seat, with a pretty girl, and yet Emmie knew the girl was not getting Tom's entire attention. It was so pleasant that Emmie hoped it was true. Meantime, she would not gratify Tom's curiosity as to the brickyard property, and that would give her time. Time for what? Emmie refused to answer that question to herself. She only admitted that she was beginning a

tremendous campaign to save her self respect and keep the village's good opinion. It was essential that she keep Tom waiting, and guessing.

Emmie was beginning to know and like Weston Kent far better than she had supposed she would ever like any one belonging to her sister May.

Weston thought his aunt a great improvement on his preconceived idea of his mother's sister. Actually she had some life in her, and some ideas! She was utterly unlike mother. He only hoped Aunt Emmie would not spoil the house. He felt it his duty to see that she did not. Meanwhile, it was a bore that Lee was letting herself go, as usual, with that middle-aged duffer, Hastings, who had been, if he understood his mother correctly, at one time his Aunt Emmie's property. Well, why on earth didn't Aunt Emmie clamp on a wedding ring, anchor him down to middle-aged matrimony and so keep him in his place, instead of letting him run about with girls?

Weston was more than usually blue. There had been a terrific scene at home, when he had hinted that he might not return to Princeton this fall. The matter was still unsettled, but he was coming down to East Penniwell again soon and intended to do as he pleased. It depended entirely on Lee whether Princeton ever saw him again. He modestly admitted to himself that the football team might miss him, but a man's career was, after all, a man's own concern.

East Penniwell saw them approach and stop at the Weston gate. Miss Annie Mink was at her window and Sister was out in the garden. They hurried toward each other and collided in the doorway.

"Sister, has Miss Emmie dyed?" gasped Miss Annie, holding her hand against her bruised head.

"Died! No indeed! She's as lively as you could wish to see, and it's Tom Hastings' automobile!"

"I meant her hair," said Miss Annie, for once impatient with Sister. "It seemed extra *bright* to me."

They looked at each other doubtfully and Miss Annie slowly shook her head. "Sister," she announced in a thrilling whisper, "we're going to see doings about this place that'll surprise us."

The street saw Miss Emmie helped out of the motor by her own nephew, which was quite as it should be. But Tom Hastings parked the car and helped out as pretty a girl as had been in East Penniwell for some time. Now what did that mean?

"Is it possible," gasped Mrs. Adam Misener, peering out of the window of the general store, "that Tom Hastings' been married whilst he was away hid off in the West?" There were doubtful shakes of the head. Tom's marriage would surely have been known, her audience argued.

Mrs. Smith rallied them with a new theory: "Then it's the boy's fy-nancy, and that must be it, otherwise Emmie wouldn't look—My land, *look* at Emmie! Did j'ever see such a change?" Space at the window was pushed and elbowed for. "Do you suppose she's been done-up, enameled and such like? I've heard you can do it, if you have the price."

But Mrs. Misener, indignant at being kept waiting to find out whether Mrs. Peter Tosh wanted two and a half or four pounds of granulated sugar, broke in:

"Here, you girls leave off picking on Miss Emmietta. My land, just the relief of getting quit of Eli Weston and having a nickel to spend on yourself would perk up any woman."

"To say nuthin' of Tom Hastings coming back," snickered the only man in the shop.

Mrs. Philemon Arrowsmith had the last word. "Yes, Tom Hastings has come back, but how has he come back?" And darkly, "What for?"

Emmietta felt faintly reluctant to enter her home. She wondered whether it was because she had changed so in her brief freedom, her brief visit to New York, that she feared the old house would reach out feelers to drag her back into the old grooves. No, that was impossible! Then she knew that she had somehow expected to see Bob Landon, and especially his friend, in the doorway.

They were not in sight and it was not until just before luncheon was announced to the hungry motorists that the two friends came toward the great dining room, which Lib had scrubbed and polished and decorated with flowers for Miss

Emmie's home coming.

Bunny stood by the doorway, smiling, but Bob came forward with outstretched hand to Emmie. Emmie realized for the first time how distinguished he looked, also that he was a little older than she had thought—younger than Tom, of course, but distinctly older than Weston. She was so engrossed in her greeting to him, and in the endeavor not to show too much consideration for Bunny, that she did not see the look that passed between Lee Lansing and Bob.

It was only a glance but it was a glance that might mean a great many things. Yet Lee allowed Emmie to go through her form of introduction—"Miss Lansing, Mr. Landon and Mr. Wells"—without interruption.

Under cover of their finding their places at the luncheon table, Bunny heard Lee hiss to Bob, "How did you manage this?" and heard him say in a low tone, which sounded dull and lifeless after the suppressed fury of her voice, "Business, which I never expected would include—you."

The luncheon party was gay, with a gayety due mostly to Bunny, who, once seated, could hold his own with any man, for looks and conversation, and proceeded to do so. Miss Emmie was plainly delighted, as she listened to his description of her oldest friends and neighbors, and when she didn't know whom he meant, he sketched them for her on the back of an envelope, with a few authoritative lines.

Bunny was deeply interested in Zebra, but Asher Turkle he loved. He blessed the day on which he had met Asher. It had made life and East Penniwell far more interesting to him, since Asher had taken the trouble to bestow on Bunny bits of his own original philosophy and his theory of the conduct of life.

"Wait until I give you his opinion of women, Miss Emmie," Bunny said. "Even expurgated, you'll tremble, after you've heard it. Every day that man comes in with wood for the open fire he talks to me and tells me how he sees through the sex. Nothing in their dreadful lives is hidden from him."

"Except what Miss Lib Candy's intentions are," Bob cut in dryly, "and those are so deeply hidden that Asher's getting thin trying to figure them out."

The talk switched to the house and its attractions whenever Lib or Morphy came into the room, which was as often as they could contrive.

Bob was tremendously enthusiastic about the house. He had found all manner of hidden beauties, and things that even Miss Emmie had forgotten the house contained.

Interested, Weston forgot to scowl at Lee for Lee's obvious monopoly of Tom Hastings. Gradually Lee joined the discussion. Tom listened, studying the group. While Bob talked, Bunny made delightful explanatory sketches.

Tom looked again at Emmie as she bent over the sketches with Bunny and wondered. The woman fairly bloomed! She looked years younger. She was good-looking and these men had not been slow to notice it. Why, they were both so absorbed with Emmietta Weston that they were not, incredible as it seemed to Tom, paying the least attention to Lee Lansing.

He looked at the men again narrowly, and saw something that Emmie had missed. Though Bob Landon was so grave, and so thoughtful, he was several years younger than Bunny. It was Bunny Wells' lameness, and Bob's anxious thought for him that gave Bob Landon his elder brother air.

Tom looked at Emmie again, and saw easily why these men could be so interested. To them she was what she seemed, a lovely woman who looked fresh and interested and charming. Neither of them would have made his mistake. The thought of his error reminded him of his business. Tom frowned a little, and tapped a finger on the table, abstractedly.

Emmie looked up. "All this I'm afraid bores Mr. Hastings, though it fascinates me."

"Not in the least," Tom said penitently and hastily. "It is only that I—I have some business to transact while I am here, and the time is short, since we go back to town in a few hours. I wonder, Miss Weston—Emmie—could I have a word with you about that business soon?"

For one brief moment Tom thought Emmietta was about to refuse point blank. Then she said, slowly, and reluctantly:

"At your own risk. I'm not in the mood to talk business yet. I don't think I want to sell."

Tom looked, as he felt, tremendously disappointed. He started to rise from his chair, and then, being a good business man, made due allowances for both the sex and the mood of his opponent. He had made one mistake with this woman. He must not make another.

"I'll take the risk," he told her, smiling, "and I think you'll change your mind, when you hear my offer."

But Emmie shook her head. Not so easily would he get his way with her.

"I think I won't sell, Mr. Hastings, so why waste your time?"

Tom, more amazed and more angry than he cared to show before this company, aware as he was of Lee's expectant and Weston's curious eyes, refused to take Emmie seriously.

"I won't take that refusal as your answer, Emmie," he managed to say with a smile. "I'll wait until I can see you alone."

Emmietta, who had been playing for just this, shook her head with the proper amount of indecision.

Only to tight-lipped Lib, industriously placing ash trays where they would do most good, was it apparent that Miss Emmie was "giving that there Tom Hastings his first come-uppance."

Sentiment and business mix as oil and water. Only fools, or women, try to mix them.

There was nothing sentimental in Tom Hastings' desire to see Emmietta alone, yet, when Weston and Bunny went together to look at the library fireplace and were followed at a respectful distance by Lee and Bob Landon, Tom and Emmietta were alone in the front room.

Emmie looked toward Tom expectantly. Surely now he would begin that long-delayed explanation to which she felt she was entitled. Nothing of the kind came from Tom. Without hesitation and without any attempt to soften his approach, he turned to her as he closed the door between them and the others.

"And now, Miss Weston, about the brickyard property I want to buy."

Emmie could not believe that she heard him aright. She did not reply.

"Fair's explained it, hasn't he?" He glanced carelessly out of the window. "The ground I want is at least two and a half miles away. The brickyards will give employment to some of the people here, pay them well and increase the value of property."

Emmie laughed.

Tom looked at her inquiringly.

"I don't care about increasing property value. I don't want East Penniwell to change," Emmie said.

Tom shrugged his shoulders. "Everything changes, so why not East Penniwell? Especially if it is for the good of everybody concerned."

Emmie walked toward the other window and looked out. There was an odd expression on her face, Tom thought, but when she turned again and looked toward Tom, her glance was serene and she regarded him with a smile that Tom somehow found disconcerting, in spite of its apparent friendliness.

"I'm not entirely convinced that it *is* for the good of everybody concerned. When I am, I'll sell the property."

"Yes, but time's a big factor in this scheme."

"It is in almost every scheme, isn't it?" Emmie replied indifferently.

"Time," said Tom a little sententiously, for he was greatly annoyed, "often makes changes necessary—"

"That's why we will take a little longer time to decide in this particular instance if the changes are necessary." Emmie was unmoved by Tom's annoyance.

"But when?"

"When I have come to a decision about the property, Mr. Fair will notify you."

"Yes, but Miss Weston—Emmie, as I used to call you."

"Oh," said Emmie, "you have again remembered that."

"Of course I have remembered that, and a great deal more."

"When you remember enough," Emmie said quietly, "you will probably know why I can't answer you now."

She waited a moment expectantly, then moved toward the door in a decided manner. Tom felt the mounting red of exasperation in his face.

"I don't understand you at all," he blurted out. "There's nothing in the past, as I look back, that should make you take that particular attitude or hold up a business deal—for nothing at all."

There was silence in the room for a moment, a silence that weighed upon them both, and then Emmie Weston said in a very small but very clear voice, "Then you'll have to let it go at that, Tom Hastings—that I am holding you up for nothing at all." Her voice had so curious a quality of feeling as she said the last words that Tom, if he had not been looking at her and knew her eyes were quite dry, might have thought she was holding back tears. There were none.

Exasperated, he knew this was not in the least the manner in which he could "manage" this woman. Why on earth was she continually putting him in the wrong? Was it still his mistake about Aunt Em? Women were incomprehensible! She had been acting all day as though she had forgotten about that, and had led him to believe she had.

He began again, with what seemed to him great forbearance, for Tom had none of the acquired patience of a married man. He was used to getting what he wanted, and found women quick to grant him favors. "Emmie Weston, don't you feel in the least inclined to do me a favor as an old friend? Doesn't the fact that we were once pretty good friends make you understand that I'll do my best for the old town and for you, and that it would be an opportunity for us to see each other much oftener, and you would have a say in the development of the whole scheme?"

The man was fatuous. He was unbearable. Emmie took a little time to master her indignation before she said quietly:

"I'm sorry, Tom, but it doesn't appeal."

And then Tom Hastings made a great mistake.

"Oh, come, Emmie Weston. There are a lot of reasons why you should listen to me. What earthly reason is there against it, leaving sentiment for East Penniwell out?"

There was another deadly pause, and then Emmie said coldly:

"But that's just where you make your mistake, Tom. In dealing with a woman, you should never leave sentiment entirely out, for though women are often quite practical, custom and training have made them deadly sentimental."

"Deadly's the word. There's no sentiment in business."

Emmie laughed. "Then until I clear my mind of sentiment, we cannot talk business."

Tom was not to be put off in this way. "Can't you tell me what is on your mind?" He asked it as gently as he could. "And let me try to remove any unjust prejudice you may have against the brick business?"

He smiled at her in rather a pleasant way. Tom's smile had always been a great asset. Emmie remembered that smile. She had remembered it for many years, while the man who smiled had calmly forgotten her. That was a thing not to be lightly forgiven. Besides, to accept his proposition was to give him what he wanted, and let his office in New York swallow him, while strangers came here to do the work. To refuse outright, was to have him go forever. There was only one way to bring and keep Tom Hastings in her life—and East Penniwell.

Emmie rose. "Sorry, but I can't, as I told you before, talk about it just now. My mind's not entirely made up."

"Then before you make it up," said Tom quickly, with the manner that had made him, ten years ago, the best salesman his company had ever had, "won't you come with me, while I point out to you just what ground I want, where the buildings would be, and where the excavations would be made?"

Emmie diplomatically hesitated.

"Won't you come now," Tom asked, edging her toward the door. "We have just about time to do it, before we start on the return trip."

A ride alone with Tom over the road they used to tramp together! It would be a wonderful treat for East Penniwell. But Emmie was not to have that ride alone. Lee Lansing came into the room, followed by Weston and Bob Landon, and none of them looked particularly happy.

"Mother just telephoned. I forgot I had a dinner dance on to-night," Lee said, coming directly toward Tom, but smiling at Emmie. "Won't we have to be starting soon?"

"You coming back with us to-night, Aunt Emmie?" asked Weston anxiously. Emmie felt the boy's thought. He didn't want

Lee to go back alone with Tom. Well, neither did Emmie.

"Yes," Emmie replied quickly, "after Mr. Landon and I ride out to look at the ground Mr. Hastings wants to buy. I want Mr. Landon's advice about the proposed brickyard."

It was a distinct surprise to Bob, but he took it quietly, smiling at Emmie, while Tom regarded them both, puzzled.

Lee softly touched Tom's arm and asked, "Can't we come along—Wes and I?"

"Surely," Tom smiled back.

Emmie didn't like that smile, so she turned and regarded Bob and Weston.

"Will it bore you, Weston?"

"Oh, not at all, Aunt Emmie. Still I think I'll stay here and smoke with Mr. Wells."

"Bunny's in the library," Bob told him, with a look of gratitude. Bob appreciated fellows that "got" Bunny at first glance.

"Would he rather come with us?" Emmie asked.

"Oh, I think not. Rather hard on Bunny getting in and out of motors."

Lee shivered. Tom looked down at her compassionately, but Bob's glance was cold. "Bunny only motors when he has to, unless he's driving. He drives like the wind," Landon concluded.

"I'll tell him where you all are," Weston announced and went toward the door, pausing to pat his aunt's arm as she looked at him anxiously. He thought he knew what was troubling her and said smiling, "Landon's got the right idea, Aunty. Your house will be a thing of beauty, when he gets through with it."

Emmie smiled. The dear boy! Reassuring her about her house, when here she was throwing Lee into the dangerous company of his rival, Tom Hastings. But Emmie's blood was up. Tom Hastings, charm he never so wisely, should dance to Emmie's music—not his own.

In the library Weston Kent offered the contents of his cigarette case to Bunny Wells, and then went to the window and miserably watched Lee Lansing climb into the front seat beside Tom Hastings.

He was not left long alone in his misery. Bunny, guessing easily the boy's state of mind, began asking questions about the house, and presently was learning all that Weston knew or had heard. From the house to Emmie was an easy transition, and while Tom rode with Emmie, Bunny came to know her far better than Tom, as he added all that Emmie's nephew said to what the village and Asher already had told him. He was finding Emmie Weston an exceedingly and increasingly interesting study.

It had been evident, even to jealous Weston, that Tom hesitated and looked toward Emmie when they took their places in the car. With Emmie close at hand, Tom could point out just what farms he wished to purchase.

Emmie, promptly climbing into the seat she had occupied on her way down, only this time with Bob Landon as a companion, quite upset Tom's plans.

Lee, beside Tom, seemed to him rather feverishly gay. Why couldn't she let him concentrate on his business and Emmietta? If he had to listen to this sort of stuff all the way up, he would not be able to arrange in his mind just what was wrong in his handling of Emmietta. Their interview had terminated badly for him. It puzzled Tom. He was used to getting his own way with men, and women too. Moreover, though this he did not admit to himself, Tom was not used to paying much attention to any woman over thirty. "Young" and "pretty" were the two qualifications Tom required of any woman to whom he gave his valuable time and attention.

At first glance, Emmie had been neither. He recognized now that she was "a darned good-looking woman," but she was not a girl, and Tom, forgetting how it placed him, was beginning to prefer girls. Their little youthful foibles he could allow for, and think amusing, charming sometimes, if they did not interfere with his own ideas. But a grown woman ought to have left foibles behind. Common sense was what Tom expected from all superfluous females, who were no longer girls.

Tom noticed that Bob Landon concentrated his attention on Emmietta, which surprised him, at first, as Landon looked like the kind of man who had an eye for a pretty girl. However, it would be to Landon's advantage, of course, to pay a good deal of attention to Emmie, since the job of making over the old Weston house would be a fat plum for any young man. Eli must have left Emmie fairly well off, too.

As they drew near the first farm on his list, Tom slowed the machine and turned to catch Emmie's eye. She was listening with such interest to Bob Landon's remarks on early Pennsylvania architecture that Tom found himself ignored. Involuntarily he wondered whether Emmie was attracted not only by the architect, but by the man. He saw Lee Lansing follow his glance and turn away. He would ask her later on if the same thought had occurred to her. Meanwhile, he stopped the car in front of the picturesque old Pickens house and invited Emmie to get out and let him show her where he proposed to put his office, and plan the branch line from the railway.

Emmie got out reluctantly, but Lee followed with alacrity, and so glued herself to Emmietta that Tom was forced to accept Bob Landon as his companion and make most of his remarks to him. Emmie seemed content, and made no move to alter the situation. Indeed, she evidently thought it was quite as it should be. Tom grew a little impatient.

"Unless Mr. Landon's your manager, Emmie," he finally protested, "it is of very little use for me to explain to him just what we intend to do here."

"You may treat Mr. Landon as my manager, Tom. Though Mr. Landon hasn't formally accepted the position, I am in hopes that he will decide to remain in East Penniwell." Emmie said this easily, and with an eye, calm but compelling, fixed on Bob.

Bob Landon, completely surprised, saw that Miss Weston expected him to back her up, and said:

"We haven't come to any definite agreement yet, Mr. Hastings, but that won't prevent me considering everything you say as it affects Miss Weston's interests."

Tom intimated that this was satisfactory, and thereafter directed all his remarks to Bob Landon, leaving Emmie and Lee to wander about and discuss in an entirely feminine manner whether or not the brickyard as proposed would "spoil the whole place."

Emmie, being quicker-witted in things sentimental, less self-absorbed than Tom, noted that Lee was dispirited and wondered why. Was the child bothering her head to that extent about Tom? Emmie, while deciding that Tom should pay a large price if he came as close toward town as the Pickens place, regarded Tom with a critical eye. After all, what, beyond his money, could make a girl crazy about Tom Hastings? Especially a girl who could contrast him with Bob Landon and even her dear, though boyish, nephew, Weston.

A glance at Tom put Emmie in her place. She was still vulnerable. Whatever it was about Tom that had made the youthful Emmietta's heart beat faster, he had it still. She could not remain aloof and cold, and in fact could not easily carry out the program she was determinedly mapping out for herself—and him. Nevertheless, she sharply called herself to order. The time for sentiment was past. Tom had no use for sentiment, therefore she, Emmietta, must cast it aside, but she would need more than her red fields, if she would catch and hold the attention of this man.

Emmie glanced at the girl beside her. She would need this girl, and down here too, if she was to carry out her campaign successfully. She turned to Lee eagerly. "Are you getting so tired of this, and us, that you won't come again? We could have the loveliest week-ends here, while the house is being remodeled, if only you would come down."

Bob and Tom Hastings had come back from the part of the farm where Tom had pointed out to Bob that the branch line would run. They stood waiting by the car. It seemed to Emmie that for a person who had only just met the girl, Mr. Landon seemed to hang on Lee's reply rather strangely. Lee Lansing looked at him and took a little time to reply. When she did, she gladdened Emmie's heart. "Miss Weston, I'd love to. It would be a way of getting away from things—a rest from rushing about."

"My dear," Emmie said contritely, "I forgot how many claims you have on your time. It is so quiet and simple here that it's bound to be dull for you."

"Oh, no," Lee protested, and again Emmie had a fleeting feeling that Lee's eyes strayed to Bob Landon's face, "it wouldn't be dull. I really love this quaint country. It has its own charm."

"I know it has for me," Emmie assented. "I shall always want to come back to East Penniwell, no matter how far I stray. That's why I want to have the house made livable. But it's different with you."

"That's why I shall come, whenever you ask me," Lee retorted, with a little touch of defiance in her tone, "just because it's—different."

Tom Hastings looked at the two women, thinking how this plan of theirs for coming down week-ends might fit in with his own plans.

"I speak for the job of chauffeur," he called jestingly, but wholly in earnest. "Come, Emmie, you must admit I did well on the trial trip. Surely you will give me the job."

Emmie looked at him, her eyes sparkling.

"That depends on two things, Tom. Weston wants to drive us too, you know. Then we would demand that you regard the week-ends as pleasure—not business—and you will be obliged to think and speak of something other than brickyards."

Tom laughed, though he felt provoked. Emmie was a sharp one. "Can't change my nature entirely, Emmie," he said cheerfully enough. "I'm an American business man and brickyards are nearly my whole life, so you must expect me to break out into song about them once in so often, unless," he smiled, "you'll make up your mind right now to let me have the land and then I'll be so busy organizing I won't have time to talk."

Emmie shook her head. "I am not to be hurried, and besides, really, Tom, you ought to take a good look at the country before you begin to cut it up into brickyards."

As he helped her into the machine, Tom looked at Bob Landon for sympathy. That young man's eyes were fixed on the landscape with an expression that startled Tom. "Why, the fellow's all against it," he thought. "I wonder why? By George, I'll *have to* come down. This man may have a scheme of his own for the land and is cutting me out with Emmie."

When they reached the house, Bunny and Weston were waiting for them. Weston was impatient to be off. "It's getting late," he announced warningly, and then as his aunt went inside for a last word with Lib, he cornered Lee. "Ride back with me, Lee," he begged. "Let old Tom and Auntie reminisce on the front seat."

Lee looked at him distantly as though, he thought, she had not seen him until that moment. "All right. I promised Tom, but who cares? We're coming down next week-end. That is, your aunt says we may if you will come too." She looked at him a little warily.

"Do you want me to?" he asked directly.

Lee noted Bob Landon's eyes fixed upon them. She smiled at Weston. "I want to come down," she said. "Doesn't that tell you anything?"

Weston looked at her rapturously. "We'll come down every week-end, if you say so."

Bob Landon moved impatiently and Bunny swung himself over toward him, his shoulder touching Bob's. Bob started. Tom watched the two carelessly. What was it these two didn't like about the week-end plan? Bob Landon didn't like it, he was sure; it had taken Bunny's presence to make him keep from betraying his objection to it.

Tom took a second glance at Bunny Wells. By George, he was a stunning looking fellow! It was a shame he was lame! He glanced at them again, and made up his mind that the week-end plan would go through. He must get Emmie committed to the brickyard program before that fellow Landon got round her with some artistic rubbish about brickyards spoiling the outlook. As for Wells, it might be as well that they were coming down often. The fellow was evidently "nuts" about Emmie Weston—or her money.

Tom was surprised at himself for having that thought, for, after all, Bunny Wells was obviously not that kind, and Emmie, herself, was excuse for any man's taking an interest in her, without her money. If it wasn't for Lee, he might cut in himself and upset their plans. He laughed softly. He had an idea he could do it, too. He could use the fact that he was an old friend, too. Oh, yes, Tom knew how he could work it—if he wanted to.

Lib Candy, on hearing of the proposed week-ends, did not keep her objections to herself. She listened to Miss Emmie,

explaining her plan, without a word but with a further upward curve to her right eyebrow, which was higher than the left already. Lib's question-mark eyebrow lent charm to her countenance and weight to her objections.

"Well, Miss Emmie, these here week-ends ain't nothing in my life. Asher and me and Morphy can look after the lot of you without calling in anybody else."

Emmie started to voice her thanks, for since her sojourn in the city she had realized that seldom, in this day of difficult domestic servants, was such willingness as Lib's to be found, but Lib anticipated her. She forgot her usual indifferent pose as she leaned toward her mistress.

"Miss Emmie, you are carrying it off something grand. East Penniwell won't know how to draw its breath when it sees you a bidding farewell to two grand men on your own steps and a riding off with Tom Hastings. Cloud-a-Witnesses, but you do credit to us females! I set such store by what you've done and are doing that I've kept Asher Turkle jumping so that he's all adrift. Thanks to your brave example, I'm holding my own. The day you get Tom Hastings where you want him, I'll let Asher Turkle up from under m'heel, but not before."

Emmietta Weston's horrified protest at this treatment was wholly ignored by Lib, and cut short by the entrance of Asher Turkle himself.

"Good Gravy, Miss Emmie!" he began, in his usual booming voice, but catching sight of Lib his tone sunk a little. "Hull kit and biling of 'em's on the piazza just r'aring to go and it looks to me as though Mr. Bunny's took a kinder hankerin' after Miss Lee. He looks at her kinda sorrowful, and she's always kinda turning back and gooping at him. His good looks and his—ahem—deformity's likely to raise hopes in more'n one female heart. You'd better tell Miss Lee to lay off him. She's got her full share of males adangling. Mr. Bob and me'll kinda shove the others out of his path down here."

Emmie, more disturbed than she cared to own, for in a less crude way she, too, thought Lee had her "full share," nodded to Lib and started to go, but Asher added cheerfully, as he followed her:

"Every soul in East Penniwell that's got nothing better to do is at their windows, excepting the Miss Minkses, and they are out in the back garden behind the hedge for a better view of your going."

Asher was mistaken, the Misses Mink were not behind the hedge. They were on the back piazza pretending to have tea, for they had discovered that from the back piazza they could sweep Emmie's front entrance from every side. They were *pretending* to have tea, because things were so exciting that they could not possibly risk missing anything by stopping to drink tea.

Miss Annie had already burned her mouth by a startled gulp when Susan called out: "Oh, Sister, they're leaving!"

Heads on one side, with the expression of sentimental parrots, the Misses Mink took in the spectacle, and although the fact that Emmie left behind her the two gentlemen, who had been causing the curiosity of the village to rise to boiling point for the last week, puzzled some, the Misses Mink were content. It was lovely that Emmietta and Tom were together, but it was only justice that some one should be left behind to make life less monotonous for the Misses Mink.

At the general store there was trouble, for Mr. Misener's youngest, pressed into service by his hurried mother, was annoyed by customers who couldn't order for looking out the window.

"Guy, Mom! Couldn't you kinda throw a fit or somepin' that could get 'em away. I wanta get to go and play ball this afternoon."

His mother paid no attention to him. Mrs. Luella Van Campen Letts had just shouted, "They're off, leaving them two men behind!"

With a sigh, most of the women left the window and the late afternoon rush at the general store began.

"Sister," said Miss Annie solemnly, "I'll just take a few of these cup cakes over to that interesting, delicate gentleman." Miss Annie was too truly refined to say lame. "I'll ask Lib Candy why Emmietta goes off this way, without seeing any of her old friends."

"It would be a Christian act," said Miss Susan. "Lib hasn't baked this week yet." She watched with interest as Miss Annie wrapped up the cakes in a fine old napkin. "I'd give a good deal," she added, "to know what those two men are

saying now."

As a matter of fact, she would have been little the wiser, for Bunny Wells had looked at Bob Landon and asked, "What are you going to do?"

And Bob had answered, "Nothing."

"I mean," said Bunny gently, braving Bob's hostile look, "how much are you going to tell—Miss Weston?"

"Nothing," Bob had repeated, and Bunny had sighed as he said: "I think you make a great mistake."

The longest way back is never the shortest way home, after thirty.

The ride back to New York from East Penniwell had been an odd one for Emmie. She laughed next morning, as she leaned back on her pillows, looked out on the opalescent sky of early day, and thought about the return. She stretched herself luxuriously. She had not yet gotten used to the feeling that the day, the city, the world was hers, untrammelled by orders or penny-wise rules. She would have breakfast in her room presently, and then dress to meet Lee Lansing. The girl seemed to have taken a sudden fancy for Emmie's society. They were going to a concert together and then to tea at The Plaza, where Weston was to meet them and take Lee home. Afterward Tom would call for Emmie at the hotel. They were going to dine at Tom's apartment—just Emmie, Tom, Weston and Lee at dinner, but afterwards others to dance and supper. It sounded rather formidable to Emmie. It would be embarrassing to meet all these people, and yet delightful, for Tom was very attentive, anxious to make everything easy and pleasant for her. Emmie smiled. It was what she wanted—and yet?

Emmie slipped on her dressing gown and slippers and went to the window. Only early rising country visitors and the occasional New Yorker know how beautiful their city looks at five *A.M.* A lovely thing, a dream city, still shrouded in the mist of early morning. An enchanted city, with a Maxfield Parrish or an Edmund Dulac background. Emmie looked, drank it in and then sighed for East Penniwell. After all, there is nothing like the peace of the country, and no country is more peaceful than that old-fashioned friendly country of William Penn's choice. Emmie sighed and stretched herself again. She would have a little taste of this life. She would see with her own eyes how Tom lived, and the circle he moved in, and then she would go back to East Penniwell and—her mouth hardened a little—she would take Tom back with her.

Emmie was playing a difficult game. She could not understand Tom's moves. Not once had he said anything to her about old times, except in the most casual way. She shrugged her shoulders impatiently, went back to bed, took up a book and then frowned and put it down. She must try to get another hour or so of sleep, or else she would not be fresh to-night and ready for everything they did, able to stand the contrast with Lee.

Emmie picked up a mirror. Yes, she was looking fairly well—a great deal better than when she had first come to town and to Calla. She didn't look her age by several years, and yet she was not young—like Lee. Then Emmie remembered how Bunny Wells had watched her, not Lee, and laughed aloud. Of course, she was not a girl like Lee, but she had a lot of years before her, and she meant to pack them full. After all, would she give up her own life for Lee's? No, Emmie would not.

Sinking down again into bed and the softness of the pillow, her hand under her cheek, Emmie wondered at human nature. She wanted to have some of the things other people had. Oh, yes, but she wanted to have them and be herself. There was no one's life that she would readily take over wholly, and discard her own. In fact, she preferred to be Emmie Weston. She dropped off to sleep before she had puzzled it out.

New York at night, from the roof of an apartment—the most splendid sight, one to make a stranger gasp! Beneath you the streets like dark caverns in which the jewels of lights sparkled, and electric signs flashed out; the sky above; the great towers of buildings, twenty or more stories high, whose many windowed, irregular facades reflected the beautiful moonlight. Underneath, the noise and rush of the city, the streets crowded darkly with motor cars, with taxicabs and pedestrians hurrying home or to the theatre. Wonderful New York at night; breadth of vision, mirror of life. Never approached by any other city, no matter how lovely that city might be.

Tom Hastings' apartment, designed to look like an old Spanish-American or Mexican house, stood well within the outer walls of the apartment house, so that all around it was a broad, tiled space terminating in a high brick wall, for safety's sake. Flowers and plants were placed at intervals, and at the rear of the house itself was a court, built like a California patio, with wicker chairs, *chaise longues*, and tables. It invited one to sit and look at the stars. In winter it was enclosed with glass, but now it stood open to the wind and sun, the breeze and moonlight.

It was a wonderful setting, and Tom, who had hitherto accepted it as just Lou's place (Lou being the owner and friend who had loaned it to him), when he saw Emmie and Lee Lansing framed against the luminous blue of the night, moving about in the rooms and in the courtyard, realized that Lou was more than just wealthy—he was clever. The house suited women amazingly, or was it that the women suited the house?

Lee looked unbelievably lovely. Her pale gold hair shone, her blue eyes looked deeper than usual, and the girl herself seemed quieter, less restless than Tom remembered her. She certainly was a stunning-looking creature.

Tom acknowledged to himself, however, that Emmie Weston was "no slouch." Who would have believed that the woman he had thought was old Aunt Em could blossom out like this? Tom was so anxious to find out just why he could have been such an ass as to think of her as her aunt, that he stared at Emmie entranced. It must have been the light, he decided.

Tom looked at Emmie again critically, and Emmie caught him at it, and blushed. Tom was annoyed at himself, but amused. Emmie Weston blushing like a girl because he stared at her! Emmie, provoked, turned swiftly from him to find that Lee Lansing, looking like some lovely golden goddess, in her dress, shoes and stockings of gold color, was staring out into the night with the expression of a little lost soul.

Emmie forgot Tom, who had turned to offer Weston a cigarette, and impulsively put an arm about the girl. The moment she had done this Emmie felt horribly self-conscious. Her country upbringing had made her friendly, a trifle expansive to those whom she considered her friends, and frequently in the city she had blushed to find herself forgetting that city acquaintances were not East Penniwell friends.

Lee did not draw back with that little chilly air that made Emmie wish she had cut off her arm instead of putting it around her; neither did she hold herself so stiffly that the arm fell away without having to be removed. On the contrary, she leaned toward Emmie. Emmie had had no female companions for years, except Lib, and Lib was about as yielding as a cast-iron fence. It gave her an odd, and by no means unpleasant, sensation to have the lovely Lee lean toward her, and drop her head gently, for a moment, against Emmie's shoulder.

"Oh, Miss Emmie," Lee said softly, "I am tired of everything. When do we go down to East Penniwell again?"

"This week-end," Emmie decided instantly, touched by the weariness in the young voice, and the dark shadows under the young eyes. "If we can persuade Weston and Tom."

"Lovely," Lee murmured softly, and then as the Japanese boy announced dinner, Emmie added impulsively, "Why can't you stay down there with me for a while—and get rested?"

Lee started and looked at her oddly. "Do you mean that?" she asked. "Now, while the architect is working on the house?"

"What does that matter?" Emmie urged. "Mr. Landon will only be doing one or two rooms at a time. The house is large. There is plenty of room. It would be a sort of picnic, if you think you'd like that?"

Lee looked at her rather strangely, Emmie thought. "I'd jump at the chance, Miss Emmie."

"Jump at what chance?" asked Weston, as they took their places at the table. "What is that aunt of mine promising you, Lee? Beware of her. She has a way of getting around you for her own purposes if you give her the least foothold."

"Now, Wes," began Emmie mildly, "what have I ever done to make you say a thing like that?"

"Got round me so completely," Weston told her with a boyish grin, "that instead of going ahead and doing a thing, I find myself thinking I'd better call you up or go down to your hotel to talk it over with you."

Emmie's face was beautiful to see. "Oh, Weston, how lovely! If it's true."

"You see," Weston indicated to Lee, "that's the way she gets round you, by utterly denying any intention of doing it."

Lee looked absently across the table, her eyes dreamy. "Well, I don't mind her getting round me, if it means that I am to go and stay at East Penniwell for a while."

"What!" exclaimed Weston and his voice had something like fear in it. To have lovely Lee suddenly spirited away made New York seem deserted and dreary. "Oh, I say, Aunt Emmie, you can't take Lee away like that!"

"But you are going to drive down there with us," Emmie said, persuasively. "You and Tom. And you can come down as often as you like and when you go to Princeton you can still come down for week-ends."

Tom looked at her appreciatively. Nice little woman she was, making things easy all around. He had been inclined to be angry at the time she was taking to decide about the brickyard, but a talk with his directors last night, about the land and its value, had enabled him to show them how well worth waiting for this East Penniwell property would be. He now had their cordial consent to making a smooth proposition to the woman who owned the land, and taking time to do it. The prospects at East Penniwell were far better than any other place in the eastern territory, both as to quantity, quality, and price. They had advised him to do his best to get the land and wished him good luck.

Tom's mouth tightened a little as he looked at Emmie. She might dodge all she liked, but in the end he would get what he wanted. He could play the waiting game as well, and better, than she could. He meant to have the East Penniwell land and Emmie Weston should not prevent it.

Being a diplomatic person, and never dreaming that he was doing precisely what Emmie wanted him to, Tom realized that if he was to get the land soon the easiest and best way was to go down to East Penniwell and make a fuss over Emmie, until he had her thinking she wanted to give him the land.

"Drive you down this week-end, with pleasure." He smiled, mentally making note that he must cancel several rather important social engagements to do it.

"I'm afraid," Emmie said, without looking at him, and Tom noted without the slightest humility in her tone no matter what her words indicated, "I'm afraid we will be taking you away from some very gay and amusing affairs. East Penniwell, as you know, can be dull."

"Not to me," Lee said unexpectedly. "I think I must have been looking for East Penniwell for a long time, looking but not believing there was such a place—such a beautiful place."

Weston Kent looked at her keenly and then looked away. His eyes first went to Tom Hastings and then to his Aunt Emmie. "Well, you have certainly got the East Penniwell germ, Lee."

Lee glanced at him quickly. "How could you know about it for so long, and never tell me, Wes?"

Wes grinned. "It wasn't the same thing in grandfather's time. Grandfather was, to say the least, a conservative soul. Wasn't he, Aunt Emmie?"

Tom looked up and smiled, and his smile had a hint of hardness behind it. "A hard man, your grandfather was," he said briefly. "And I should know. Wasn't he my guardian?"

"Have you remembered that at last?" Emmie asked, and gave him a clear, cold look that somehow set Tom Hastings' blood tingling.

"Eli gave me cause never to forget it," he replied.

Emmietta's face was enigmatic as she said, "So I understood."

It was in Tom Hastings' mind to ask her what she meant by that speech, but he forgot to answer it because Lee Lansing said suddenly, "Miss Emmie, who recommended Mr. Landon to you?"

"A Mrs. Montgomery, one of Calla Lilley's clients, and a delightful person. I shall never cease to be grateful to her. Don't you like him, Weston?"

"Oh, a fine fellow," Weston agreed with enthusiasm, as he made a mental note to tell his mother that Aunt Emmie knew *the* Mrs. Montgomery. It would make a difference. "A rattling good architect, if all I hear is true."

"Pity about his friend," Tom said carelessly. "What crippled him, I wonder? Is he an aftermath of the war?"

Lee's fork trembled in her hand, and she laid it down so deliberately that Weston noticed it.

"I don't know, Tom," Emmie said, "just how he was hurt, but I remember Mr. Landon said the foot was injured after the war. They were in the army together, and Mr. Wells was wounded badly but was just recovering, getting in shape to take

up his business again, when he was injured. It seemed to upset Mr. Landon so to talk of it that I never asked any questions."

"Whatever it was," Tom announced, "it was a shame—handicapped a fine, athletic fellow."

But Emmie looked up at Lee's sensitive face, and thoughtfully changed the subject. Presently Tom was asking if they would like to dance on the roof after dinner, when the others came. He had had the smooth tiles waxed for the occasion. Ito, the Japanese boy, would start and watch the victrola for a while, and the radio would be turned on whenever they were ready.

When the other guests arrived, and Tom went out to greet them, they followed. As she heard the laughter and voices of these strange people she must meet, Emmie shivered. She felt a sudden nostalgia overcome her. East Penniwell and the old house, she wanted them. She could close her eyes and see the lovely old sitting-room, with the lamplight mellowing the shadows in the far corner, and near the fireplace Bob Landon and Bunny Wells would be sitting, smoking, reading, with the firelight on their faces. What was it Bunny Wells thought of as he leaned forward and looked at the fire? What woman? Was it Lee?

Lee felt Weston's arm press hers, and draw her back. He whispered, "I say, Lee, don't overwork this East Penniwell charm business. I happen to know it's something else taking you down."

Lee stood quite still for a minute, then, "Oh, you do?" she said, in the lightest and easiest tones. "How do you account for the charm then, if it isn't East Penniwell itself?"

"It's a man down there," declared Weston, and the boy's voice was hard and savage. "I saw you with him, and I want you to answer me two questions."

Lee tried to withdraw her hand, but Weston still held it. "Lee, how long have you known Bob Landon, and what's between you?"

Lee gave him a white, still stare for a second, then gave a hard little laugh.

"You are absurd. You are dreaming, Weston. What do you know about it?"

But Weston still kept his hand on her arm, and she could not release herself.

"I have nothing to tell you, Weston," she said with dignity. "You are simply absurd."

"Oh, not so much so as you think," Weston told her coolly. "You see, I've seen you together."

A quarrel may be the shortest cut to an understanding, if one is young enough to enjoy quarreling. It all depends on what one quarrels about.

Emmie, wondering if it was that kind of quarrel, turned toward Lee and Weston. Instantly Lee grasped Weston's arm. "Dance with me. Don't let your aunt ask questions."

Weston swung her out on the tiled floor of the court. Ito had started the victrola at Weston's request.

"Soon come ladio; soon come orclestla," Ito protested in his gentle Japanese squeak.

Lee and Weston were the only couple dancing. Emmie watched them with pleased eyes. It looked unreal—like some beautiful picture—this court with the open sky above it, the tiled floor, the lanterns hanging from the outer pillars, and the long lighted windows leading to the rooms. Some newly arrived guests stood in the doorway, exclaiming with pleasure, as they watched Lee and Weston circle around the court. One by one other couples joined them, until only Tom and Emmie were left standing side by side.

Emmie gave a little excited laugh as Tom turned to her. "Oh, Tom, what a picture! It's the most beautiful thing I've seen."

Tom gave her a pleased smile. By Jove, Emmie looked well and one had none of that tiresome feeling of being expected to dance or she'd ask you herself, that so many women of her age gave you nowadays.

"Let's join them," said Tom. Then as he saw Emmie hesitated, "Dance, of course, don't you?"

Emmie laughed. "I haven't for seventeen years or so, Tom, but I've been taking lessons recently. Try me out first behind the palms and pillars." She indicated the outer edge of the court. "Then if I'm too bad, why, I can sit and watch and no harm done."

"Nonsense!"

They were out on the floor with the others.

A phrase of her father's, used at mealtimes, when his overcareful thought for the size of the household bills resulted in a rehashing of everything until the last leathery bit of meat had been used, came to Emmie's mind. "Devoid of all flavor," her father used to say, as he pushed his plate away, and devoid of all flavor to Emmie was the dance with Tom Hastings, which ought to have thrilled her, and did not. Tom's arm around her, her head—Emmie being shorter than Tom—practically against his shoulder, and yet, devoid of all flavor to Emmie, since Tom did not appear to remember.

"Who said you couldn't dance?" Tom asked her.

The music stopped. Weston's voice was heard demanding his favorite music from the polite Ito, who was trying to explain that this mechanical music was only temporary. "Orclestla coming soon!"

"Why, Emmie, you are a wonder!" cried Tom.

"Thank you, Tom. I haven't the slightest doubt my success is due to my partner, but it's great fun."

Tom looked at her curiously, as the six jazz performers comprising Ito's "orclestla" came in and took their places at the open window, shepherded by the grave Ito.

The music began again. Tom and Emmie threaded their way among the dancers. Emmie's cheeks were flushed, her eyes shone.

"I say, Emmie," Tom bent his handsome head with only the faintest tinge of gray in his hair, nearer hers, "I have an odd feeling—a faint recollection of dancing in the moonlight with you somewhere in East Penniwell."

"Faint recollection is good, Tom." Emmie laughed softly, then she added, "On the Hatton's piazza. Don't you remember, up on Highland road. Their house looked down on a lovely valley. They had Japanese lanterns on the piazza and we danced out of the living room—"

"Oh, yes," Tom laughed. "That must be it. I seemed to remember the way your face looked in the lantern light."

Emmie turned her head away. She could have struck him. "Seem to remember" her! Why, that was the night he had—

Tom led her toward the doorway, danced out with her, through the entrance hall, and caught up a Spanish shawl that lay across a chair. "This is yours, I remember," he said and hurried Emmie through the entrance to the tiled walk outside, between the house and the edge of the roof.

Tom put the shawl about her, and looked down at her still face.

"By all that's holy, Emmie, it's all coming back to me! I kissed you in that long ago moonlight. Don't deny it," and he broke into a great laugh, "I did."

Again Emmie could have struck him.

"I don't remember," she lied firmly.

Tom leaned toward her.

"I can make you remember." Emmie's hand came too quickly between his lips and her mouth.

"No," she said breathlessly and her eyes had a shy look. Like a girl's, Tom thought and drew back. "Sorry."

It was Emmie who laughed now. "Oh, that's quite all right, Tom. You see, I am a little old-fashioned about kissing, and besides—"

Tom waited. "Besides what?"

"It would have spoiled the memory."

"Then you do remember!" Tom laughed, all his good humor restored. "Great flirt you were those days, Emmie."

A strong and very primitive desire to push him over the low brick wall that protected the outer edge, against which he was leaning, his back to it, his smiling face turned to her, came over Emmietta Weston. She was startled by the strength of this primitive female desire to get finally rid of an annoying male. She shuddered and moved away, thinking for the first time how true it was that over each prison door should be placed, "Here, but for the Grace of God, go I."

Tom followed her. "Oh, come, Emmie, it's cooler here. Let's stay, unless you are daft about dancing."

Emmie shook her head. "I like it, but my liking is within bounds. I'm not eighteen any longer, and my head is heavier than my heels. But you, Tom?"

Tom looked at her and smiled. "As long as it's you, I don't mind telling you that while I can dance fairly well—"

"Oh, more than that, Tom; very well indeed."

"Still and all," Tom continued, "I do it just to prove I can, and not to drop out or lag behind the procession. Frankly, I don't care much what I do, so long as it's in pleasant company."

"Tom, what a fraud you are!"

"Fraud!" Tom looked at her amazed.

"Pretending you remember about East Penniwell, when you have forgotten all about it, pretending to be pleased with my society, when all you want is to get hold of my land and make a brickyard."

Tom roared with laughter. "But you're quite wrong, Emmie," he said when he had finished his laugh.

Emmie, who had laughed too, now leaned against the wall, looking at him with eyes that were bright, not with laughter as he thought, but with wrath. He could laugh at it, but she was in deadly earnest.

"No, on my word, that isn't true! Do you know that for the first time since I've been East, I've had a sort of home feeling in these rooms? You know it's really because I'm beginning to look on you as an old friend and to remember that I did

know you pretty well once in East Penniwell. Old friends are pretty handy things to have, after all Aren't they, Emmie?"

"It depends, Tom," Emmie said slowly. "It depends on what kind of friends you have—and are. Here's Lee."

Lee came toward them. Emmie watched her. Without feeling, would be the best way to describe the mood Emmie was in.

"Here you are, Tom Hastings! It isn't fair to carry Miss Emmie off this way, and did you or did you not ask me to dance with you?"

Weston had followed the girl out slowly, a cloud on his young face. He came toward his aunt without speaking, and leaned against the wall beside her. Lee avoided looking at him. She took a cigarette from the case Tom had taken out and offered to her, and allowed him to light it. She looked toward Weston. He had refused Tom's cigarette and was selecting one from his own case. Emmie had shaken her head.

"I can't, Tom. I haven't acquired the habit."

Lee slowly blew a smoke ring. "I suppose I might be better without it," she said, "but it's wonderfully soothing to fretted nerves."

"What's been fretting your nerves, Lee?" Tom asked.

She waved her cigarette toward the silent Weston. "I don't know what's the matter with Weston to-night, Miss Emmie. I brought him out to you because he's quite impossible."

Emmie looked with affection at the tall boy beside her. "I can't have that, Lee. Wes is a nice boy. You must have done or said something irritating."

Lee smiled at Tom. "Isn't it aggravating the way a woman will always side with a man? All right, Miss Emmie, my dear, I'll leave you with your agreeable nephew, and see how you like it."

She put out a hand to the older woman as she went by and touched Emmie's arm, lightly as though begging forgiveness.

Emmie's glance followed them as they went through the entrance into the court. She said nothing for a moment to the boy beside her, but watched the dancing figures swing past the lighted window. Then she turned to Weston, with a sigh.

"What's the matter, Wes?"

"Nothing."

The very tone of the boy's voice told her something was very wrong indeed. She sighed again and, turning, put an arm through his.

"Tell me, Weston. I'm safe."

"Oh, Aunt Emmie. It's Lee."

"Yes, Lee's lovely."

Weston groaned. "Not always. To-night she's a little devil. Won't give a fellow one comfortable minute. If only I knew whether she was serious about Tom."

"About Tom!" Emmie echoed, and incredibly to herself she realized that she felt depressed. Was it so apparent, or was it only Weston's jealous eye that saw it?

"Yes, you can see how he acts and I can't tell whether she's playing with him, or means business. Tom Hastings' worth a lot."

"Somehow, I didn't think Lee would care for that."

"All women care, Aunt Emmie, for money. Some of them more and some of them less, but they care whether they give it up or not."

Emmie smiled to herself in the dark at his world-weary tone.

"But Tom's a lot older," she ventured.

"Yes," Weston agreed, "old enough to have a wife and family of his own. Lord, how I hate oid bachelors! Always butting in on their juniors and crabbing the game. Make girls expect more than a fellow of their own age is rightfully entitled to offer them. They spend the best years of their life grubstaking themselves, and a young fellow has got all that in front of him yet." Weston smoked moodily. "Of course, if a girl wants money and an old man, why she'll take Tom."

Emmie felt a little resentful at the tone in which he damned her contemporary as old. Though reason told her this was only a first affair with Weston, that Lee was not to blame, yet Emmie's heart ached for the boy. "Puppy love" may be transient, often best that it should be so, but it sometimes hurts the puppy badly, and he is never quite the same gay little dog afterward.

Weston, regardless of anyone's feelings, continued his lament:

"But what's the game with Landon? Tell me that.

He isn't old, and he doesn't look worth much, so why is Lee setting her teeth in him?"

"Weston!" Emmie turned on the boy, completely surprised. "Surely you are mistaken. Why, Lee had never met him before she came down last week-end and she hasn't had time—"

"Time!" Weston groaned. "How much time does a girl like Lee need to play havoc with a man's life? Leave it to Lee. She can do murder and get away with it in less time than any other girl I know of."

"But, Weston, don't be ridiculous about Mr. Landon."

"I tell you she's got him bound and tied to her saddle," Weston argued. He was not jesting, Emmie could see that. His face looked tortured. Emmie turned away.

"I saw them look at each other," Weston continued. "They knew each other before they met at your house, Aunt Emmie. He may be through with her, but Lee isn't through with him. Why else do you think she made all that grandstand play for another invitation down to East Penniwell? It isn't love for the good old place. Don't you believe that! Lee has an axe to grind in East Penniwell or she wouldn't cast her shadow there again for anybody—not even you, Aunt Emmie. I know. I know Lee!"

Weston's voice had risen a little in his earnestness, and Emmie put her hand on his arm to silence him. A man had just come out of the elevator and was standing now in the open door of the entrance. They could see him distinctly. It was Bob Landon.

"Speak of the devil," Emmie said softly.

Weston's eyes identified Landon and he turned to his aunt. "Speaking of the devil, what brings him here? You?"

Emmie shook her head. "I don't know. I didn't send for him," she added lightly, "but I am surely very glad to see him."

Even as she said it, Emmie had a swift feeling that she had rather it had been Bunny Wells. Odd, she thought, as Bob Landon came out of the doorway and turned toward them, how strong an impression Bunny Wells' personality made on one, in so short a time. He was, in a way, far more vital, and much handsomer than the man coming.

Bob Landon, she noted, was dressed as the other men. Then he had not come there unexpectedly. He had known. The light fell upon Emmie's face with its curious, wide open eyes.

Bob Landon saw her and came forward.

"Miss Weston!"

"Mr. Landon, I was frightened at first when I saw you. I thought something might be wrong with East Penniwell—or Mr. Wells?"

Bob shook his head.

"Everything going splendidly," he said, "and Bunny in the best of spirits. He simply loves East Penniwell, Miss Emmie. I'll never be able to pry him loose."

"I hope not," Emmie murmured, conscious of Weston's critical gaze and hoping Bob Landon did not see it.

"I came up to town to talk to a dealer in wrought iron, and met Mr. Hastings at the club. He asked me to come up." Bob Landon glanced about him. "Lovely, isn't it? I'm glad I came."

"Yes," said Emmie, as Weston after a silent greeting held out his cigarette case. "It's lovely and modern and queer and unhomelike—"

Bob Landon laughed, and finished her sentence for her, "And not in the least like East Penniwell."

"No, it's not."

"Odd about East Penniwell, isn't it, Miss Emmie? Simple old place, but it pulls you back."

Emmie nodded. "I hope it will pull you very hard, Mr. Landon. I am in earnest about your acting as my manager."

Bob looked at her, hesitated, and then said to Weston, "Wonderful aunt you have, Weston. She doesn't let much grass grow under her feet."

Weston looked at his aunt protectingly. "I guess so much grew for a lot of years that Aunt Emmie feels no more is needed."

"Right," said Emmie and patted Weston's arm. A wilder strain of music came from the windows. "Wes, dear boy, I want to talk business with Mr. Landon. Don't let us keep you out here—and bore you."

"All right," Weston threw away his cigarette and turned toward the court, "only, when are you going to dance with me?"

"Next dance," Emmie said, "provided you haven't forgotten all about it, dancing with some pretty girl."

"No fear," Weston glanced sidewise at Bob Landon, "there's only one girl here to-night, and she's favoring Tom Hastings with most of her dances. Best get through with business early, Landon, if you want to dance with her."

"I'm not dancing," Bob called to him, as Weston went toward the court.

Landon turned to Miss Emmie. "You don't mean that?" she said.

Bob nodded. "Yes, I do. I hate the sound of the stuff," he said, as the music began again. "Bunny used to dance like a breeze, and loved it," he added, as though to explain himself to Emmie.

"Is nothing to be done for him?" she asked. "I—"

"Nothing," Bob said shortly. "It's kind of you to offer, but if there had been anything I would have had it done, if I had to work day and night paving hell to get the money."

Miss Emmie believed him.

"It's merely a matter of Bunny's growing stronger now. Of course he'll always be lame, but if he grows stronger he will be able to discard one crutch."

Miss Emmie sighed.

Bob leaned against the wall and looked at her. "At that, Bunny doesn't feel the way I do about it."

"No, I suppose not."

"He accepts it, since there's no getting round it," Bob said, "but I—I resent it. It was all so unnecessary." He broke off abruptly, for Tom and Lee came through the doorway and toward Miss Emmie.

"It's your dance, Weston," Lee called. "Pity I have to come and collect you," she added gaily, and went up to the dark figure beside Miss Emmie, with its back to the light.

At the touch of her hand, Bob turned. It seemed to Emmie it was ages before Lee spoke. They stood looking at each other, and Emmie felt Lee was trembling.

Then Lee said, "What are *you* doing here—Mr. Landon?"

Emmie felt that Lee had just saved herself from saying "Bob."

Bob Landon moved away, so that Lee's hand fell from his coat-sleeve.

To Emmie's amazement, Bob was looking at the girl with positive dislike.

"Business," he said briefly. "The only thing that could make me leave East Penniwell—and Bunny Wells."

Emmie, although Tom was asking her to dance again, could see Lee shiver, and then rally.

"It has a great fascination, hasn't it," Lee said, with unnecessary clearness. "I'm coming down—to stay."

Involuntarily Bob moved. Emmie could see his face in the moonlight. It was white with fear.

A lone man is the legitimate prey of the female of his species.

Bunny Wells sat in the sunshine, a drawing pad on his lap, puzzling over a scheme for decorating the library, and between-whiles he looked out on East Penniwell.

All East Penniwell that passed by the house looked at him and for the most part returned his smile. They could hardly help themselves, Bunny turned such a genial face toward them.

Miss Annie Mink was quite unsettled by the smile he gave her. She hurried home to Sister and confided to her that her first impulse had been "to go right up the steps and sit down and cheer him up a bit."

The only thing that held her back, as she assured Sister, was that it was Lib Candy's washing day and Lib was out in the kitchen and it seemed "a little bold," Miss Annie thought, "to go right into a room where a strange man was alone." Sister agreed with her that it was best not.

"Tongues will wag, Sister, and you are an unmarried girl."

Miss Annie Mink sighed. "An old maid, some people would say," she replied, with a toss of her head.

"Not thoughtful people, Sister Annie," Sister hastened to assure her. "Only thoughtless people would speak of you so. Why, Sister Annie, you are no older than I am! No, I think you did quite right. Later this afternoon, when Lib Candy has finished her ironing, we might both run in for a few minutes. I could engage Lib, while you spoke to the gentleman."

Annie sighed. "There isn't a girl, nowadays, who would hesitate for a moment. I saw Betty Langly all alone in Bill Blossom's shop."

"Sister Annie!"

"Yes, not a soul in that plumber's shop for more than three-quarters of an hour—except Betty and Bill."

"Are you sure, Sister Annie?"

"I made it my business to be sure, Sister. I looked in when I went into the post office and then coming out of the post office I crossed the street and looked in again, and after I had finished at the store passed that way again, and she was still with him. I called that old Mrs. Holmes' attention to it. You know what a gossip she is, snaps you up on everything. I just hinted, mildly, that if Betty's mother knew where Betty spent her time! Well, she wormed it out of me and then crossed the road herself and looked in. They were still at it. Still there."

"Mercy! What did old Mrs. Holmes do?"

Miss Annie looked embarrassed. "Well, Sister, it's terrible how little tact a real busybody has. She went right along and told the next person she met. I'm sure, for I saw her speaking to Mrs. Seth Lamby, and Mrs. Lamby went right up and peeked in the window too. Sister, it's dreadful how some people set scandal in motion."

"It is indeed, Sister Annie. One can't be too careful."

Lib Candy and Asher Turkle met on the triangular patch of bleaching green at the kitchen side of the house. Lib, carrying a basket of clothes ready to be hung up, surveyed Asher with a cool eye as he came striding toward her, hands in pocket.

Lib had on one of her new work aprons and a wonderful boudoir cap, bought in New York by Miss Emmie for its proper use. It was now diverted, as Emmie had known it would be, to the use and custom of East Penniwell. In East Penniwell, your respectable and most "fussy" matrons and maids put on a boudoir cap in the morning, and felt fully equipped to do both housekeeping and shopping, secure that it was all that could be asked in the way of style and comfort. Some had even gone so far as to wear them out in the family Ford, but Lib frowned on this. Lib wore her cap with just pride. There was none like it in East Penniwell. It was of blonde net, with pink ribbons, and a generous frill of lace. Lib was secure in feeling that it made her look distinguished. It certainly took Asher's eye. He stopped and stared.

"My Great Jehosophat! Lib, there's no end to your Style. Sence you came back from New York, East Penniwell's never

knowed what get-up you'd appear in, but that one's a hummer!"

"Nobody's asking you your opinion, Asher Turkle." But Lib was pleased.

"No," returned Asher, "I'm a vulteneering it, and a hummer she is, Lib. Why, here, I'll put up the clothes rope!"

It was unheard of, but Lib, though astonished, submitted with a grim face. "Men, men," she thought to herself, "ain't it awful how a bit of ribbon will fetch them!"

"Put it up strong, Asher," was all she said, but this was to Asher so encouraging that he went to work with a lumbering alacrity that was as astonishing to the Misses Mink as it was to Lib.

"Asher Turkle's putting up Lib Candy's clothes line, Sister," Miss Annie called. "It looks like intentions on his part!"

"He's kept off and on-ing with poor Lib for long enough," Sister remarked, "and Lib's felt it."

"Any woman would," declared Miss Annie stoutly. "Lib's put on a good deal of style since she came back from New York." She glanced at Sister.

Sister nodded.

"Do you think it possible," Miss Annie asked, her cheeks reddening with excitement, "that Miss Emmie has settled something on Lib Candy, and Asher knows it?"

"It might be," Sister replied. "Poor Lib, after years of waiting for that philandering, great creature to settle down and stop smirking at every girl and woman that passes, to be made the object of a mercenary marriage!"

"It might be true, Sister. It might well be from his actions," agreed Miss Annie. "We must surely call on Lib this afternoon."

Bunny Wells watched Lib and Asher, but not having known them for years he did not perceive all that lay behind the simple putting up of a woman's clothes rope. He thought Asher an amusing old beggar, and hoped he would come and talk to him.

His wish was presently gratified, for having fastened the clothes rope, it was of course beneath Asher's dignity to hang up clothes. That was too distinctly woman's work for any able-bodied man. He presently slouched into the living room, and asked Bunny if there was anything he wanted "fetched."

"I'm going down this afternoon for Mr. Landon, and so be if there's anything you have set your mind on, let me hear it."

Bunny shook his head. "Nothing, Asher, except Mr. Landon. You bring him back with the mail. That's all I ask."

"Yeah," Asher said, trying to twitch a straw out of the hearth broom, which having been made at an "art" shop and presented to Emmie for Christmas by Miss Annie Mink, would not, of course, twitch out as Asher expected. "Yeah, being a reasonable male creature, naturally you don't ask for much. If you were a woman now and I had put that simple question, By Peanuts! I'd had a list of half a dozen things by now."

"Lib know you are going?" Bunny asked him.

"Sure not," Asher grinned. "I don't tell her until just before I go. I know what's what." His face became overcast with gloom. "That woman, Mr. Wells, you ain't no idea how she's carrying on."

"Carrying on? Lib! Asher are you quite crazy. Lib's the quietest and most wonderful person I ever knew, when it comes to running a house."

"Yeah," Asher said again, "about the house, but how about a man? She's got me near wore out and pretty near run off my feet."

"What's the trouble?"

"New York's the trouble," Asher said determinedly. "New York notions, she's got. She used to be a clean enough woman. Now she's onberable. Why, she won't," he glanced down at his stained blue overalls, "she won't even hear of me

meeting Mr. Landon in these here! I says to her, 'What's the use of fussing, I'll only get some more ile or somepin' on my pants if I slips these here off, and besides it takes time, and everybody knows me and me pants, so what's the use?' But would she listen to me? She says, 'Think a little about Miss Emmie, and don't shame her and me by drawing up at the station thataway'." Asher shook his head and felt his cheeks. "Even made me shave, she did."

"Well, you look a lot better, Asher," Bunny was forced to admit.

"Mebbe," said Asher, darkly. "Mebbe, but what's looks, compared with a man feeling his soul is his own, and he can stick his hand in his overall pocket and survey the world with freedom. I tell you looks ain't anything compared to that."

He sighed, succeeding in getting a straw from the broom and began cleaning his pipe. "Females," he continued, as he bent over his task, "is beyond everything curious. They glorify in a man's strength and will, and then tries to pull 'em down by their tricks." He looked at Bunny again, darkly.

"You are an afflicted person," he said, with that dreadful country directness that Bunny had learned to expect, and not to wince at. "It ain't to be expected that you should be pursued and follered as a man of my strength and abilities, but even so you have your dangers. You ain't safe, Mr. Wells, though you may think ye are. Why," he added earnestly, "crippled though ye be, there's women in this town that has an eye on you."

Bunny was genuinely astonished. "Heavens, Asher, you are touched!"

"Sound and in my usual mind," declared Asher. "And though there's surely more strong and kinda athaletic men round 'bout, still you have not escaped the female eye. Why even Miss Emmie, with all she's got on her hands, kinda notices you. I am warning you because you being tied down, as you might say, is a more easy mark for them desprit females than what I or Mr. Landon might be."

"I don't see that," Bunny began, prepared to take a back seat in such a contest, with two such rivals.

But Asher would not listen to him. "Mark my words. We, on the approach of danger, can git up and git. But you are kinda held, you might say." He breathed uneasily, for even his self-absorbed mind realized that he must not continually allude to Bunny's lameness. He leaned toward Bunny, and whispered so loudly that Bunny glanced nervously at the door of the library, "Miss Annie Mink'll be over this afternoon."

"Well?" asked Bunny, and added, "I don't know the lady."

"You will, you will. She's bent on *that*. She'n Sister's been eyeing this house far too long for them not to be ready with their plan. I have kept 'em off hitherto," he said grandly. "Me and Mr. Landon has kept them off with a kinda pleasant 'Good day and fare-you-well' combined, and kinda mumbling about how busy we was. But Mr. Bob ain't here to protect you, and I'm a going to fetch him, and that'll leave you alone for some time. If I could get out of going for Mr. Bob," he announced so earnestly that Bunny believed him, "you bet I would, but somebody's gotta fetch him, and I'm the only male creature able to handle the car."

He suddenly rose and leaned over Bunny eagerly. "Heard any word yet, that you can pass on to me, about Miss Emmie's buying a new car?"

Bunny shook his head.

"Well, it's about time she did," Asher told him, "but a woman will always go on spending on clothes and other useless things and keep a man that's fit to drive a Buick, or something, running an old Ford. I've been taking lessons too, for I aim to drive well, one of these days."

Bunny intimated that he didn't doubt it.

"I spend," said Asher, "every spare moment I kin call my own, and some that ain't so-called, at the garage kinda mastering the science of driving something else beside this here old coffee-grinder I'm going to fetch Mr. Bob in."

"Good idea," Bunny agreed carelessly.

"I ain't sure that it is. It gets me a kinda reputation for loose living and fastness, as it were, and at that, women is so fickle, Miss Emmie might up and git her another Poor Man's Packard."

There seemed nothing to say, so Bunny simply looked his sympathy, and then out of the window.

"Lib's coming," he warned Asher.

Asher rose wearily. "And she'll be for routing me out if I don't get of my own accord, but you mark my word, don't give way to anything this afternoon. You will be tempted all right, as much as Miss Annie kin temp'."

"What's the matter with Miss Annie?" Bunny asked, smiling. "Nice woman and nice looking."

"She looks above me," Asher informed Bunny, simply and without rancor. "But that ain't why I'm kinda set against her. No, I'm a fair man. I don't try to slam innocent females, when they are innocent, but these here shilly-shally airs sure annoy me. Here's Miss Annie trots over here with the intention of kinda winning you—fascinating you any way. She'll come over and set with you while her sister kinda tackles Lib, and so keeps her engaged and silences such speech as people might git off. So far so good, but will she carry it through? No," he roared, pounding his fist on the delicate looking tip-table near Bunny. "She'll have you there, cornered like, all trembling and waiting the shot that'll leave you helpless and in her power and will she fire it? No! She'll get excited trying to get some fact out of you about your past life, or Mr. Bob's, or what Miss Emmie's doing up in New York, or what you know about Tom Hastings and Miss Emmie, and the precious moment'll go by. You'll kinda recover yourself and she won't get her hook in so deep but what you can kinda wiggle off, and hand it back to her, withouten her being able to land ye. And mark my words, once the moment is gone, it can only, maybe once in a lifetime, be recovered. And then," he warned, drawing himself up, "only be a man. A woman's last chanct is lost, when she misses that there moment."

"Is that so?" demanded Lib in the doorway. "And at that it may be a God's blessing to the woman, Asher, that there furnace ain't cleared out, nor is the fireplace in the front room looking anywhere near like what Miss Emmie and me expects it to be. Wood is wanted for this here fireplace, for though a mild day, Mr. Bunny might kinda feel the edge of the air with the window open like he has it."

Asher stumped out, closing and opening his mouth spasmodically like a fish, as he thought of a snappy retort too late to make it.

"If it doesn't bother you any Lib—Miss Candy, I should say—" began Bunny.

"No you shouldn't. Lib I am, and pleased to be so to you. In this here community, what With the Quakers and all, we ain't so much at Mistering and Missusing, and especially not Missing as some. Lib's good enough for me."

"Thank you. Well then, Lib, I'd like to keep the window open."

"Sure, do anything you have a mind to," and Lib actually smiled at him. "Only don't keep that big lunkhead, Asher, in here achawing the rag when he oughta be working."

"Aren't you a little hard on Asher?"

"Me? Me hard on Asher! No, I don't think so, Mr. Wells. I don't reely, and if you knew all the facts you'd wonder I stayed my hand and tongue as much as I do."

Lib, the grotesquely gay boudoir cap bringing out every line on her strongly marked face, stopped and looked bitterly past Bunny, and out of the window for a moment.

"He was warning me against the plots and plans that he thinks are being made against me by the ladies in the lovely old brick house," Bunny said, embarrassed at the situation he found himself in.

Poor Bunny was so often used as a confidant and safety valve, and by so many people, that he knew the signs. He began to be afraid that the strong and efficient Lib might feel herself called upon to tell him more than he wanted to hear.

But Lib did not so easily give way. She turned a wary eye on him. "At that Asher ain't so far out. Nothing'll stop 'em, Mr. Wells. It ain't any use to try, but you can count and call on me for help if needed."

"Thank you, Lib," and Bunny smiled. "It seems ridiculous, doesn't it? If it is true, why I think I can defend myself."

"Women," said Lib, darkly, "that ain't got much else to do but think about other people, is pretty sly. Smart as men are,

Mr. Wells, women can be pretty dangerous."

They could, Bunny thought bitterly to himself, as Lib, catching sight of Asher about to empty the ashes in a direct line with her clean clothes, called shrilly and went out of the room hurriedly.

Bunny looked down at his crippled foot and thought that he owed that to a woman, but because it was not in Bunny's nature to dwell long on what couldn't be helped, he was once more his equable and kindly self when Asher drove away to the station. Asher made so many mysterious nods and gestures toward the window, where Bunny had established himself, that the bewildered Bunny could only guess at their meaning, until he noted the approach of Miss Annie and her sister.

All the street saw them going to the Weston house, and they were conscious that all the street did, but bore themselves with a beautiful meekness that was a treat to see. They also had, for the day, robed themselves in their second-best calling costumes. The very best were always kept for "an occasion," and while to visit "an interesting invalid," as Miss Annie always classified Bunny, was an event, it was not quite "an occasion."

Sister, after the first few words, fluttered out to the kitchen and Lib, babbling softly about a recipe for some lemon cookies that she wished to borrow.

Miss Annie sank gracefully into the chair near Bunny and congratulated him on his window.

"Knowing dear Emmie as long as I have," said Miss Annie with a little titter, "positively since childhood's hours, you might say, possibly longer than you have—" Miss Annie's ears twitched under the load of curled hair she had dropped over them, and she waited to see if Bunny would take the hint and tell her how long he had known Miss Emmie. The village wanted to know.

"Possibly," said the wary Bunny.

"Knowing dear Emmie as I do," Miss Annie began again, not disconcerted at all, "I have wondered if she was coming back here soon?"

"Soon, I believe."

"Oh, I feared, when your friend Mr. Landon went up to meet her—"

"Not to meet her," Bunny corrected patiently, "to meet a hardware dealer."

"Oh! Then dear Emmie *is* going to start remodelling the house?"

"Very soon." Bunny could give her that much.

"Oh! In one way that makes me a little sad, because when the house is finished you will go, and that nice Mr. Landon will go, of course."

"I'm not so sure." Bunny was thinking of a scheme of his own.

Miss Annie's face shone. Evidently she would make a rich haul this time. In her pursuit of the facts that would enable her to catalogue the household at Weston's she forgot all else. "But Mr. Bob Landon, doubtless, wants to go home to his family," she intimated with sly carelessness.

The wary Bunny looked at her. "I don't think so. I am Bob's family."

Miss Annie grew a little excited. This poor creature was so easy. "And Mr. Tom? Poor Tom Hastings. Do these—ahem—alterations mean—" she tittered a little nervously. Bunny's steady glance was embarrassing. "Mean we shall soon see him back here?" It was a rather lame finish.

Bunny still looked at her as though he didn't comprehend, and then suddenly his face lighted up. "Oh, the alterations won't keep him away. He's coming this week-end, I think."

Miss Annie had not received all she wanted, but still this was something everybody didn't know. Tom Hastings was coming back.

"We're all so excited," she said, leaning forward. "You know we all saw the beginning of the romance, years ago, when they were but children—but children, and now! Oh, Mr. Wells, you can't know how the town looks forward to seeing Miss Emmie's romance completed."

"They must," Bunny gravely agreed, struggling with the information Miss Annie had just given him. Miss Emmie and Tom Hastings involved in a romance! Great Scott!

"And we all feel so sure—"

"Oh, I wouldn't be too sure," Bunny said, unable to keep from upsetting the complacency of this female question mark.

"You don't mean—" she fluttered.

Then Bunny, with malice, took a hand in the game. "With a woman you can never tell. Once let them feel their power—"

"Do you mean?" Miss Annie asked excitedly, "Oh, she couldn't turn him away now! After waiting all these years."

"I don't mean anything," Bunny asserted, aghast at this revelation. Poor Miss Emmie's pitiful romance! That lovely creature waiting for an old love to offer her his warmed-over affections, while all the village looked on approvingly. What a fate for Emmie Weston! Tom Hastings! Why, she was meat for his masters! And at that—and here Bunny's eyes darkened—was Tom Hastings playing up as he should? Well, whether he was or not, Bunny determined to give the town something to talk about, and if Tom wasn't playing up as he should, it would at least keep the town guessing a little.

"Miss Annie," he began leaning toward her, "I don't really know anything."

"Of course not."

"But," said Bunny firmly. He had it now—that was what was the matter with Miss Emmie, she was fighting for her pride here in this lovely old nest of gossips. "But you can't count too much on a woman, who, after years of waiting, suddenly has not only money but men in her power."

"Men!" gasped Miss Annie. "Oh, Mr. Bunny! Emmie has blossomed out since her father's death, but *men!*"

"More than one man has noted that blossoming out," announced Bunny cryptically. Then abruptly he felt ashamed of himself, for the effect was marked upon his caller. Forgotten were all her matrimonial designs upon this man. Her pitcher of gossip was full—overflowing. She wished to rush out to Sister and give her, and the other interested parties, a drink from the well of knowledge. She and she alone could tell them—for had she not seen Mr. Wells' expression when she mentioned Tom Hastings—that Mr. Landon was down here "after" Miss Emmie? Had she not received a decided hint to that effect from Mr. Landon's best friend? What else had he meant by "more than one man?"

But not yet would Bunny let her go.

"By the way, Miss Annie, you might help me. Do you know where I can pick up old furniture, cheaply, about here?"

Miss Annie came back from the rearranging of the gossip she had gathered.

"There's a sale out at Bumperville, Saturday. There might be something there."

"Good!" said Bunny. "I'll ask Asher to drive me out. Would you like to go too?" he asked politely.

Miss Annie looked at him in such a bewildered manner that again he felt ashamed of himself, although the impulse had been a friendly one.

"I—I must ask Sister," poor Miss Annie stammered, trying not to look frightened. It was the first time in fifteen years that a man had asked her to go—anywhere!



Clothes may break, as well as make a man.

Waiting at the East Penniwell station, Asher put his hand up restively to his neck, and finally brought away his "made" bow tie. "The danged thing don't set well," he explained to the taxi-driver nearest him on the station platform. "It kinda presses on to me gold-plated collar button and so on to me throat. Being a large and athaletic man, I need room for me breathing."

"So?" said Banbury True, regarding with interest the projecting brassy-looking object that stood out about half an inch from Asher's neck.

Banbury was a man of few words, but his "so" was so pregnant with meaning that Asher was a little perturbed.

"Say what's on your mind, Banbury," he urged testily. "If so be as you have anything on it."

The emphasis being on the wrong word, in Banbury's opinion, he stared hard at Asher, then at the gold-plated collar button, and cleared his throat. Asher grew palpably nervous.

"Say on, Banbury. I won't hurt ye man, whether it be a thing welcome to me or something I'd rather not know. I'm a big man, but I won't use that there gigantic strength to crush a feeble worm like you."

The feeble worm regarded him. "Ye think too much about yourself, Asher, and always did. It's been a kinda curse of your life, too. If ye'd occasionally given some of your thoughts to other people, you'd gotten on faster."

"What say?" demanded the disturbed Asher.

Banbury True lit his evil smelling "Penniwell Puff," as a certain coarse creation of tobacco not unlike an old "Pittsburg stogie" was called, and took his eyes from Asher. "If ye wasn't so full of your own strength and glory, you'd see that you don't do Miss Emmie any credit."

"What!" roared Asher. "Here you, Banbury, what you saying?"

"God's truth." Banbury turned his fearless eye on the towering Asher. "If it wasn't for her downright kindness to you, on account of your working so many years with the old man, Miss Emmie could easy get a younger and a better looking feller to drive her car. A reg'lar driver, with a uniform, a good cap, his collar and tie on, and not looking like a country mule."

Asher made a step forward but the valiant Banbury did not retreat. "Come on and hit me. I'm only two sizes smaller, and you asked for it. Miss Emmie'll have to bail you out of the county jail and Mr. Landon'll ride home in my car."

"Sweet Serpents!" Asher drew back the enormous hands that had been reaching out for Banbury and put one of them in his pocket, to grope for the "made" bow tie. "I ain't even meaning to touch you, Banbury, knowing that a blow from me would probably injure you for life. I'm going to put on this tie, because I hear the train acoming." He paused, as he struggled with it, to look at Banbury directly. "But that ain't the end of it for you, Banbury."

"Nope," said Banbury cheerfully, "I don't reckon so, but if it is, don't you worry. I'm making you a present of it."

Asher still kept his eye on him and shook his head. "Seems to me, Banbury True, for a little feller, you are awful venturesome."

"That's the way with us small fellers," Banbury called back. "We ain't got the monopoly, of course, for if Napoleon was five feet two and a half, why Washington was a big feller. But at that we little fellers manage to get away with quite a passel of the world's gole medals, quite a little passel."

"But in the eyes of the females," Asher began.

"Even there," said Banbury, "we ain't so small as some. When it comes down to that, I'm married on me third, and you ain't even begun yet."

"What's that got to do with it?" yelled Asher, still struggling with his bow tie.

"I dunno," Banbury called back. "Ask Lib Candy."

The train was coming in so that the others waiting on the platform could not hear the mouth-filling oath. Asher, as he swore, jerked his bow tie into its place. He tore down the platform in the wake of the wiry little Banbury, who was looking for customers.

Under cover of the noise of arrival, Banbury turned fearlessly toward Asher. Asher, his curiosity greater than his rage, leaned to him.

"Asher, if ye know, which of them two men, the lame one or the other, is Miss Emmie playing off agin' Tom?"

Asher straightened up, triumph in his eye.

"You that's been married on three, and knows so much about women, otter sense it withouten calling on a bacheller to solve the problem for ye."

But he went on down the platform considerably disturbed. He would have to alter his viewpoint, if this hint of Banbury's was worth anything.

"Onknowable!" he muttered. "Onknowable the whole lot of 'em! Even Miss Emmie!"

Bob Landon stepped off the train alone, nodded briefly to Asher, handed him, to Asher's surprise, a bag to carry, and followed Asher to the waiting machine with a preoccupied air. Asher, inwardly regretting the returned bow tie, since there had been no females aboard, waited for a word, and then as it was not forthcoming supplied it himself.

"Well, Mr. Bob Landon, I'm glad to have you back to help."

Bob looked up at him puzzled. "Help?"

"Yeah," Asher answered, "to help keep Mr. Wells outta the clutches of designing females."

"Designing females! Bunny Wells!" Bob turned an alert and smiling face toward Asher. "Come off, Asher! Surely Lib—"

"Leaving Lib Candy outen this," said Asher dryly, "still there's enough to sicken any man."

"Oh, surely not Morphinia!"

"I'm talking about females," Asher roared indignantly, as he extracted his machine from the traffic. It was a busy night at the East Penniwell. There were eight cars at the station. "Morphinia ain't in this class. Besides while I am for freedom and liberty to all, I ain't for mix-ups. Let black stay black and white ditto and things will git evened up, somehow. How, I don't know, so don't ask me to explain the will o' God. It can't be explained and is best left lay."

"Well, you'd better explain, Asher, very carefully, what you're talking about. I am still a pilgrim and a stranger here."

"Miss Annie Mink's after him," Asher announced in his beautifully direct way. "Using all her tactics and female wiles, she is, too!"

Bob did not look alarmed. "Well, no harm in that. It will only amuse Mr. Wells."

"Mr. Wells ain't any fool," Asher agreed moodily, "skinning" past the grocer's wagon and just escaping Sam Carter's truck. "He'll scent the danger, I hope, soon enough to save himself. I gave him a warning before I lef, but him being so kinda held down, as you might say, leaves him a mite helpless at times. That's why I am glad you're back. I can't take all the responsibility alone. For if Miss Annie once gets down to brass tacks, he'll be a goner unless we stand by."

"But," Bob began and was silenced by Asher's sweep as he took the curve into their own street.

"Looka there," Asher shouted at him, as he rattled the car toward the house.

Bob's eyes followed Asher's. Miss Annie and Sister were just leaving the Weston gate, but Miss Annie turned and ran back to Bunny Wells' window.

Bunny leaned out and shook hands with her. Miss Annie was triumphantly making her way toward Sister when Asher, regaining control, shot the machine toward the house. "My Guy!" groaned Asher. "We may be too late. It's started."

Unable to contain himself, Bob burst into a hearty laugh.

Asher looked at him distantly. "Laff!" he groaned. "Don't I wish Miss Emmie had come out with you! She'd know it was no laughing matter."

Bob, having finished his laugh, spoke: "Miss Emmie is coming out to-morrow, but I doubt if you will get any help out of Miss Emmie, Asher. She has bigger fish to fry."

Asher looked at him. "And at that you might be right," he said. "Has she hooked him?"

"Hooked? Who?"

"Him," said Asher. "Him she's been breaking her heart about for eighteen years, though God knows if I was a woman with money of my own, Tom Hastings ain't the man I'd pick."

"Tom Hastings!" exclaimed the astonished Bob, and then seeing where he had put himself declined to go any further. "Oh, that's something I know nothing about, except that Tom Hastings is coming down this week-end."

"Then he's a goner."

Asher brought the machine up to the Weston house with a flourish. He felt vastly proud of himself. He had, with delicacy, "put Mr. Bob wise" to what he would be spoiling if he interfered with Miss Emmie's romance. He alighted, intending to run the car around to the back door when Bob Landon had gotten out. Asher meant to give Lib the news at once. He was prevented by the fact that Lib herself appeared in the doorway, and that Mr. Landon seemed to expect him to carry his bag in. Asher was about to remark casually, "You take the bag, Mr. Bob, and I'll unload the groceries I got in the back seat there, all be meself," which was Asher's idea of how the thing could be done neatly, when Lib, who had been watching him closely, called out: "Bring Mr. Bob's bag in this way, Asher, and take them groceries around the back."

Muttering that "Females is the onknowablest things on this oncertain earth," Asher followed Bob Landon into the house. He had no chance to give Lib the news, for Bob told her himself, with the additional item that Miss Lansing was coming down with Miss Emmie.

"Well, the more the merrier," Lib said cheerfully. "This here house has stood quiet so long that it does a body good to cook for a family. Shall I shove dinner along for you, Mr. Bob? Feeling pecky?"

Bob looked bewildered a moment and then said. "Oh, no thank you, Lib, the usual time. I had luncheon on the train. But it's nice to be included in the family," he added, "and I appreciate it." He put a box of candy in the flattered Lib's hand. "This is for you and this smaller one for Morphinia."

He went into the sitting room to find Bunny, followed by Lib's curious, flat giggle and her joyful statement that, "If you keep this up, Mr. Bob, me and Morphy won't have a tooth left in our jaws."

Asher, bringing in the groceries, was present at the opening of the boxes. Morphy's squeal and Lib's grim pleasure annoyed him. He refused indignantly any part of the spoil. Eating candy was a "kinda unmanly thing to do. I'm grown-up."

"Maybe so," allowed Lib.

"It ain't a good reason to refuse candy," retorted Morphy, her own mouth full. "Grandmaw says a growed man what likes sweets has got some of his innersense left yet, and ain't so clouded be sin and drink that he can't ralish 'em."

"What! I'll show ye!" The indignant Asher put a huge fist into Lib's box and withdrew it full. Lib, with a cry, rescued her box, and Morphy, seeing him approach with equally reckless designs on her own, flew out of the back door and into the woodshed where her "Grandpaw," Zebra Ballins, was cutting logs of wood into fireplace and stove lengths. Here Morphy took refuge, and shared her sweets with Zebra until such time as Lib, lifting up her voice, called Morphy in to pare vegetables and help get the supper.

As Morphy ran toward the house with her precious box, Asher came from the kitchen, moodily munching a chocolate. He

sat down heavily on an empty box and watched Zebra attack a stubborn log.

"Well, Zebra, we're in a pretty bad way." He shook his head.

Zebra looked up, his little bright eyes snapping. "Hey? Ain't nothing happened Miss Emmie, is there?"

"No, nothing rightly 'happened' yet," Asher began.

"Miss Emmie all right, then we all right," Zebra affirmed, "perwided we sits tight and says nothing."

"Zebra," Asher said solemnly, "what's your idea of the situation between Miss Emmie and Tom Hastings?"

"Who—me? I ain't got any at all," Zebra replied cheerfully. "You folks know more'n I do. I'm out doors, youse is indoors. Moreover, any inflammation we gets about Miss Emmie, you folks gets the insides of it and we gets the outsides. I seen Miss Emmie traveling with that Tom Hastings, last time she drove here. Well sir, Tom Hastings he look entirely flummoxed in his mine. That's what he looks, while Miss Emmie she's sorta studying him. And she's taking her time to study him.

"Seems like Miss Emmie's mine is saying to her, 'Look here Emmietta Weston' (that's Miss Emmie's mine talking to and about Miss Emmie, y'onstand, so she's gotta right to using Christian and front name). Well Miss Emmie's mine say to Miss Emmie, 'How you know, gal he's kinda fellah you like to be loving with now? He's been away long time,' Miss Emmie's mine say to her. 'Heah he is now, and maybe he ain't been making love to some other woman? Oh, no! You know how woman's mines revolving round that subject all a time, Ashuh?"

Asher nodded gloomily.

"Then Miss Emmie's mine says, 'Miss Emmie you got a heap of money now, chile. You gotta control of all what your pop he kep' away from you. You kin splurge, chile, you can even git 'nother man, younger and better looking than this Tom Hastings if you tries. Tom Hastings a mighty nice gentlemum.' Miss Emmie's mine says to her, 'but he ain't only bug in potato patch, no sir, he ain't. You study him, chile, you study him.' An Miss Emmie says to Miss Emmie's mine, 'You talk too much. Leave me lone. I'm studying Tom Hastings, I'm studying.' That," said Zebra, finishing up and starting to saw again, "is how I dopes it out, Ashuh. That's the way."

Asher said nothing for a moment or two, finished three rather messed up chocolates he had been holding together in his right hand, and finally jerked out:

"Mebbe, mebbe. That's what they're saying round town, Zebra?"

Zebra laughed. "Pretty much, pretty much, that what they saying. Of course, it don't suit some. Nothing ever suits all white folks at the same time. These ha'd boiled and kinda onreasonable ones want to think for themselves. Now, nobody ever thinks all alone by themselves. Do they, Ashuh? Ain't it so? Somebody's always pushing from inside or outside with dark sayings that interferes with the working of a person's mine.

"Why, if I sits down at night to kinda figger out things I have hearn during the day, does I git the chanct to make up my mine? No, never. I says a word to Inja, ma' wife, thinking to keep her sorta engaged in her mine and cease to trouble me. But that one word leads to another. First thing I knows she's got the whole problem before me, and starts solving of it, withouten any 'pologies. She steals the thoughts right outen my mine and revolves 'em round in hern. And then gives me the thoughts in her mine long before my mine is ready to take 'em up. It's awful aggravating, Ashuh. But this m'rring and givin' in m'rriage is the most aggravatingest thing that the Lord ever put in the Bible. You bein' a single gentlemum and free—"

"Free!" Asher's tone made mock of the word. "Free! Zebra Ballins, there ain't any free men! Every mother's son of us is tied up by some woman, somehow. Them that's married is struggling to get out of the trap, and the women won't let them, and them that ain't married, the women is struggling to put 'em in. Look at me, a strong, athaletic man, and can I call myself free, what with Miss Emmie keeping me on the jump and telling me nothing, and Lib, here, so nightly sence that New York trip that I can't do a thing with her. Yet, if I so much as pass the time of day with any of the girls in the choir or Sunday School, she looks at me like milk in a thunderstorm."

Zebra nodded. "Women can be uncommonly sour at time, but when they sweeten up, Ashuh, they sure is sweet."

Asher looked at him glumly and shook his head. "Maybe, maybe, but seems to me I've struck all the sour ones."

"Asher, Ash-ur Turkle," Lib's voice came clanging across the bleaching green. "Where are you loafing now? Git a move on! Miss Emmie just telefoamed that she's changed her mind, and she and Miss Lee's coming down on the late train to-night. Ashur!"

"Suffering Cats, woman!" roared Asher. "I hear ye, and I'm coming soon as I git through with what I'm doing." He winked slowly at Zebra, who smiled a toothy smile, in spite of the fact that he was a grandfather.

Asher stretched himself leisurely. "So Miss Lee's coming and Mr. Tom ain't. I have a kinda feeling, Zebra, that we gits a little nearer the truth this week-end."

"Mebbe," Zebra agreed. "Mebbe, but she ain't sayed Mr. Tom wasn't coming, yet."

"No," said Asher, struck with that aspect. "She ain't."

"More'n likely he is," surmised Zebra. "Ain't it possible that them two women has to rush down here just to lure him on?"

"It's possible," Asher admitted. "Anything's possible with women."

Again Lib's shrill summons came to them.

"Coming," bellowed Asher. He turned and said to Zebra with such solemnity that the old darky still sat back idle, saw in hand, and pondered long after Asher had gone to the house:

"It's as you say, possible, Zebra Ballins, but there's one thing you've forgot to remember. Women is fickle, and there's two men down here already. And Mr. Bob and Mr. Bunny remains on the ground kinda permanent."

In the living room Bob Landon was facing Bunny Wells. He did not want to face Bunny or to answer his questions, but Bunny was quietly determined he should.

"If Lee Lansing comes here to stay, what are you going to do?"

"Why should I do—anything?" Bob finally asked him defiantly.

Bunny looked at him keenly. "Because you're an honorable man, Bob, no matter what you pretend. It's not fair to Miss Emmie," he finished.

Bob looked at him with distinct hostility. "I can't see where it's my affair," he declared doggedly, "and I don't intend to make it mine."

"Then I will," Bunny told him, with a face that was no longer kind and friendly, but drawn and hard. "I'll give you a few days leeway, Bob—time to make you see where you're going, and then if it's still none of your business, I'll make it mine."

"Is that a threat?"

"Threat or promise, whichever you choose to make it, but it's God's truth, and I mean it."

A female in flight is not always a routed female. Witness the queen bee.

Emmie was flying to East Penniwell in hot haste. Even as years ago Washington, closely pursued, fled from New York to entrench himself on the other side of the Delaware, and await the coming of the enemy, so Emmie fled to her stronghold at East Penniwell. Emmie meant to fight fair, if she could, but also she was determined to use every weapon she could lay her hands on. Lee Lansing was one weapon.

In New York, Tom Hastings had the advantage, but in East Penniwell there were many things Emmie might do. She might even turn defeat to her own purposes there, for East Penniwell believed only what it saw.

She leaned toward the window, as the sleepy little branch road wound about the lovely valleys of her native county, and wondered just what she would do next.

For Tom was coming down to East Penniwell, but not to ask Emmie to marry him, and Emmie knew this very certainly now. He was coming down to be everything that was friendly with Emmie, and to try and persuade her to sell him the ground for his brickyard. But it was to be Lee Lansing, sooner or later, and if Lee had stayed on in New York he would have written Emmie, or at least delayed his visit.

Emmie would not have that. She would have Tom down now. Now, before Bob Landon and Bunny Wells had to leave Weston House, and that would be soon, for presently it was agreed that the living rooms must be overhauled. The plaster was to come down in the dining room, and reveal the old rafters it had hidden for so long. Fireplaces were to be opened and a heating system introduced, and instead of the primitive old water tank in the carriage house, the water system was to be the latest in electric automatic pumping devices, with a tank in the cellar.

Presently the Inn would have to house Emmie and her guests, while the work went on. But before that Emmie must work or fight out her own salvation or the Inn would be impossible for Emmie. She would have to go away from East Penniwell. Emmie didn't want to leave East Penniwell. Making over an old house, with the help of two such men as Bob Landon and Bunny Wells, was a fascinating occupation for any woman. Emmietta meant to continue it. Afterward, when the house was as it should be, there might come travel, but now nothing would induce her to go off to parts unknown. When she left East Penniwell, she meant to leave it with flags flying, if she had to pretend to give Tom his bride with her own hands.

She turned to look at Lee Lansing, who was seated beside her, opening and glancing at some letters that had been given her just as she left the house.

Emmie wondered if the girl suspected what she had been thinking. It was impossible, of course, but her thoughts were interrupted by a sharp exclamation from Lee.

"Of all the stupid kids!" Emmie looked at her inquiringly. Lee was slowly tearing a note into small pieces. She turned on the older woman a calculating look.

"How much influence have you with Weston, Miss Emmie?"

Emmie laughed. "None that I know of. Why?"

Lee flushed a little. "His parents have absolutely none, and anyway they will blame me. You see," she hesitated a moment, and then went on in the frank, almost boyishly embarrassed way that was part of her charm, "Weston has it rather badly just now. I give you my word, Miss Emmie, it isn't my fault."

Emmie smiled. "Of course not, but Wes has every excuse."

The girl squeezed her arm. "You are the best they turn out," she told her, briefly and solemnly. "The very best—no 'cat stuff' in your make-up. Well, Wes says he'll stick this year out at Princeton if I'll promise to announce my engagement to him, and I won't, so he's not going back this week. He means it. He says he can't study with me on his mind," she added hastily, seeing Emmie's alarmed look. "There's probably a grain of truth in that. If I will promise, Wes will go back all right, and without a murmur. He's coming down with Tom Hastings, and says if you won't take him in he's going to try the Inn, and—there you are!"

Emmie gave an impatient exclamation. "Of course, I'll take him in," she said. "No Inn for Weston, while he's in East Penniwell. But the boy—is it quite hopeless, my dear?"

"Completely."

Emmie felt Lee meant it. It must mean—Tom.

"I like Wes," Lee continued, "but I am not engaging myself to anyone."

Emmie thought over this for a moment. "We'll have to try to make him see reason."

Lee nodded. "It won't be easy, but at least I want you to know I'm honest about it. It will *never* be Weston, Miss Emmie."

"No dear, I can see that," Emmie acknowledged, but she frowned a little as Lee resumed her reading.

The frown, though ever so slight, suddenly made Emmie unable to concentrate. She remembered the instructions given her by Miss Beatrice, Calla's first assistant:

"Never frown, always keep a half smile on your lips, and your mouth pursed a little as though you were about to be kissed."

Emmie giggled aloud as she relaxed her frown, and Lee looked at her inquiringly.

"What's so funny? Mean of you to keep it to yourself. Let me laugh too. Heaven knows I need to laugh."

Emmie related the "looking as though you were about to be kissed," instructions.

Lee, highly amused, insisted on practicing. She surveyed the rosy cupid's bow slightly pursed up, which was her own mouth, in her little hand mirror, and said, "It will be rather hard on whoever meets us at the station, if we both get off looking as though we want to be kissed."

"Asher!" exclaimed Emmie, stifling a laugh in order to preserve the proper expression. "And Asher is so susceptible."

"That big log, susceptible?"

"Ah, my dear," Emmie told her, "we know so little of each other, don't we? You see Asher as a log and yet I haven't the slightest doubt that Asher and Zebra analyze us and our affairs down to the very mainspring of our actions. For Asher is, as he would tell you, 'a discerning man, capable of reading the female mind,' as well as 'a terrible, athaletic, strong man.'"

"Heavens!" Lee exclaimed. "Does he really trouble to analyze the feminine mind? He looks far, far above it."

Emmie shook her head. "Asher has had more than one affair. He's a very dashing man—at church socials. Only his long and uninterrupted courtship of Lib saves Asher. Very few women would want to dispute a man with Lib Candy."

"Lib! Lib and Asher!" Lee's laughter was low, but hearty. "Miss Emmie, that's a scream. Those two Old Things!"

Emmie smiled. "Lots of settled grown-ups have surprisingly youthful hearts, Lee, as you will learn one of these days. Fate hasn't been very kind to Lib. Asher and Lib meant to be married when they first came to work for my father. They thought he would give them a chance. But he took the one sure way of keeping them apart. It was better for his own purpose. He wanted Lib as a housekeeper, so he never gave Asher the chance that he had carefully never promised Asher—for father never went back on his word. But he had allowed Asher to infer that a tenant house, and the position of farmer, would come to him after a few years' service. Then Asher and Lib would have married. But they waited past the real moment and now—"

Lee looked at her inquiringly.

"And now Asher isn't so eager."

"And Lib?" the girl asked.

"Oh, Lib cares, or thinks she does, which is the same thing," Emmie admitted ruefully, diagnosing her own case as she described Lib's.

"But you could—" began the girl warmly and then stopped. "Oh, I beg pardon, Miss Emmie."

"Not at all," Emmie said tranquilly. "Of course I could, and I will when I see what Lib really wants."

Lee looked at her a moment shrewdly, and then smiled. "On the side of the lady?" she said teasingly. "A pure feminist—"

"No," said Emmie, "on the side of the weakest. Just woman."

Lee patted her arm. "I'll never understand why you have never married."

"Tell you some day," said Emmie quickly, "but there's no time now. Here's East Penniwell—and Asher."

"Scotland!" Lee reached for her travelling bag. "I can't keep my mouth pursed, for Asher."

"Put your bag firmly down at his feet," advised Emmie. "And don't pick it up again. Put it right on his feet if necessary."

Then at Lee's surprised look, Emmie explained herself. "Asher thinks it beneath his masculine dignity to carry anything, if he can help it. He is quite capable of allowing us to lug our own bags, sustaining us, meanwhile with pleasant and profitable conversation, if we would let him."

Then seeing Lee's slim eyebrows travel upward, Emmie added, "It's the country, my dear, and the combination of independence, a slow-moving mind and a great but real contempt for anyone who can be 'put upon' by his women folks."

"Oh yes," Emmie answered the eyebrows again, "I pay Asher wages, but that's the way he regards me, and probably the way he would describe both of us, if asked. He is probably in a great taking because he has had to come down to meet us. He's so inherently lazy, I am sure he has vainly tried to switch his duty to either Mr. Landon or Mr. Wells."

"I hope not," Lee said so heartily that Emmie looked at her, as they waited for the train to come to a complete stop.

"Don't you like them—either of them?" she asked softly.

"Oh, yes," answered Lee quickly, but without much conviction, "but I'd rather be met by Asher."

Asher was there, but Emmie saw at once he was not in his usual form. By placing her bag and motioning to Lee to put hers down so that to move he must step over or on them, Emmie succeeded in having him pick them up, without having to order him to do so, but that was all.

His "How-do, Miss Emmie, How-do, Miss Lansing," was preoccupied. Emmie felt nervously that there was something he wanted to ask but was not quite ready to risk it. She hoped if it concerned Tom Hastings he would not ask it while Lee was with her.

He took up the bags, after stubbing his toes against them, and walked with them toward the flivver. He threw open the door for the two ladies, but refrained from assisting them in. When they were safely settled, still in the same wide-eyed trance, he put in the bags and climbed in himself. With his hand on the self-starter, he turned to Emmie. "Miss Emmie, I wouldn't think of blighting your first minute at home if I could help it, but things is serious."

Miss Emmie's eyes looked frightened. "What is it, Asher? What's happened? Is Lib ill?"

"Lib's herself," Asher told her coldly. "This ain't any family calamity that's overtaken us. At least the female concerned isn't of our household. It's kinda bad-looking, though, Miss Emmie, and I'm glad you're back. Miss Annie Mink's gotten her clutches on Mr. Wells. They're going riding after antics to-morrow morning."

"What?" Miss Emmie gave Lee's hand a warning squeeze lest she laugh and spoil it all.

But Lee was in search of information. "Antics?" she questioned, mystified. "I don't think I ever heard of them."

"Mebbe not," Asher answered, as patiently as he could. "Mebbe not, you being young and flighty, old ancient things mebbe don't attract. But there's money in 'em, Miss Lee. Doc Slavin, that usta keep the Inn, always kinda hee-hawed at antics just as you do, Miss Lee, and yet come a time when he bought an old ancient chair that had been lying in Ben

Amtler's barn sence his grandmother's vandoo. Well, be Guess and be Gracious! He was just carrying it acrost the street for his wife to rest the washboiler on, when one of these here city men that's got an eye for these here antics, happens to be passing by in his motor car and seen the ancient thing. By Guy! he paid the Doc twenty dollars over and above the dollar Doc had paid Ben!"

"Ben was fit to hit somebody or smash somepin' when he hearn of it. Sence then every family in this here town has set store of their old ancient things something wonderful. You can't git a single antic at a vandoo—"

"Oh, *what* is a vandoo?" Lee interrupted.

Asher turned on her a look of pity. "Seems to me, Miss Lee, for one that's kinda up to date and knowing, you ain't got any too much word-play. Things that anybody down here would know kinda stumps ye."

"Yes," admitted Lee, meekly, "they do, Asher. You see, I haven't had your advantages. I've only lived in cities."

"Yes, be Guy, that's right," agreed Asher, "and a pity it is that a young, kinda 'greeable and bright female such as you be should be so dumb about things, just on account of lack of country upbringing. A vandoo, Miss Lee, is a sale, a kinda gathering together of a body's things, old and new antics and just ordinary gear, and selling them off to the neighbors for as much as you can bamboozle 'em into paying. It's a good way of getting more'n you would if you called in the junkman and asked him, face to face, what the damn clutter is worth. By doing that the truth would be arrived at far too soon to suit human nature. Nobody wants to hear the truth, specially about anything they have to sell. So things are arranged on the lawn, in the house, and on the porch as jumbled up as may be, so that the good has a chance of rubbing against the bad. The women kinda git into a frenzy of buying. They will pay a good five cents for an old cracked dish they'd heave outa their own kitchens, if it was theirs. But knowing somebody else cracked it gives it a kinda glow in their eyes, and they takes and bids for it."

"Now, Asher," Miss Emmie began, trying to stop the flow of his eloquence and give Lee a chance to laugh, "the women are not alone in their craze for sales."

"Chuck it up at me," Asher groaned. "Chuck it up at me, Miss Emmie, that my re-gard for kinda getting the best of anything there is for Weston House has led me into betraying an interest in things that ain't interesting to me, myself. Yeah, men do go to sales, Miss Lee, but only to get some needcassity for the house or the barn. They ain't led off be old ancient antics in the shape of moth-eaten bed kivers or old andirons. Be George and Jesse! You won't believe it, Miss Lee, but two years ago I seen an artist give five good dollars for an old candlestick and a glass bottle that Levi Throop's grandmother had more'n once throwed out inter the shed. Levi just scrabbled it up and put it with the odds and ends inter a waste basket. Well, come along another fellow, with jest as little sense as this here artist, and they bid again one another till they run them articles inter five dollars."

"Ah," said Lee exhausted, "I know what antics are now, Asher."

"In course you do. You knowed all along, I suspect. Just wanted to get a rise outta a country fellow. Well, you'll get your come-uppance from Mr. Landon for such. There's a man that seems all wrapped up in the country. Defends it, he does, for everything."

Asher stole a sly look at Miss Emmie, to see if she showed any "feelings," but Miss Emmie was thinking her own thoughts and paying very little heed to Asher.

"I'm kinda partial to Mr. Wells on account of his having that rabbitty name for one thing, and never resenting it nor nothing," ran on Asher. "And for another thing, on account of his being lame, and kinda thrusting it behind him, as it were. Yet, I'll always say for Mr. Landon that there Miss Annie Mink and her Sister mighta planned all their plans to their best ability, mighta set their snares again and again, and they wouldn'ta gotten Mr. Landon. There's a man that kin treat females as they should be treated—leave them flat and still kinda admiring him for so doing."

"Oh, you think so?" Lee's voice had an edge.

"Think!" chuckled Asher. "I seen him do it. It was masterful."

He drew up to the house with a flourish. "And yet when I warned him of Mr. Bunny's danger, he wouldn't lift his foot to save him. 'Let them go,' he says. 'Let any misguided female go with Bunny Wells' hunting antics, if she wants to. That's

all the good it will do her. He'll never see anything but the antics.' But Mr. Bob don't know the Minks. He don't know the Minks—especially Miss Annie."

Asher had been holding the door open, it was true, but he had also been blocking their exit until he had finished his lament. He now helped the two women out rather awkwardly. Indeed, Lee felt as though she had been projected out of the machine by a big flat hand the size of a dinner plate, and sent flying toward the porch. It was all so sudden that she could not stop herself.

It was Bob Landon, hurrying to greet Miss Emmie and help with the bags, who inadvertently stopped her.

It seemed to Miss Emmie that Mr. Landon was not in his usual form at setting females in their place. He seemed to be more than usually embarrassed at finding Lee Lansing in his arms. He held her there for the moment of confusion, in the soft dusk. Miss Emmie noted how the two stared at each other, intently for a moment, before moving suddenly apart, with Bob's abrupt "I beg pardon."

Miss Emmie concluded she must have been romancing in thinking she had seen something very like entreaty in Lee Lansing's eyes. It had been Bob, not Lee, who sprang away.

"Little flirt," Miss Emmie thought. "Isn't Lee content with Tom and Weston?"

Bob Landon flung himself on what he thought was Miss Emmie's luggage and started to the house, leaving the other bags to Asher. Miss Emmie followed Bob in.

Lee was against the wall, opposite the old newel post, and was looking intently at Bob Landon, who, face averted, was carrying the bags up the stairs. Emmie was sure that Lee's hand had been outstretched, and was suddenly withdrawn at her entrance, and that her lips had formed the words, "Wait, Bob."

Yet when Emmie entered, Lee came to her, put her arm within Emmie's, her face serene.

"I don't wonder you love this place. Even to me, it seems like coming home." She glanced up at the landing where Bob Landon stood, and lowered her eyelashes, but Bob didn't look at her. He called over the bannister, "Both in your room, Miss Emmie?"

"Oh no, just the black one," Emmie said. "The brown one is Lee's. She has the long room next mine. And thank you so much, Mr. Landon, but why don't you let Asher struggle with them?"

"Asher's quite worn out," Bob told her solemnly, as he leaned over the rail. "What with the Mink affair, and helping Lib with the clothes line to-day, as well as going twice to the station, he's all in."

"Goodness!" Emmie exclaimed. "He has had a day! I'll be careful how I use him."

Bob nodded and went on into her room with the black bag.

Lee, in her turn, had been slightly surprised at the tone of complete understanding between these two. She went up the stairs ahead of Emmie, and was in her room before Bob, who had just brought in the bag, could escape.

Lee stood against the door. They looked at each other. On Bob's side it was a long, hard, cold look that fully bore out Asher's description of his ability to put females in their place.

But on Lee's, there was none of that sweet feminine appeal that Asher had pictured being relegated to its proper place. She looked at Bob stormily, her back to the door.

"Bob Landon, you've got to give me a few minutes."

"Not now," said Bob coolly, even rudely, and he put out a strong hand that propelled her a sufficient distance from the door, to enable him to pass her.

"Any other time, and any other place, but not in Miss Emmie's house, nor where Miss Emmie might hear."

The door closed softly behind him and Lee Lansing threw herself on the bed and lay there, her face hidden.

The man who wrote that silence is golden had a secret to keep. To those about him, his golden silence must have seemed a leaden lump.

Bunny Wells waylaid his friend Bob Landon in the hall the next morning. Bob tried to slide past and out of the doorway, but Bunny put out a hand and touched Bob lightly on the arm.

To refuse Bunny anything was beyond Landon. He paused unwillingly.

"Bob, I'm going out with Miss Annie Mink."

"No news; Asher has proclaimed that to all and sundry."

Bunny went on gravely: "Asher having made me and others fully aware of the danger I am running, in exposing myself in this careless way to the wily Mink sisters,—for of course Annie refused to go without Sister,—I want to make my verbal last will and testament.

"Bob," and his voice changed into so earnest a tone that Bob could not ignore it, "if you ever thought anything of me at all, give Lee a chance—to explain."

Bob gave a quick, anxious look around.

Bunny saw it and shook his head. "Both Lee and Miss Emmie have gone down to the hotel to order ice cream for tomorrow's dinner. You are perfectly safe."

Bob looked relieved. "In that case, I'll tell you something. Lee gets no chance at all, if I can help it. If I'm cornered so that I can't run, or scream, I'll listen to her, but not otherwise. I want no explanations from her. You may be as forgiving as you like."

"It seems to me," Bunny interrupted, "that as the injured party—"

Bob's face changed into a mask. "If you please, Bunny, we won't go into that."

"You aren't human, Bob," Bunny began, then stopped as he saw Bob's face. "That is, you aren't human to anybody but me. I wish you'd extend the right hand of fellowship a little further. I feel both guilty and a little embarrassed in the role of the only human being you can tolerate."

"It's worse than that, Bunny," Bob managed to say. "You are the only human being I believe in."

He went out abruptly, leaving Bunny, leaning against the newel post, regarding him with eyes that were a little misty. Bunny winked them rapidly, as he limped his way out of the side door, where he might watch the approach of the Mink sisters. All he could see at first, however, was Asher struggling with the car. The self-starter was practically useless this morning, but Asher, who always managed to make a lot of noise about anything he did, grimly kept at it.

On their own steps the Mink sisters were posted, undecided whether to wait there with dignity, or to join Mr. Wells on the Weston steps, to watch at close range Asher's struggles.

Miss Annie, for the fourteenth time in the last five minutes, came down one step.

The car's stuttering attempts to talk back to Asher sent Miss Annie up the step again.

"Oh, dear Sister," she said nervously, "if one only knew the best thing to do."

"Do the kind thing," advised Sister sepulchrally. Her bunion hurt, and she had on her best patent leathers. Annie looked hopelessly undecided.

"Oh, dear! There's that lovely, stylish Miss Lee Lansing talking to Mr. Wells now. I think, Sister, we lose a good deal by dignity."

"Maybe," agreed Sister, who had no desire to move, "but we lose more by thrusting ourselves in before the arranged

hour."

Through the din of the car's refusal to start, Lee's voice came to Bunny: "Oh, Bunny, how can you expose yourself so recklessly to danger?"

"The car or the Minks?"

"Both."

"Lee," said Bunny gravely, "I can't make Bob listen to reason."

"I know. You are awfully kind, Bunny. No one should be as kind. I'll have to take my chance with Bob. Only, something must be settled before the end of my visit."

Bunny patted her hand sympathetically.

"Don't," Lee whispered. "Don't you be too kind to me, Bunny. I can't stand it."

"Damn kindness, Lee. You know I'd give my other foot to get you out of this."

"Oh, Bunny! Hush! Here comes Miss Emmie!"

"Mr. Wells," Emmie called, as she came toward him, "what have you done? Never has the village been so stirred up. Are your intentions Minkward perfectly honourable?"

"Surest thing you know," asserted Bunny. "Miss Emmie, this is a choice field you have planted me in, and I want to make use of it. Those two twittering dears know where some of the treasures I want are, and I'm going with them because if they are along people will be so blinded by the fact that the Mink girls have caught a man that I'll get the things cheaper."

"How base and low!" Miss Emmie exclaimed. "I was looking upon you as a high and lofty influence, and here you are only seeking 'antics.'"

"Miss Emmie, 'antics' are the breath of my life. I am thinking of embarking in the antic business, here in East Penniwell."

Both women exclaimed in surprise.

Bunny looked into the two kind faces so near him, so eager and so interested. "What nice women you are," he said approvingly. "I'm counting on both of you to prove I am right in my opinion, and help me out. You see, East Penniwell's a small place, but it's right on the highway between New York and Philadelphia, and it's a main travelled road. If I could make a shop out of the old deserted carriage factory and smithy, with a new red sign and plenty of good old Pennsylvania 'antics' all fixed up and highly priced, I think I could calculate on making quite a decent sum. I could make a living and not be so heavy a burden on good old Bob."

He avoided Lee's eyes.

Miss Emmie was entranced at the idea.

"Lee! We could help him paint it, and fix it up with curtains."

"So we could," Lee declared enthusiastically, "orange curtains. Would you have a tea room, Bunny?"

Bunny shook his head. "No, but I'd try to get the Inn to cover that. I'd recommend the Inn to my customers."

"Bunny Wells," Lee exclaimed, "it's an enormously good idea! But you'd have to live here."

"Any objection to me as a neighbor, Miss Emmie?"

"It would be wonderful!"

"Then you'll help me find out who owns the little old carriage factory and blacksmith shop?"

"Yes—I—if I can," said Miss Emmie, smiling in a way that made Lee suspicious. "We'll find out about it to-morrow."

"If I can't rent that," Bunny declared valiantly, "I'll find something else."

"Or build," suggested Lee.

"No," both Bunny and Miss Emmie said together, "that would be the very last thing to do."

"You see, I want an old, and original building," Bunny explained. "The old smithy, or an old mill, would be half the battle. Such a building would catch and hold the eye of the traveling public."

"We'll see," Miss Emmie said serenely.

Bunny looked at them both and drew a little nearer, for Asher was emerging, grim, sweating but triumphant from his struggle with the machine. "If you want to really and truly qualify as angels, take pity and ride out to the sale and rescue me from the Minks."

Lee and Emmie exchanged glances.

"Ah, weakening!" jeered Miss Emmie.

"Wouldn't you?" asked Bunny. "Even with a strong, athaletic man like Asher along, I'm afraid."

Miss Emmie, with a side glance at the two Minks still undecidedly going up and down the top step, turned to him.

"You don't deserve it, of course, but since you have really told us your guilty secret and leaned upon us for help and advice—You have, haven't you?"

"What?" asked Bunny. "Oh, leaned on you for help and advice? Surely. I'm unable to stand without you."

"And you will listen to some of our suggestions about the shop?"

"I'll listen," promised Bunny conservatively.

"Well, then Lee and I will come, in my new car."

"What! Asher's dream come true?"

Miss Emmie shook her head violently. "On pain of our leaving you in the lurch, don't tell him. Mr. Landon is in the secret, and he'll drive it up there as his, or as a try-out. We haven't decided what the lying tale is to be yet—until I am sure I like the car. I really must be satisfied myself, before Asher is called in. He would have thrown cold water on the fiery chariot of Elijah, if he had been asked to drive it."

Bunny looked at her, like a small boy full of mischief. "If you'll really come, I'll tell you something splendid. I intend to ask the Misses Mink to supper."

"Do you?" Lee looked at him admiringly. "You are a sport, Bunny, a real, dead game sport."

"If you came along and joined us," Bunny assured Lee, though he looked at Emmie, in a manner that was so extremely flattering that modest Emmie thought she must be mistaken, "*that*, together with what Asher calls my 'deformity', may save me. It is true there are two Minks, and I am the least conceited of men, but I am a little afraid that—"

But what he was afraid of they never knew, for Asher's car dashed up to them, nearly running over Emmie and Lee, who scrambled hastily to safety.

"Say your fare-you-wells, and say 'em quick," shouted Asher. "Get you into this here excited and nervous female of a car, and get into the back seat where you'll have to set with Miss Annie, being as you brought this here party on yourself. Sister Mink'll set with me, and I'll try to drive straight and true, if so be this here thing'll drive so, and may God have mercy on us all."

Bunny, a little awed, swung himself into the back seat. Miss Emmie, handing him the carriage robe, said, "We'll join you later, at the sale, before the supper."

They watched the Minks embark, Emmie clutching Lee's hand so that they might not laugh aloud.

With considerable hesitation Miss Annie, after twice offering the seat beside Bunny to Sister, and Sister twice and with ceremony refusing it, coyly seated herself. Asher, fully aware that Lib was watching him critically from the back kitchen window, gallantly helped Sister to her half of the front seat. Sister being a timid and somewhat forgetful person, this was not accomplished easily. Twice she seated herself and twice Asher began work on the self starter, only to have to stop and help Sister out again, and watch while she ran after and captured Satan, the cat, and put him in the "glassed-in porch," as the tiny solarium was always designated.

Finally Lee broke from Emmie, and rather hastily ran into the house, threw herself in one of the big chairs in the living room and laughed unrestrainedly. She had heard Asher's ear-splitting roar:

"Choose between Miss Annie and that there cat, can't ye! This here machine's r'aring to go, and I'm not the man to hold her here eating up gasoline for any blinking old moth-eaten tomcat."

With a moan, Sister planted herself down beside Asher.

"She's off!" Asher roared, and the start was punctuated by Sister's scream. She clutched Asher by the shoulder.

"Hands off!" Asher yelled. "Hands off of me, woman! I'm the driver of this here wildcat and she takes all me time. There's nothing left for other females. I'm a two-handed driver, I'll have you know from the start."

Sister drew herself proudly away, much offended, straightened her hat and bestowed a polite nod and wave of the hand on Miss Emmie, who had remained to wave farewell. Miss Annie very dignifiedly saluted with her "show" handkerchief.

The village retired from its windows, satisfied that there was no more to be seen just now, and the car careened around the corner and out of sight.

Bob Landon at the garage, looking over Miss Emmie's new car, saw Asher pass and flung up a hand in greeting. Bunny nodded solemnly, but Asher, taking it as a signal to stop, drew up at the garage and yelled, "Come on, Mr. Bob, the more ye crowd the rear seat the better the old girl'll ride. Not meaning you, Miss Annie," he added, "but alluding to this here petrified female of a car that I'm steering."

Bob thanked him, but declined, avoiding Bunny's eyes, though he slapped his shoulder in sympathy. The car having started again, Bob turned back to his inspection of Miss Emmie's purchase.

The garage owner, who had been looking over the new car with him, rose to his feet, and nodded toward the departing vehicle. "There goes the hell of a brave man," he said solemnly.

"Asher?"

"Nope. The lame feller. Your friend. A man that takes the Mink sisters out riding in the face of the hull town and in the teeth of their chatter ought to get a medal for bravery, and a pension."

Bob looked at him gravely. "He has a medal, but don't tell him I told you."

"Blame me! I knowed there was somethin' more'n convincin' about him. But after to-day he'd oughter have two."

The sale was at an old farm house ten miles or more from East Penniwell, high on the ridge. Taking its leisurely way through the household goods, as is the way in the country, beginning with the "oddments" and working on through the rows of furniture standing out of doors on the grass plot, it had reached the farm implements and the barn. Bunny, flushed with victory, for he had, thanks to the Misses Mink's knowledge of the countryside and the genuine age of certain articles, secured several treasures, stood beside these treasures, strewn in and around the car. Bunny had just finished paying for them and arranging for the transportation of all, save a few odds and ends, to East Penniwell.

He looked around for his companions. Asher, he easily distinguished by his great height, and his shouting voice, among those at the barn, bidding heavily a penny at a time for a box of assorted rusty nails, old hooks and broken locks. But where were the Minks?

Presently he saw them in the midst of a group of women, turning over odds and ends of china, holding themselves a little aloof as behooved a Mink, but keenly alive to what was going on. It seemed to Bunny that Miss Annie was giving him a slight but beckoning nod, but he hesitated, remembering with what dignity Miss Annie and Sister had withdrawn, when the country auctioneer had approached certain homely household utensils in a spirit of ribaldry.

"He grows a little coarse, dear," Sister had whispered to Annie. "Possibly it will give the men more freedom if we walk apart."

They had "walked apart" for some time, but now surely Miss Annie was beckoning.

As Bunny drew nearer, Miss Annie fluttered toward him. "Mr. Wells, there are two pairs of old salt cellars, glass. Really good ones, such as my Quaker ancestors brought from Philadelphia in 1830. Would you—"

"I would. Do they know how good they are?"

"No, I think not," said Miss Annie, "though such things are no longer picked up as easily or as cheaply as they were. Still I felt it, under the circumstances, unnecessary to enlighten any one. They are in a basket of odds and ends, which will presumably be sold as a quarter lot."

"I'll bid for them."

"No, indeed, Mr. Wells." Miss Annie declared earnestly. "If you bid they will go up perhaps as high as a dollar. Better let me bid."

She was gone, and Bunny stood aside to watch. Miss Annie coyly signalled the auctioneer, and the bidding began at five cents, only to be spiritedly raised by a belligerent-looking Irish laundress to ten cents. Miss Annie, despite her natural timidity, kept valiantly on, cheeks flushed, hands trembling, until she had reached the incredible sum of fifty cents. The laundress, who had seen a bottle of bluing, a cake or two of soap and some clothespins at the bottom of the basket, stopped there, red with indignation, but Miss Annie bid another ten cents, and flushed with triumph received the box and turned with it to Bunny Wells.

Bunny knew that he had everything he wanted and could afford now, so he whistled the signal agreed upon between him and Asher.

Asher reluctantly withdrew from the group of wise men over against the barn and came toward them.

Unsmilingly he took the box from Miss Annie's hands, glanced at it contemptuously, sniffed and said, "Seems to me, Mr. Wells, if it's housekeeping you're aiming at, ye do the woman little compliment, by such. Be reaching down inter yer pants pocket you coulda fetched out enough to let her visit the five-and-ten to the better advantage of ye both."

Aware by the silence with which this was greeted that he'd had done his friend more harm than good by this speech, Asher withdrew hastily to put the box neatly away in the car.

At a safe distance he endeavored to retrieve the situation by roaring out, over his shoulder, in their direction, "The country's safe! Here's the rescuing party. By Christopher and Columbus! It's Miss Emmie riding in a new car."

He paused to contemplate the picture. A dull gleam of discontent came into his eyes, as he noted the car.

"A man," he observed sadly to Bunny, as Miss Annie and Sister fluttered to meet the newcomers, "a man could look like a man riding in one of them, even with the Minkses aboard."

Bunny stopped him. "Asher, you take too much liberty in speaking of these good friends of mine."

Asher stared at him blankly. "Sure," he said, rather shakenly, "and so am I their friend. But they ain't exactly moving pictures, Mr. Wells, and a car like that'd help us carry 'em off better. Now wouldn't it?" Then he paused solemnly, and regarded Bunny so fixedly that involuntarily Bunny straightened his necktie. "Instid of bearing malice fer that there slam y' handed me a pause back, Mr. Bunny, I'm giving you somethin' like kind advice, as a true friend an' a brother man. Y' show better skill handling the Mink sisters than I give ye credit for, but when it comes to Miss Emmie—go slow."

He bent toward Bunny, shaking a huge finger in warning. "There's a wary female, and with cause. Tom Hastings is a hard

bird to ketch. But she's bound an' determined to ketch him, and it won't aid her none if you tries mixing-in and taking her off places like this, the very day Tom's expected."

Before Bunny could recover, or accustom himself to the Don Juan role Asher had assigned him, Asher spoke again:

"We will now change the subjic', always you bearing in mind that I'm looking after Miss Emmie till she gets her own Man."



"A woman," Asher observed to Bunny, continuing to keep step with him, and acting as though, the warning delivered, relations could now be resumed in peace and amity, "a woman never chooses a car for its en-jine and gen-u-wine worth. No sir. Something kinda showy and fussy for them, everytime."

His face took on a bitterness that made Bunny feel sorry for him. "Listen to them there lady friends of yours, yapping to Mr. Bob," he gulped. "Cute, they calls it. My Suffering Snakes! A work of God and man together, such as a good machine is, hadn't ought be demeaned thataway. It's a grand car!" He sighed. "And me with a mind to understand her and the heart to feel fer the engine in her, and its lovely pulling power, has probably got to go through life driving an old coffee percolator like what you and me just got out of."

"By This and by That, Mr. Wells, things get kinda mixed up in this world. Miss Emmie's as fine a woman as you will find in a day's journey but look at her! She kin ride in that old rattler and never feel the flush of shame on her cheek, whilst I'm one burning blush, and feel like crying aloud to the passerby that I ain't and never was responsible for its actions."

"But Miss Emmie, with her father's money behind her, and her position to keep up, just acts like it was a heavenly chariot, and until some wise man,—" he stole a look at Bunny to see if it made any impression,— "until some wise man lays down the law to her about the wickedness it is for a woman, a delicate bred woman like her, to risk her life in the old rat trap, she won't notice it."

Bunny said nothing.

Asher sighed. "Most women is dumb to the music of an engine. Honest, Mr. Wells," and Asher turned the rapt face of a dreamer toward him, "is there any sweeter music than an engine running smooth and clean?"

They went toward the new car. Asher surveyed it with an absorbed air. Bunny joined his two best friends, intent to tell Miss Emmie that she was being unconsciously very cruel to Asher. He had no opportunity to do this, for Miss Annie fluttered toward him, and the question of where to eat was broached.

Miss Annie and Sister, despite the fact that they ate at least three hundred and sixty-two of the three hundred and sixty-five days in each year in their own little dining room, had very positive notions about where to "eat out." They did not, however, express these opinions positively, but by gentle insinuations. "Wasn't the Deerpark Inn, a *little* public!" They had "heard Oliver's Mills was not so well patronized as it had been because, my dear, the chicken dinner is absolutely not good."

Come to a decision as to where they wanted to go, they would not, or could not.

Miss Emmie, more understanding, or more sympathetic with the ways of country people, felt that it was the embarrassment of riches that dazzled them. They could not decide to which of the many places, to them hitherto names only, they wished to be led.

Bunny's serene voice broke through the clamor. "I move that we take a little ride first. Let's cut across country and drive over the ridge down to the river, past the old stone quarries. There's one good country inn up there, maybe more, and we can make up our minds when we come to it."

The Misses Mink were delighted at the thought. Their faces shone with relief. A ride was a ride to them, and it would mean staying out much later, and crowding into this already crowded day one more rich experience to be talked over, bit by bit, for days, months, afterward.

To add to this excitement, Miss Emmie insisted that one of them must ride with her in the new car. After much discussion, Miss Emmie was compelled to decide for them, and Sister rode off in the new car with Miss Emmie and that "rather reserved" Mr. Landon, while Lee Lansing sat beside Asher, and Miss Annie resumed her proud position beside "that delightful, though lame, Mr. Wells."

The country along the ridge was truly beautiful.

"God's own," Asher announced to Lee, "and created, Miss Lansing, 'long toward the fust of them seven hard-working

days, He put in over this old sphere. Monday or Tuesday I should say, when His ideas about the world was fresh and clear before Him. To my way of thinking, that there North Pole and them there Arctic regions was His Saturday night job, when He was tired and longing for Heaven. But this here bit of country can't be beat."

Lee admitted it was lovely, and sat looking at it, dreamily, her eyes following the new car, just ahead of them on the long smooth highway.

Presently they took a lovely winding road over the ridge to the river, which being miles from East Penniwell, Lee had never seen before.

The big, old country hotel, across the bridged creek, came within sight far too soon. Lee was reluctant to stop. "Oh let's ride along this lovely river for a little while," she begged. "We can always come back and get supper."

"Shows how little you know about country hotels, my dear," Emmie called to her, for the other car had stopped near them for consultation. "Supper six to seven-thirty, and after that not even a fried egg sandwich."

"We've got an hour's leeway," Lee urged. "Let's go along the river for a mile or so, anyway, and come back if we must."

They started on their way, not knowing that the gods of Things that Are, had decided to be good to them. They had gone but a little way from the hotel when a novel sign, roughly printed on pasteboard, and attached to the white fence around a delightfully quaint white church, caught Asher's eye.

"Church supper, Fifty cents, six to eight," read the sign.

Asher stopped his machine instantly and called to Bob to stop. "By God's good Providence!" he yelled. "We're in sight of the promised land. A church supper! Could ye ask anything better?"

Bob stopped and backed a little to find out what was the matter.

Asher, with a wave of his hand, indicated the sign. "There's the reason for me stopping, and a right good reason it is, too. If you knew the cooking up here to Blackpool as I do, you wouldn't hesitate."

He pointed to an open field, between the church and the nearest house, where long, rough board tables had been put up and covered with white table cloths. Wooden chairs had been placed near them. A cooking stove had been set up and its long pipe went right up toward the blue without a chimney to help it. An improvised kitchen surrounded the stove, with a bench holding several dishpans; dishtowels hung from chairs, side tables were stacked with crockery, and another long table contained roast beef, and ham, over which a genial, handsome old farmer, gray bearded, ruddy and hale, with a smile and an extraordinary sharp carving knife, presided.

Asher caught sight of him, and entirely forgot his dignity as a driver. "Yoo-hoo, Cap. May," he shrilled. "God bless your whiskers! How's things?"

The genial Cap turned, waving his knife. "Asher! Asher Turkle! You old son-of-a-gun, light down and take something into you, and help yourself and the Church both to onct. Gorry! Now that I look at ye, you're failing, Asher. You're failing for a piece of this here beef."

"I'm coming, Cap, and bringing with me a whole clutter of city people, and the Minkses. You and Aunt Lu keep an eye on them pies and cakes and don't leave everything get et up before we get back. We'll be there in, say half an hour. By that time you can get some of them gormandizers shooed away and the places cleared for us."

He turned back grinning to his passengers, wholly unconscious of the bridling of "the Minkses," and Lee's amused smile. He had, in his own way, made them free of the assembly.

"Well, girls and boys," he announced, including the two cars, "we'll take a little ride, but only a little one. The supper's lasting from six to eight, 'tis true, but the nearer to six we are, the better and more abundant'll be the victuals. Aunt Lulu Zimmerman's there, as you kin see, and a splendid woman she is. She's Cap's sister-in-law and a widow, but dangerous I warn ye, Mr. Wells. A heart of gold, when it comes to setting out victuals for man and beast! She'll scrouge more victuals to the square inch on your plate than you have any notion of. Half an hour's our limit for the ride. I'd say stop now, but the tables are all full."

Miss Emmie, having been assured by Bob that he'd like the experience, allowed Asher to feel important and useful, without checking his enthusiasm. It would be a good supper, Emmie knew, and she thought it might amuse the visitors more than the Inn. Emmie's car moved off.

Lee saw, as Asher worked at the self starter, that a little group of newcomers were waiting their turn, leaning on the church fence, or occupying some extra chairs placed for them. A stout woman in white was screaming amiable welcomes and stamping her plump way around the furthest table. Something told Lee that she was Aunt Lulu. The self starter worked, however, before Aunt Lulu caught sight of Asher.

The road along the upper stretch of the river was beautiful and the drive all too short. In vain Lee suggested that it was too lovely to leave. Asher was adamant.

"Say what you will," he replied, "people has to be fed, and you can't go on scenery. Let's you and me turn back, Miss Lee, and Mr. Bob'll follow us, while the turning is good. For loiter on, and some of these here scenery hounds will be the first to find fault with us, if everything's been et up but the table cloth."

Back again at the supper grounds, they found a crowd of motors parked on the grass and under the great old trees on either side of the wide road above the church. Afar, for they were compelled to leave their cars some distance away, they could hear the sound of merriment, the clatter of dishes either being set on the tables, or thrust into the dishpans.

Tickets were bought at the entrance, from another genial old soul, evidently a "late widower," from the amount of poking in the ribs that ensued between the ticket taker and Asher, and Asher's coyness in introducing the ladies of what had now become *his* party—although Bunny paid for the tickets. Asher, in true country fashion, bore himself as an important and highly necessary guide for Miss Emmie's guests. He seemed not to see the glances the timid Mink sisters cast at him when he became particularly boisterous, with several of the prominent deacons. Miss Emmie more than once regretted Lib's absence. Only Lib Candy's eye could have subdued Asher now. Emmie did not intend to hurt him by trying.

"Here ye are, Miss Emmie! Seats for the hull lot of us at Aunt Lulu's table. Keep a hold of them chairs though, for Aunt Lulu's pop'lar. Aunt Lulu, here's two dressed-up city beaux for you. She's berryed her third, Mr. Bob, and no objections to the fourth, have ye, Lulu?"

"No objections," said Aunt Lulu, who had preserved five fine front teeth on upper and lower jaw, and as she later explained, "had a couple of chewers both sides and in the back and needed no more." If her kindly smile had a cavernous aspect, you soon forgot that when Aunt Lu started ministering to you.

The tables were long and the ground uneven under the chairs. Asher and Aunt Lulu were loud and cheerful in voice and in their habit of laying large hands on people's shoulders and urging them to make a little room and not "split up these here pleasant family parties."

Emmie, who had real respect for these people, whose sterling worth she knew, bore it cheerfully, and was proud to see that it caused neither Lee, Bob nor Bunny the slightest apparent discomfort, but the Misses Mink became their mincingest as to voices and manner, lest by chance their party might mistake the circle and manners to which they were accustomed.

It was a difficult thing to do, especially when Aunt Lulu was patting your shoulder with a big fat hand and saying, "Well, well, Annie Mink, here you are! Ain't married to either of these fine young men are you? No? Well, here's me had three good husbands all to myself, and you ain't had one yet. Ain't it so?" Yet Annie managed to smile through it, and, simpering but determined, to take her place beside Bunny.

Bunny Wells noted the determination and remembered, with something like fear, that she had never left his side since starting out. It is true Sister always hovered near them, but still Bunny knew that things would never again be quite as they had been between Annie Mink and himself, now that he had boldly squired her to that sale. It was all too plain that Asher's warnings had been those of a friend. She had indeed marked him for her own. But Bunny was a brave man. He thought of his purchases at the sale, he remembered what Asher and Miss Annie called his "ahem—deformity," and took heart.

He turned to look for Asher and see if by hook or crook he could get that "strong athaletic" man between him and Miss Annie, but Asher was busy instructing Aunt Lulu, who hung largely over him, just what they all wanted.

"Whatever ye got to eat, we'll eat for you, Aunt Lu," Asher announced kindly, "and we're going to keep that ol' reprobate

Cap May so busy carving for us that he'll give out before the night's over. I'm here prepared to eat my fifty cents' worth, so bring it on."

Lee, so bent on avoiding the vacant chair next Bob that she had collided with Miss Annie in her race for the seat next Bunny, relinquished it gracefully and took the chair that Asher had reserved for himself. Asher observed this with a frown, which deepened as Bob Landon, absorbed in seeing that Miss Emmie was comfortable, found Lee on his left, and Asher was forced to squire Sister Mink.

Pretty girls, a little tired from the many demands made upon them by the crowd of guests, came to "clear up." A very make-shift proceeding, indeed, consisting of whisking away dishes and brushing the crumbs into a plate with one of the paper napkins. They then set before them such quantities of delicious food that Lee groaned.

"How can they get so much food together at once!" Lee exclaimed. "And can anybody eat it all?"

"Rather!" retorted Miss Emmie. "Watch the man at the foot of the table."

He was a healthy young farm hand, who had already blushed a deep red at seeing Lee's eyes fixed upon him, and was now plowing through a plate which contained roast beef, two thick slices, potatoes mashed, browned sweet potatoes, three ears of corn, tomatoes and lettuce, gravy, biscuits, bread, ham. He had both milk and tea to drink. He looked again at Lee and took courage. "Please mam, will you ask your husband,"—he indicated Bob,— "to pass down the butter?"

The butter, a big slab swimming in ice water, was duly passed down by the annoyed Bob.

Emmie, who had laughed with the others at the error, noted that Lee had turned pale, not red.

"Funny she's so angry," Emmie thought. "It's queer how she hates Bob Landon."

Aunt Lulu and Bunny, to the great disturbance of Miss Annie Mink, had started a violent flirtation. At close quarters Aunt Lulu proved white haired, with a lovely smooth pink and white complexion, straight features, considerable avoirdupois, and a decided way with gentlemen.

"You look all tuckered out, you do," she remarked to Bunny solicitously. "Can't think what your lady-friends were thinking of keeping you so long from your victuals. Here you girls," she called to the waiting maidens who hovered around with plates of bread, butter, pickles and jelly, "keep away from this here Article. I'm looking after him in a way you flighty things would never think of doing. Him and me's real friendly, ain't we, Boy?"

"Pals," agreed Bunny, smiling a little faintly. Somehow the food and the flies, plus Aunt Lu, were almost too much for him. "We're pals, and I'm coming to call on you next week, Aunt Lu."

Aunt Lu was charmed. She emitted a high, ear-piercing laugh and smote Bunny lightly on the head. "You cut-up," she crooned delightedly, "nothing slow about you."

"I should hope not," retorted Bunny, "but I'll have to hurry up to get anywhere near your pace, Aunt Lu. Why, you are looking for a fourth and I haven't had a first yet."

"Yeah Boy!" said Asher, and smote the table with his fork, with which he had been demolishing a saucerful of slaw. "That's the way to get at Aunt Lu. Her house is the second hand turning to the left, after you leave the lane there by the river, and I'll say for Aunt Lu there's always a welcome and a glass of cider."

"Not for you no more, Asher Turkle," shouted Aunt Lu, jovially, "not sence I've heard that Lib Candy is like to give you the go-by. No rejected suitors for me. If a man can't get a woman's yes or no in eighteen years, why my time's too short to waste on him. I ain't got Lib's patience."

Asher's mouth fell open. His face took on a dark hue, as he choked over the cabbage and this unwelcome hit. Miss Emmie took pity on him.

"Why Aunt Lu Zimmerman! How can you talk like that! Asher and Lib are the same good friends they've always been. Asher may have something important to tell you one of these days, when we get the estate matters settled."

Asher's reddish-blue color slowly receded and became normal, but Aunt Lu, though distracted, was still of an inquiring

turn of mind. Her own marriages and courtships had always been openly discussed by herself and others, and she saw no reason for reticence now.

"Your old sweetheart's back, isn't he, Emmie? Well, the Lord sends every old thing back, if you wait long enough, and want it back bad enough. I never could see much in Tom Hastings myself," she announced negligently, propping a dish of gravy on the back of Bunny's chair. "A dratted mischeivous fella he was, always cutting up. I have chased him outa my cherry trees more times than I'd like to remember. But you'd a better eye for worth, seemingly, than most of us, Emmie, for I hear tell that he's just about rolling in money."

Emmie hesitated, though to hesitate too long she knew would be hurtful to her, here where news was sought and distributed widely. Lee Lansing's eyes were on her, wide in wonder. With an inward prayer that she might satisfy Aunt Lu without telling too much, or taking Lee too far into her confidence, she slowly swallowed a sip of tea and answered lightly, "Tom's done wonderfully, Aunt Lu," and her voice was so rich in content that Lee stared. "He's made a lot of money, and wants to make more in East Penniwell."

She had turned the trick. Aunt Lu stared at her in genuine surprise. Forgotten were all the searching questions she had been going to ask Emmie about his future plans—lost in her excitement and eagerness to learn how money could be made in East Penniwell.

"Good Lord alive!" screamed Aunt Lu, excitedly. "I thought your father, Emmie, was the only man that could screw a red cent out of East Penniwell's pockets."

"But Tom Hastings doesn't want to take it out of East Penniwell's pocket. He wants to put money in its pocket. He's anxious to start a brickyard here."

"Land of Moses!" Aunt Lu fairly shouted. "That's a poor business, ain't it now, Emmie? With all these here portable houses, and ready-to-build bungalows, ain't brick falling back a little? You advise him to hang on to his money, dear. 'Tain't so easy to get that he should spend it in wile-cat schemes like bricks."

"There's chimbls gotta be built," declared Asher loyally. "Howsomever the rest of the house is tacked together, chimbls have got to be brick."

Aunt Lu regarded him unsatisfied. "They kin be stone," she argued, "and in this part of the country often is. 'Twould be just like Tom Hastings' luck if stone chimneys come in strong, just as he got his bricks going."

She passed the gravy to Asher. "Here, send this down the table and you girls here get busy, and scabble up the dirty plates and bring on the dessert. I wanta have a word with Emmie here concerning her future. I'm no gypsy but I seem to see wedding rings hovering nigh."

Bunny Wells had seen Emmie's face, and despite Asher's warning he acted promptly. He leaned toward Lee Lansing.

"Switch that curious old woman from the subject of Tom Hastings by any means in your power. Hastings is here. He's gone past for the second time, and now he has seen us. He's coming with Weston. Quick!"

Before the astonished Lee could respond, Aunt Lu's eagle eye had seen Tom, who with Weston Kent was making his way toward this table.

"Talk of the devil!" she exclaimed, setting sweet potatoes before the already surfeited Asher, "and you'll hear his tail aswishing through the woods. Here's Tom Hastings, folks! My Land! Tom you've grown a lot both ways. Style too, city style! But I'd still like to whack ye for breaking the limbs of my oxheart cherry tree. Come on over here, Tom. Here's Emmie."

It seemed to Emmie as though her cup of bitterness was full to overflowing. Must she be shown up, here and now?

Then she saw Bunny Wells rise, and was surprised at the intensity of the look he gave her. Before she could analyze it Bunny had hailed Tom, and determinedly waved him toward Emmie.

Tom came striding through the crowd, smiling a greeting to all, and straight to Emmie. "Make room for me, will you, Aunt Lu? I caught sight of these people from the road and could hardly believe my eyes." He took both Aunt Lu's hands and kissed her smooth cheek. She gave a shriek of pretended rage.

"At his old tricks," she said, triumphantly to Emmie. "Tom, you always was a kissing bug and you ain't changed none. Fresh as ever, you are," and she gave him a push toward Emmie. "Kissing me right before Emmie Weston! Asher Turkle hump yourself right outa that chair and let Tom sit next to Emmie," but before Asher could move Bob Landon, to Bunny's disgust, rose and pressed Tom into his chair beside Lee.

"I'm completely stuffed, Hastings," he said, and as Lee looked up at him under her eyelashes, he looked back at her coolly. "Fed up," he added and moved away.

Aunt Lu was so busy thumping Asher and calling him "Slow-poke" that Emmie, still smiling, though with an effort she hoped would escape the others, saw what Aunt Lu did not see, Tom secure Lee's hand, and hold it tightly.

"I couldn't stay away," he was saying to Lee, while Emmie hoped he did not hear Aunt Lu's whisper in her ear.

"Emmie, no wonder Tom's still faithful. You look fresher'n paint in your New York clothes. You look grand!"

An arm stole round Emmie's neck. "Aunt Emmie," Weston said, as Aunt Lu moved away, "will you take me in. I'm perfectly miserable," he whispered.

Emmie rose to the occasion. "Surely," she whispered and returned his kiss. "Weston House is always home to you, dear boy. Don't be miserable."

He sank into the chair Aunt Lu had, at last, forced Asher to vacate. "Aunt Emmie," he asked in a low tone, almost a whisper, as Aunt Lu engaged Tom in conversation, "is someone making you miserable too?"

"Trying to," admitted Emmie briefly, as she realized that Aunt Lu had been drawn away by Lee and Tom and that Weston's presence might save the day for her this time, "but he won't succeed."

Aunt Lu put her hand on Weston's chair.

"Come, get up, my lad; this here's Tom Hastings' chair."

"Oh, no it's not," Emmie said cheerfully. "This is my boy's chair, Aunt Lu. Surely you know Weston Kent, May's son?"

"For the Sake of Peace!" Aunt Lu shrilled, placing the roast beef she had selected with loving care for Tom, in front of Weston. "Here's how a good woman loses her head. There's so many fine looking fellers in this here party of yours, Emmie, I just don't know how to act."

Bunny Wells saw, with pain, Emmie's quick look toward Tom Hastings and Lee, and Bob's frown in the same direction as, Asher having risen to intercept Aunt Lu, Bob dropped into his vacant chair between Sister Mink and Miss Emmie. Determined, at any cost, to switch Aunt Lu's attention from Emmie, Bunny leaned back in his chair and caught Aunt Lu's sleeve. "Have you deserted me, False and Fair? I'll throw myself in the canal or the river, whichever you say."

"My Land! You want more coffee, don't you Lamb?" She hustled off to get it, only to meet Asher's contemptuous look. He walked with her toward the coffee tank, lowering his voice. "Aunt Lu, widow or no widow, you should kinda hold yourself more contained like. You have throwed a good few personal words at me to-night. I don't take 'em too seriously, thank Providence, else I'd have to slam a plate or two again your head, a gentleman being held back be public opinion from tussling with a lady. I warn you, though, now and forevermore, to leave off the subject of Lib Candy and her feelings toward me, in public, completely. Likewise a little tact used on Miss Emmie wouldn't hurt you none."

"My Land of Love, Asher!" the kind woman exclaimed, totally unable to understand his position. "Isn't you a little interfering? You and Lib's affairs, I'll leave to yourself, but Miss Emmie's beau's come back and Emmie's no cause for complaint."

"Maybe not," said Asher darkly, "maybe not, but I see further than most. Yeah," he continued as Aunt Lu stared at him open-mouthed, "I'm a strong athaletic man, holding myself back in good control, but if that there Mr. Bob Landon,"—and he cast a sour look at the man who had taken his place,—"whom I like well enough in his way, seeks be a new car and otherwise to pry Miss Emmie's affections off'n Tom Hastings and then play fast and loose with them, he'll have to reckon with me."

A little wholesome vanity does for a woman what a great deal of self-respect does for a man. Wound that vanity and you take all the courage and color out of her life.

Emmietta could not sleep, for sleep means tranquility of mind as well as body, and Emmietta's vanity had been deeply wounded, and her mind was far from tranquil.

Only too clearly had Tom Hastings shown her that it was brickyards and Lee, or Lee and brickyards that brought him to East Penniwell. It didn't matter which—it was certainly not Emmietta Weston, and but for Bunny Wells' tact, that fact would have been apparent to more than Emmie herself.

Emmie's face softened as she thought of Bunny. What a wonderful person he was! Wonderful to look at, too. Emmie remembered his face in the moonlight, as he skillfully maneuvered the party so that Emmie, Lee and Weston returned with Bob in the new car, while Bunny and his inseparable companions, Annie and Sister Mink, rode with Tom, leaving Asher to rattle home alone.

Miserable as she was, Emmie had had to laugh a little as she remembered Tom's face when the arrangement had first been broached to him. Tom had been game, but only too plainly had Emmie seen that it had been his purpose to carry off Lee in his car, and that he felt not to do so was a waste of good moonlight.

Emmie rose and went to her window, sat down in the moonlight and looked out. Something must be done, and soon, or Tom would betray her to the village.

At that Emmie laughed. What a fool she was! How could Lee take Tom from her, since Tom had never been hers! There in the moonlight Emmie faced her problem, only to find that there was no problem! Only the truth to see—and face. The attitude of Tom at the church supper had quite surely lifted any veil of romance she had chosen to drape about that very commonplace and matter of fact person, Tom Hastings. Tom wanted his brickyards. Brickyards and Lee, if he could get both, but certainly brickyards, and all he asked from Emmie was that she give them to him.

And brickyards were all Emmie had to give him. She faced that, too. After all, if she were honest, she must admit that the one-sided romance, which she had spun about a mythical Tom Hastings, had done for her much more than anything else in her life. It had lifted her out of the humdrum of village life. It had pricked her into going out into the world. It had saved her from being a drab, ill-dressed, frumpy looking woman. It had kept her alive, so that she could interest, and find interesting people like Bob Landon, Lee, Bunny. She might well be grateful to her lost romance for that alone.

She went, in the moonlight, to her mirror, and looked at the pale reflection of herself.

"Even the moonlight shows, Emmie Weston," she whispered, "that you're a lot better looking than you were three months ago, though you are not as young as Lee."

She went slowly across the room and got into bed, but not unhappily. Her mind was fully made up at last. She felt serene and at peace. Tom should have his brickyards.

Then suddenly Emmie sat bolt upright and gasped. She had not wanted to think about *that*. She had hoped that was safely buried—even in her own mind. But Lee Lansing could not be allowed to marry Tom Hastings without knowing what only Emmie and Tom knew.

Color came to Emmie's cheeks. How dare Tom treat her as he was treating her? How dare he forget, when she had kept this secret for him all these eighteen years. Why, she held Tom Hastings in the hollow of her hand!

But saner thoughts came, and Emmie considered her attitude. Was it jealousy that made her think she must tell Lee Lansing about Tom? She must be very sure that nothing so small and mean be allowed to enter into her attitude toward Tom and Lee. Emmie was drawn to Lee. Somehow, for all Lee's modernness, for all her lack of so many qualities that in Emmie's day had been the "marks of a lady," Emmie liked Lee. Better than she had ever imagined she could like any girl, she liked this one, who was making Weston miserable and was about to take Tom away.

Emmie thought it over long and carefully and finally came to her conclusion. She would give Tom his brickyards, and if that was all he wanted, well and good. Tom could walk his path unmolested, unreminded by an Emmie whom he had

relegated to the background. But, if he wanted Lee too, then Emmie would speak. At all costs, Lee must be protected. Her way clear, Emmie put her hand under her cheek, turned away from the moonlight, and composed herself to sleep.

In his room across the hall, Tom Hastings woke from a sound sleep, and thought of Lee. Not hotly and passionately, as young Weston had, before he fell into the deep sleep of youth, troubled with dreams, yet Tom's thoughts were not too calm. He thought how sweet Lee had looked to-night in the midst of "that bunch", as he designated the group he had found at the supper. He thought how Lee would adorn the home he meant to have here in the East. He thought several other rather broad but satisfactory thoughts about matrimony in general, and Lee in particular, and turned over on his pillow, and settled himself to sleep. The girl was pretty, the girl was clever, and the girl did not seem to find him disagreeable, while her mother was distinctly encouraging.

Tom had arrived at the stage of maturity when he looked upon matrimony as his just reward for remaining single so long. He had accumulated enough for himself and others now. His business was satisfactorily filling his business hours. He could always provide himself with temporary amusement, but temporary amusement was beginning to lose its appeal. It would be rather nice to have a fireside of one's own, nice to stay at home once in so often, and yet not be alone, but most engagingly companioned by some girl, preferably Lee.

Lee, with her radiant young thoughts of life and matrimony, would hardly have been pleased. It is difficult for the young and passionate to understand that this life is full of nice, agreeable people who are seldom passionate, who may never know passion, in its stark reality, and yet are most delightful, easy companions, ready to simulate, when it is demanded of them, the effect of passion. Lee, like most romantic young persons, thought everybody had, at one time, felt as she did.

Across the hall from Lee's room, Bob Landon stared at the ceiling, hating Lee so heartily that his handsome face was twisted into the resemblance of a Japanese mask. But presently he too slept, heavily, dreamlessly.

On the other side of the door from Bob, Bunny, his arms above his head, thought about Emmie until he fell asleep. Bunny's thoughts—and he laughed at himself at he realized it—were all plans for rescuing Emmie from the mercenary and indifferent Tom Hastings. He laughed because the man who rescued her was always Bunny Wells, and he was lame and poor.

Emmie was the last to fall asleep, and New York having undermined her good, or bad, country habit of being first at the breakfast table, and the loss of her night's sleep having, she feared, spoiled some of the effects of Calla's careful treatment for the hair and face, she bathed and returned to bed until Lib appeared with coffee and toast.

"Everybody's down but Weston and Miss Lee and Miss Lee's having hers in bed, same as you. Wes, he ain't awake, yet. I hadn't the heart to pound any harder on the door than what I did."

"Let the poor lamb sleep."

"Yeah," Lib agreed. "I thought so, too. Say, Miss Emmie, is Mr. Tom Hastings gonna stay here until Monday?"

"Why not?"

Lib stood, her lips pursed, smoothing the doily on the tray, without speaking for a moment, and then with a swift look at her mistress, said reluctantly, "Of course, Miss Emmie, if you think it's safe. I ain't saying anything, but between you and me East Penniwell's getting just a bit kinda restive."

Emmie moved impatiently. Lib looked at her intelligently and said, "Silly, of course, to modern wimmen like me and you. We don't care much for the speech of people, but East Penniwell ain't any too modern, and if we are to live here, Miss Emmie, you and me's got to show East Penniwell. Of course, in a measure, so to speak," Lib tried to look modest, "I've got Asher where I want him. If ever a man's had the fear of God put into him, it's that man. But I took a sorta vow on meself, Miss Emmie, that I'd keep Asher on the waiting list until your affairs was something near kinda settled."

Miss Emmie gave a little exclamation. She was disconcerted.

Lib nodded, "Yeah, I know it was chancy, but I got faith in you, Emmie Weston, even if things are looking dark just at present."

She looked at Emmie for some kind of expression, but as Emmie, who was in reality struggling to keep her annoyance

down and her memory of Lib's faithfulness uppermost, said nothing, Lib burst into speech.

"My Good Mercies! Miss Emmie, why did you haul that girl down here?"

Emmie looked at her in surprise. "Tom wouldn't come without her."

"My Land! Bad as that!"

Miss Emmie helped herself to some toast.

Lib's brows drew together. "That girl's about as safe in a house full of men as a can of kerosene and a lighted match. Here's Wes, sick with love for her, and Mr. Tom, well he ain't in love with anybody but himself yet, but he's got an idea that he's after her in his head, and then Mr. Bob. That's what I can't forgive her for."

"Bob Landon!"

"Yeah, Miss Emmie, what's she done to him, and where did she meet him before?"

"Lib!"

Lib nodded. "Directly I seen it. First time you introduced them I said to myself, kinda funny they don't say nothing like 'You again, hey?' or some such passing remark or 'Sure I have met up with you before haven't I?' But no, nothing—just straight black looks at each other. And she's always stopping Mr. Wells on the stairs and saying things to him. He's soft as butter about her, too. Miss Emmie, it was a black day that you brought that girl home here with you. Believe me, she'll upset the apple-cart."

"No," said Emmie determinedly, but she took a sip or two of hot coffee before she looked at Lib and announced firmly, "No, she can't do me any great harm, Lib."

"She can prevent Tom Hastings marrying you," declared Lib, brutally, believing that this pose of Miss Emmie's was not to be safely borne. "My Gracious Mercies, woman! You can't beat a girl like that. You are wonderful improved, Miss Emmie. You can dress with the best of 'em, and you don't look your age, but she's an awful good-looking girl and she's young. I hope to goodness you ain't overestimating your powers."

Emmie withdrew into herself. She said nothing, but calmly ate her toast and drank her coffee as though Lib was not in the room. It was her severest way of punishing Lib.

Lib flushed. "Miss Emmie, I may have been too forward like, but—but I got a lot at stake, too."

Instantly Emmie repented. "Yes, I know, Lib, but you've got to trust me, and you've got to let me do things my own way. You can stand by to help when I need help, and I'll need it before this is over, but you must not ask me questions or expect me to talk. What one talks about, Lib, one seldom does."

Lib nodded and with a last look at Emmie and a shake of her head went out of the room.

Left to herself Emmie finished her breakfast in silence and proceeded to make herself as beautiful as possible. Despite the agitated night, she succeeded very well indeed. The Emmie that presently went down stairs and found Tom, Bob Landon and Weston examining and discussing the new car, took East Penniwell's breath away.

"My Land! Look at Emmie Weston!" was the signal in more than one household for all housework to be neglected while the feminine members hurried to the windows.

Her gown was blue, and it was modish, and it became Emmie well, and her hat was of the same lovely tint, and her shoes and stockings had cost much more than any shoes and stockings that had ever been worn in East Penniwell before, and they looked it.

Miss Emmie surveyed her world for a moment and smiled. Weston looked at her and thought: "Aunt Emmie's a peach, but I hope she isn't silly enough to think these men are after anything but her money."

The look in his eyes made Emmie pause. "He thinks I'm an old, foolish girl. Well, I think he's a foolish, young boy, so I suppose it's even." But she wished for a moment, with a strength that appalled her, that there was one person in the world

who would take her for what she was, and understand. Understand her without qualifications, was what she said to herself, but she meant love.

Just for a moment she hesitated. The desire to send them all away, the sudden desire to let everything go, cease striving and sink back into her old half-dead existence in East Penniwell, almost overcame her. Of what use was it to strive to please these who would not be pleased with what she brought. Then the *something* that is older than the world we know, stronger than we are ourselves, the thing that makes even the most hardened skeptic at times believe in immortality, made her stoop to her burden again. Without hope, without belief, promising no happiness, this *something* bids us go on. There was no going back for Emmie. Her feet were set forward on the road. To go back was death to all her desires.

"Mr. Landon, I'll look over your estimates, while Tom and Weston show Asher the car." She turned to the others with the spirit of mischief alive in her eyes.

For the first time Tom had a thrill when he looked at Emmie Weston. He thought he was seeing once more the Emmie Weston he used to know—the Emmie Weston of Lee's age, without Lee's sophistication.

"Asher thinks the car belongs to Mr. Landon. He thinks he is condemned for life to drive the flivver. Now I want you to call him, go over the car with him when I am inside, and don't let him know until I appear that it's mine. Let him praise it to the limit, as he will as long as he thinks it is not mine. If he knew I had bought it, he would find all sorts of fault with it. When he has hopelessly committed himself, then I'll call it mine."

She went toward the house with Bob Landon.

"By George, Weston, your aunt's stunning to-day!" Tom said enthusiastically.

Weston flushed. "Aunt Emmie's all right, but she's a little soft-hearted. I'd hate to see her taken advantage of."

"Who's trying it?" Tom asked amused. "Seems to me that Emmie Weston knows how to look after herself."

Weston said nothing until, after whistling and signalling to Asher at the barn, he at last made him reluctantly realize that the signals were meant for him. As Asher began to make his way very slowly toward them, Weston said, "I know that's how it seems, but Aunt Emmie's really very helpless. She believes in everybody and everybody takes advantage. Look at this big oaf coming toward us—skeptical, opinionated, and conceited. Aunt Emmie treats him as though he were pure gold, and she was afraid of breaking him."

"I don't know. Seems to me she has just the right way with these country people. These, my boy, are our own people, the real Americans, proud and conceited maybe, but faithful and honest. While their manners lack something, when you contrast them with trained servants, still when you consider them as friends and helpers, as Emmie evidently does, and know, as she knows, that they would do for her more than any carefully trained hireling in the city, why I think it's rather splendid the way Emmie manages.

"One thing she does that's remarkable," Tom continued, as Weston failed to agree with him. "She keeps them satisfied with service here, though they eat at their own table, not ours, and they call her 'Miss Emmie'."

"Why shouldn't they?" Weston demanded hotly.

Tom smiled. "Watch Asher and you will soon learn. I'm an important man in my own way, Wes, and you are your mother's son, but neither Asher Turkle nor Zebra Ballins will 'mister' us behind our backs, or even to our faces. They will call us Wes and Tom."

Weston opened his mouth to speak and then closed it, as Asher slouched toward him.

"What's the matter, young Wes?" His tone was not conciliatory. "I have gotta tend to that there old rattling coffee-pot Miss Emmie calls a machine, and I gotta lot to do to it, too, and Miss Emmie won't think much of you if you and Tom Hastings here keeps me from me work."

Refraining carefully from looking at Weston, who was speechless at this corroboration of Tom's statement concerning their Christian names, Tom said, quietly, "Miss Emmie told me to have you look over this car carefully, Asher, and asked me to show you how it was run."

"Show me!" groaned Asher. "My Land! I have been negglecting my other duties just to get the hang of the thing. Ain't she a beaut' though, and ain't her engine sweet?"

He bent over the car, fingering the mechanism with loving care. Tom, with a sly wink at the silent Weston, began leading him on to expatiate upon the different parts. Presently they were in the car and Asher, greatly interested, at the wheel, began his trial run.

In the dining room Bob and Emmie Weston went carefully over the estimates. Emmie discussed with him the advisability of beginning the work at once. They could begin to-morrow to dine in the living room, at the end nearest the kitchen.

The dining room plaster was to be removed. Bob was sure that the rafters so exposed would prove to be the original old hand hewn beams taken from the Weston woods, when the first Weston in East Penniwell built his house. Miss Emmie shared his belief, and also his desire to see if behind the wall plaster was hidden a Colonial fireplace. Bob was sure of this.

"The chimney, the old one from the kitchen, would take care of this room. Moreover, the stove hole shows that they boarded it up and plastered over it to prevent draughts along the floor. If it is, as I think, a small fireplace, Miss Emmie, we will paint it black and rebrick it, if the old bricks are worn."

Their fifteen minutes had become thirty, still their enthusiasm had not waned, when Weston's whistle, insistent and repeated, made Emmie start. She went to the window.

"Look!"

Bob turned from his beloved plans.

Asher, his face flushed with excitement, his cap gone, his ashen blonde hair, streaked with gray, standing up, was driving the car toward the house. Tom, sitting beside him, waved at Miss Emmie.

"Is that all for the morning?"

"Yes," said Bob and hesitated.

Emmie noted the hesitation, and had a feeling that he wanted to tell her something important, but though she waited a moment he said nothing.

"Then I'll go on to my next business interview." She started toward the door and then came back slowly.

"Mr. Landon," Emmie spoke rather quickly, "if I should arrange this deal with Mr. Hastings about the brickyard, and he should agree to employ my architect, as construction manager and architect for his buildings, so that I would be sure they would be—well—not an eye-sore to East Penniwell—would you take the job? If I can make it come about naturally and it is worth your while?"

Bob looked at her. "And give up the house?" he asked.

"Oh no, take it on in addition. You see I'd like to keep you—and Mr. Wells here."

Bob flushed. "I say, Miss Emmie, you are frightfully good. I'd jump at the chance."

Emmie clapped her hands. "Well, say nothing and I'll see what I can do."

A determined woman may not be able to move mountains herself, but she can get the man-power to help her shove.

Emmie went down the steps in a mood to dance down them instead of walking. It would be heavenly if she could get Bunny Wells and Bob Landon to stay in East Penniwell. What wouldn't it mean to have them for neighbors when she came back home. When she came back? She went thoughtfully over to where the new car stood.

Weston and Tom had alighted, but Asher was still at his post. Asher's voice was hoarse with emotion. "My Guy, Miss Emmie, it's a peacherino of a car! The angel Gabriel couldn't ask for any better if he gave up his wings and came down here for a stretch."

Miss Emmie came nearer, a sweet but sly look upon her face. She asked Asher a question or two about the car. He bent to explain.

Against the kitchen window, Lib flattened her nose and watched the scene. "Now what is Miss Emmie after?" she asked Morphy. "She's gettin' round Asher for something. Lord knows whether it's for her good or his."

"M'm," Morphy murmured, "whatever 'tis Miss Emmie's after, she boun' git. Ol' Asshuh, nor no man kin stop her. Ma' old granmaw says Miss Emmietter's a requiring woman. Yes'm, eve'y thing Miss Emmie requires she gits."

Asher's voice rose as he sung his psalm of praise. The most enthusiastic motor salesman could never have said as much. Emmie listened, her hand playing with the handle of one of the doors.

"It would be nice to have a sedan like this for rainy weather, wouldn't it, Asher, or do you think a touring car would be better? It would be cheaper, you know."

"Nice! My Good Gravy! and *then* some more, Miss Emmie! It would be just plain Heaven to set in this here car, the rain coming on the outside and nothing coming in, and to hear other drivers passin' remarks on its make and all. A little beaut' she is. Mr. Bob, there, had good taste."

"He didn't have much to do with it," Emmie remarked absently.

Tom, his hands in his pockets, looked at her puzzled.

"Then who did if he didn't?" roared Asher belligerently. "It's his car, ain't it? It's a man's car, anybody could see that. No woman woulda had the sense to choose the likes of this car, without running something like a red line round the body, or putting in some kinda silly device for powderin' her nose while it was goin' full speed. Miss Emmie, if ever you gets so you think you can part with that there old coffee-pot you seem to set so much store by," and Asher groaned, "let some man go out with you and choose your next. For God knows a woman wandering round in them automobile salesrooms with one of them gabby salesman telling her things is what they ain't, and showin' her maybe white painted cars that would take a man a day to clean up, or a pale lemon color, now, that shows every spot instead of a sweet steady color like this here blue."

Miss Emmie came nearer. "A woman chose this car, Asher. At least she bought it."

Asher's face darkened. "Oh, yes," he said. "I see what ye mean, Miss Emmie. Mr. Bob, he likely took a woman along with him, and she gave him the high sign that it was a good car and she's like to ride in it. Sure she would. What woman wouldn't? It's a car for a queen."

"You can't think of any other you'd like better?" Emmie surveyed him gravely. "It would be your choice, too, if you were buying a car, say for me?"

"You bet you, Miss Emmie. If I had my choice of all the cars there is made to-day, this here would be the one I'd lay me hand on and take."

Miss Emmie lifted smiling eyes to his. "Splendid, Asher! Then you'll be glad to know that it isn't Mr. Bob's car."

"Not Mr. Bob's?"

"No, it's mine. I bought it, I chose it, and you're to drive it, Asher."

Asher gazed at her. "Honest?" he asked, and looked over Miss Emmie's head to the men for confirmation. They nodded.

Miss Emmie waited. She had known Asher for years but never had she known him to accept anything without a proviso covering future complaints. Could it possibly be that this time she had so forestalled him that complaints were out of the question? She hoped but she doubted.

Asher Turkle was not to be so put upon by any woman. Slowly he put his hand on the steering wheel and surveyed the car. "Well, Miss Emmie, ye did pretty well for a woman," he said, regretfully. "I'd a chosen a leetle larger wheel, and had a rubber cover put on it such as Harry McGibbon's got on his car. They keep a sweaty hand from slippin'."

The car moved slowly under his hand toward the garage. Miss Emmie dared not look at Tom yet. Then Weston precipitated the climax.

"Well," he shouted joyfully, "you've got a car that ought to be a credit to any driver, and a woman chose it, and a woman bought it, Asher. You can't get back of that."

"No," yelled Asher, his eyes on the wheel, "I can't. But it was a man that made her, and a man that drives her, Wes Kent, and say, you listen carefully while I drive off. Isn't there the least tinky teenty knock in her engine?"

He was both startled and shocked at the roar of laughter that greeted his ears. Emmie had looked at Tom.

Leaving Weston to deal with Asher, Tom turned to Emmie.

"Emmie, when do I get my brickyards?"

It had come, but Emmie met the direct question with equal directness.

"To-day, Tom, if you will satisfy John Fair that you'll agree to my conditions. I'll see him now," and she smiled up at Tom.

"That's very satisfactory, Emmie," Tom said appreciatively. "Much obliged."

And though he said it gratefully, Emmie knew that he was dismissing her from his mind until after he had seen John Fair. She laughed softly to herself. "Oh, Tom, dinner is at seven to-night, and as that's very late for East Penniwell, don't forget, when you are off with Lee."

Damn it, how did this woman manage to read his thoughts! Tom wondered if she were jealous, as he watched her cross the street to John Fair's office, conscious that his feelings toward Emmie had undergone considerable change since he first set out to buy his brickyards. She was charming. A sympathetic woman, good to look upon and gracious in manner, and, moreover, she was a personage in her own town, indeed in her county.

Tom began to remember that the name of Weston was one held in great respect throughout the county. Unconsciously the old land, the old people whom he had almost forgotten, had woven a spell about him. More and more he became conscious of the fact that Emmie Weston and he were old friends. He began to waver a little in his allegiance. Granted that Lee was younger, Emmie's personality made a strong appeal to Tom. Well, if Lee wouldn't, though that possibility seemed remote, Emmie would.

From the vantage point of the open garage door, Asher observed his mistress step forth and go toward Lawyer Fair's office. Asher, recovering his composure, had seated himself on a keg of nails, and Zebra had suspended all operations in order that they might discuss women in general, and the one who paid their wages in particular.

"Miss Emmie's getting better looking every day," old Zebra declared, "and high-stepping. She's the high-steppingest woman in these parts. Got plenty to make her so, too. Gentlemen here and there waiting on her hand and foot."

"Yeah," grumbled Asher, "and what makes them so attentive to her? J'ever think of that? The money what a man made and lef her. Ever think of that?"

"Course I has thought of that," Zebra chuckled. "Then I have thought again. How come he make that money? Grounding down women. Miss Emmie and her Ma too—whilst she was living, and whilst he was saving and laying up. Then the

good Lo'd he lay him to rest and says, 'Now, Mr. Man what thought money was everything and women, what I made, was nothing but you' bounden slaves, you just peer over them clouds, man, and watch you' money being spent by woman. I ain't sending you to Hell, Eli Weston, I just asking you to watch that money fly, in new cars, and fixing up house, and dresses and what not.'" He chuckled again. "Guess old Eli wishes now he had lef' few hundred to you and me, what serve him well."

Asher waved his hands in despair as he went to get the car. "Women left so well fixed think they kin leave out a man entirely. Something's wrong."

Lawyer Fair agreed with Asher's "Something's wrong" when he looked at Emmie as she came in. She looked, he thought, lovely. Fair had always admired Emmie and continued to do so. Nothing she did seemed amiss to him, and while to his neighbors she seemed to be spending recklessly he knew that she was well within her income, and he liked the way she did things.

He listened now, his eyes fixed on her animated face, as she went over Tom's proposition, rapidly and clearly. It was eminently business-like, and yet Fair knew that Emmie was not satisfied. "Something's wrong," he said to himself, "something's wrong here."

Then she told him her conditions. He whistled at the price per acre she asked. Emmie looked at him sharply. "Always when dealing with Tom, John Fair, remember we are not selling farming land, we are selling land that I am not particularly anxious to part with, and which Tom Hastings wants for industrial purposes. Therefore we raise it to proportionate industrial prices, and at that it's lower than he could get the same land nearer a city. That's the bottom price. Get more if you can."

There spoke Eli's daughter, Fair thought. He smiled, made his memorandum, and waited, and as Emmie said nothing, repeated:

"Then the conditions are that the buildings front the road, that where the brick process is liable to render the outlook unsightly he build a wall, fence, or plant a hedge. He must not make that part of the highway near East Penniwell an eyesore, and for the buildings and his workmen's cottages you wish Mr. Landon to be retained as architect, if he and Mr. Hastings can come to terms."

"If they can't," Emmie interrupted, "then the deal is not to go through, until Mr. Hastings and I have again consulted about the buildings and the property. I have every confidence in Mr. Landon's ideas, you see. I am not sure of any other man. Anyway, those are my conditions. Mr. Hastings can take them or leave them."

Fair's heart sank a little as he listened. This wasn't the tone of a woman who was going to marry Tom Hastings. "Something's wrong," he said to himself again. "Something's wrong."

"Now about the old smithy. Mr. Wells will call, and as father let it to Brierson for ten dollars a month—"

"But that was years ago!"

"It's ten a month still," Emmie was decided. "If I put in a bathroom and paint it up a little, it's fifteen a month."

Fair opened his mouth to speak, but Emmie was quicker. "You see I like Mr. Wells. He's such an interesting man, I want him here for East Penniwell's sake, as well as my own. Better fifteen a month than nothing; better a thriving shop in East Penniwell and a good citizen like Mr. Wells, than an empty shop and no entertaining neighbors. You like him too, John Fair, and so does Hal." Hal was John's boy.

Fair laughed. "You have your head screwed on, Emmie, but this isn't business—it's pleasure."

"Of course, and one always has to pay for one's pleasures."

Fair gave her a slightly anxious look. Did Emmie know what she was doing to that nice fellow Wells, he wondered.

Emmie caught the look and was annoyed at John; then at herself. Surely she was old enough to be friendly with a man like Bunny Wells, without being accused of folly. Anyway, gossip would not prevent her keeping Bunny Wells in East Penniwell, by any means in her power. He was not only the most interesting man she knew—but the handsomest.

"Are you going to stay down here, Emmie?"

"I don't know yet, but I will soon."

"And Tom?" asked Fair, hesitatingly.

"Tom? Oh, Tom will do as he likes." Then she smiled suddenly. "No, Tom will do as I like, or Tom will go."

And at that she left the subject and Fair, to Fair's bewilderment. Nothing more to be gotten from Emmie. He knew her of old. To question her, when she did not want or mean to be questioned, was to get nothing, less than nothing.

He watched Emmie as she crossed the street, saw her meet Tom, and indicate the Fair office, saw Tom come toward his door, as Emmie went toward the old smithy.

Fair sighed as he turned from the window and then smiled, as he saw that Sister Mink had been watching too, and had hurried agitatedly toward the glassed-in-porch to inform Miss Annie of impending disaster. For, with Miss Emmie as a rival, though Bunny Wells' market value, in the eyes of East Penniwell, might increase, Miss Annie's "chances" would decrease. He turned to his desk, and studied the memoranda he had made of Emmie's conditions, striving to reduce them to a strictly legal phraseology before he offered them to Tom.

Miss Emmie had reached the smithy only to find Asher there, his owl-like gaze fixed on Lee and Bunny.

"What ye counting on doing with this here junk pile?" he was inquiring amiably.

"Nothing yet," Bunny told him calmly, while Lee's eyes danced. "But the East Penniwell 'Antic' shop is going to be planted here, and I will also display samples of Mr. Tom Hastings' East Penniwell bricks, when made, in the windows, for a consideration."

Asher laughed. "Oh, yeah, I kin see a joke as well as the next man! You can't make an antic shop pay here."

"Can't I? Wait and see."

"Miss Emmie," Bunny said eagerly as he saw her, "there are four or five good rooms at the back, which could be made fit for bachelor housekeeping—and a fireplace! There is also a loft above."

"Yes," Miss Emmie agreed, smiling, "and there is also a garden in the rear and a lovely well. You could easily pump water into the house and transform one of the smaller rooms into a bathroom."

"I'll have to go slowly, until I find out about the rent."

"The owner might put in the bath for a little extra rent," Emmie hinted. "The rent now is ten dollars a month."

"What!" chorused Bunny and Lee.

"Oh, Miss Emmie, darling," said Lee. "Is that true?"

Emmie nodded.

"My word!" Bunny was astonished. "Is it possible that anyone can get anything nowadays for ten dollars a month?"

"Of course, if the owners put in improvements," Emmie went on, "it would naturally be more."

"Naturally," Bunny agreed, "but such a reasonable man would undoubtedly be reasonable about improvements. How soon, Miss Emmie, can I have speech with this paragon of landlords? For, at that rent, I could hold on for about a year and give my shop time to pay its way."

"Great!" Lee declared. "And Asher, where is your business head not to see that right here on the high road it will attract attention, and in the summer time, with the wide smithy doors open, and the interior representing an early American living room, Henry Ford, and other lesser money-bags, will be stopping, admiring, buying. With bright cushions, and an attractive sign—Bunny, your fortune's made."

"Ford!" Asher gaped at them. "Henry Ford!" He looked from Miss Emmie to the others. "Yeah, I'm laughing, too! My

Good Guy! Ford buying anything second-hand!" He looked again at the others, and seeing no echo of his pretended mirth, added graciously, "At that I kin see *something* in a good junk-shop, with antics as a side line."

"Something? Everything!" Bunny told him. "Strictly between ourselves, Asher, I paid a dollar yesterday for two pairs of ancient salt cellars, which I can easily sell for twenty dollars apiece. They are the genuine article. Thanks to Miss Annie Mink."

"Mercy, Bunny!" Lee exclaimed, with a side glance at Asher, who remained silent, pretending to coil up some rusty wire. "Will it be safe?"

"What?"

"The shop, with Miss Annie so near?"

"Perfectly," Bunny assured her. "Asher has promised to protect me. He knows the ways of women. Everytime Miss Annie comes down the street, without Sister, and with an eye toward spending some time in the shop, Asher's going to break forth from the garage. He can watch the shop from the doorway."

"Yeah," Asher asserted, with a glance at Miss Emmie, "and I'll be along, too. It may work out to be a little hard on you, Miss Emmie, at first, as it'll kinda interrupt me work, but it will be safe for you, Mr. Bunny. No man in this here town is going to see a poor cripple put upon by an able-bodied female like Miss Annie."

"I don't know," Miss Emmie said softly, before Lee had quite recovered, "how the plan will work out, but I'm sure I hear Lib calling you, Asher." She watched him slowly lounge toward the house before she said, "I'm glad the old smithy will make your fortune, Mr. Wells."

"Not a fortune," Bunny corrected, "but a living, and contentment withal. It will be worth more than dollars to me, if I can manage my life, and reduce Bob's over-head a little. Nobody knows all the sacrifices that man has made for me, and I don't want him to make any more."

Lee Lansing moved away abruptly and went to the locked door of the smithy. She stood there a moment fingering the old bolt, and then without turning called, "Only see, Miss Emmie-darling, the hinges and bolts are hand made, and that's worth money to Bunny. When he has the place painted all these things will stand out, and show to advantage. Can't you see it, with a fireplace, hooked rugs, rag carpet, orange curtains, which I am going to give him, in the windows? Won't it be ducky? Through the windows you will be able to see the old rafters, and those frightfully useful shelves, that can hold his treasures."

"I know it all," Emmie answered without moving. "I have played there many a day, when it was a blacksmith's shop—with Tom Hastings," she added, glancing at Lee, but Lee did not seem to hear her.

"Go to Mr. Fair, the lawyer, now," she told Bunny, "and he will fix up the lease for you. You might consult him about the improvements. If you can get it painted and fixed up a little for you, you wouldn't mind paying fifteen dollars a month, would you?"

"Would I? Lee, you had better go with me to see Mr. Fair, and keep me from kissing him when he makes out the lease."

Lee was still laughing gaily, as Emmie left them and went thoughtfully toward the house.

Asher was waiting at the gateway, an anxious look in his eyes. He followed Miss Emmie a few steps before he spoke.

"John Fair, he's your own lawyer, Miss Emmie?"

"Yes, but neither Mr. Wells nor Miss Lee know that yet, Asher. Keep it to yourself."

"Miss Emmie, you can't afford to go round playing providence to all the nist, though lame, young men hereabouts."

"Asher, you heard me tell you Lib was calling you."

"Yeah, Miss Emmie, but that was a kinda figger of speech, for she ain't. I ain't so dumb, neither, that I don't understand ye. I'm versed in the ways of wimmen, but I feel a kinda responsibility fer you. You'll git the sharp tongues of people on ye if you go round helping young men that's as old as you be. Mr. Bunny's full your age."

"What!" Emmie was startled out of her determination to put Asher in his place, by this interesting bit of news. "I thought him much younger. You're mistaken, Asher."

"No, Mam, Miss Emmie, he told me himself. Mr. Bob's the younger, yit because Mr. Bunny's delicat' he's been kind of babied, but he's full thirty-six or seven."

"It's better to have a paying shop in East Penniwell," Emmie declared, "than a tumble-down empty smithy, and wonderful to have a man like Mr. Wells as a neighbor."

"Neighbor!" Asher echoed. Then, as he saw Miss Emmie's face, he went toward the house, shaking his head. "What'll Mr. Tom Hastings say about such a neighbor?" he asked himself. "My good Peanuts! I wish things was settled. How'm I gonna comport myself—if I don't know which man, or if any, is gonna be boss?"



From the eye of the curious servant, no mistress is safe.

Considerably annoyed with Asher, Miss Emmie was not pleased, when she came to the kitchen with her dinner order, to find Lib and Asher facing each other over the table. Asher was calmly engaged on a large piece of pie.

"Miss Emmie," he began as she came in, "I have been kinda overlooking the machine and it does seem to me that it needs a little oil. If you'd taken me with you at the time of buying, I coulda had a lot of things done."

"Nonsense, Asher. You can't hunt a grievance now, and bother Lib, or me, with your grouching. We both heard you last night and this morning simply pouring out praises whenever the car came in sight. You thought it was Mr. Landon's car then. Now you know it is mine and you are bound to pick faults. Well, pick them where I can't hear them."

As Asher shifted his feet and opened his mouth, Miss Emmie continued hurriedly, "You've got a beautiful car to run, and I expect it to be beautifully driven. Also, Asher, I expect a collar and tie on my driver, and his hair brushed, likewise his clothes. Come for me, or Mr. Landon, at the station again, with nothing but a brass collar button holding you together, and I'll buy a regular chauffeur's uniform and *make you wear it.*"

Asher rose, a fragment of apple pie still clinging to his lip. He started to speak, his mouth opened and shut, but the audacity of the woman had really taken his breath away. Then, just as he got ready to launch his retort, Lib laughed.

Without a word Asher strode out of the kitchen and into the garage. There he routed out old Zebra, who was stacking the wood he had been cutting, and poured forth his soul on the subject of women. His voice rose and fell in the denunciation.

Bob Landon at his window, figuring out the alterations he meant to make in the old dining room, leaned out to hear the choicest gems.

In the kitchen Lib and Emmie faced each other, Lib with her apron at her mouth.

"Land sake, Miss Emmie, that was mean of me," she said, "but My Saints! you certainly did shut off his cries."

"Lib, my hand is against every man to-day. Get the best dinner you ever made in your life, for I want them all in good humor." She glanced out of the window and saw that Bunny and Lee were leaving the Fair doorway.

Lib nodded. "I know what you are up to about Mr. Bunny, and I'm with you. We gotta keep that nist young man here and do for him a little, Miss Emmie. He's the salt of the earth." She was about to add, "and he's awful fond of you," but thought better of it.

"That's why you've got to make a specially good dinner, Lib. Because I am going to try to keep Mr. Bob down here, too."

Lib looked at her oddly. "Miss Emmie, I overheard something I didn't ought to, yesterday, on the stairs. I can't state it to you, 'cept only to say that it was Mr. Bob cussing out Miss Lee to Mr. Bunny. Mr. Bunny seemed to be taking her part, but nothing would do Mr. Bob. You wouldn't believe them lips of his would let loose the words he did let loose. I was surprised. The long and short of what I gathered, and Lord knows it was a temptation to set and hear more, was that if she stayed—he went."

Miss Emmie looked puzzled. "I wish I knew why."

"My Land! So do I. Sweet'n innocent she looks, but she's been up to something that Mr. Bob can't forgive. Something—not very nice."

"Lib! I like the girl. Why isn't it something not very nice that Bob Landon may have been up to himself? Men are often very much against women to whom they haven't been—quite fair."

"Maybe," but Lib looked doubtful. "In that case the girl didn't ought to look like a whipped cat at the sight of the man. Miss Lee had been up in her bedroom bawling, just before lunch, and she never spoke or looked at Mr. Bob at noon-time. I sure would like to know what's going on. And," she looked at Emmie for a moment, as though doubtful whether or not to continue, then, "Miss Emmie do me the favor to listen to that." She held the door open and indicated the living room, while Emmie went toward the door.

Emmie stood at the foot of her own stairs, and all her bravery seemed to ebb away and leave only an anxious woman who wished she had some one to tell her what to do. For she could hear very plainly that Tom and Weston were "having words," as Lib whispered to her.

"Dear knows, Miss Emmie, what it's all about, but it began a minute ago when Mr. Tom came back from Lawyer Fair's, and it's been going on hot ever since."

Emmie dismissed Lib with a gesture, and stood there waiting. She could not hear the words but the voices were loud and angry. She went quickly to the doorway leading to the kitchen and called Lib again.

"Where are the others?"

"Mr. Bob's in the library. Miss Lee is still with Mr. Bunny. My Land! Miss Emmie, you ain't gonna let that nist Mr. Bunny live in that there old tumble-down place?"

Emmie gave no attention. "I may have to go up myself if that doesn't stop," she said. "Don't let anyone in without warning me, Lib. We don't want the sound of *that* to get abroad."

The voices were raised again.

"Has Asher heard them?" asked Emmie.

"No, thank the good Lord! He's out in the garage. Morphy's down to store," she added.

Miss Emmie sighed and walked again toward the stairs, not resolutely but dispiritedly. As she mounted the first two steps, Tom's door opened and Weston came out rather hurriedly, his face flushed and his hair rumped. He paused at the sight of Emmie and came down toward her.

"Aunt Emmie!"

"Weston, what's wrong?"

"Nothing much. I've been having—having a talk with *your* friend,"—and his emphasis was significant,—"Mr. Tom Hastings."

Emmie looked at him gravely. "I hope Weston," she said quietly, though her heart sank, "I hope you haven't said anything to annoy Mr. Hastings. He is my guest."

"I remembered that." Weston sat down wearily on the stairs, his head on his hands. "I remembered that, or the cynical old devil would not have had a chance—"

"A chance at what?" Emmie asked him, amazed.

"A chance at Lee," Weston groaned rather than said. "Out of decency, remembering he was your guest, I gave him his chance, Aunt Emmie—and I wish I hadn't."

Emmie sat down on the stair and looked up at him, concerned. "Weston, my dear boy! That isn't done, is it?"

"What?" Weston stared at her. "Oh, don't be old-fashioned, Aunt Emmie! Everything's done nowadays. As long as you can get away with it, everything goes."

Aunt Emmie shivered.

Weston, in spite of his misery, grinned. "Oh, it wasn't so very bad. Don't worry. Old Tom got a little fresh with me about whether I should go back to Princeton or not. This old bird, Tom Hastings, tried to dose me with a lot of old stuff! Middle-aged platitudes, about the duty I owed to my parents to go back and finish up and all that sort of rubbish. I never was so disgusted in my life. I told him that even you, who had some right, as my aunt, to air your views, wouldn't so far forget yourself as to talk that ancient rubbish."

"Weston!"

"Yes, actually, Aunt Emmie, he was that far back in American history. He thought he could pull that old cant with me!"

"Weston!" Emmie gasped again.

"That seemed to get his goat a little, and he began to take a different tone, and then, Aunt Emmie, what do you think I discovered? Why, the old bird *thinks he's young!*"

"Weston, you must not say—"

"He can't hear me, Aunt Emmie, and if he did, he heard it once before—and didn't like it very well."

"Weston, what *did* you say?"

"Why, I told the old boy the truth. Told him to forget what they used to teach in the dark ages when he was young, and bring himself up to date."

Emmie moved nearer him; her eyes were narrowed. She didn't know whether to laugh or to cry.

"And then I discovered what was the matter with the old top. He's after Lee! Lee! That old dry-as-dust business man, that careful old bachelor!"

Emmie's back straightened. Why, this was Tom he was dissecting. Tom, who to her, looked young,—young enough.

"Then I let him have it. I told him what I thought of people who wouldn't take any hazards in matrimony or love, when they were young, and then tried to butt into the younger generation's game."

"Wes, you didn't!"

"Oh, yes I did! I told him it would look a lot more his style if he was going to Princeton, where he was trying to send me, to arrange for the entrance of a boy of his own. I asked him what he thought a man of my age thought of a man of his, who went chasing after girls like Lee, young enough to be his daughter. I asked him why he didn't pick out a nice looking, sensible woman of his own age, like—like you."

"Oh Weston!" Emmie moaned, stricken now. "You didn't! You couldn't!"

"But I did, Aunt Emmie. What's wrong with that, since I finished up by telling him that you were far too good for him and a lot younger looking."

"Weston Kent! You abominable boy. Didn't you know—"

"Know what?"

"That Tom Hastings was once—"

"Oh, I say, Aunt Emmie, it didn't dawn on me that he was one of your boy friends. Sacred Cats! Why didn't you take him on, and keep him from making a fool of himself in his old age? He's hopeless now."

"You wretched boy!"

At last it dawned on Weston that it was not on his side that his aunt was ranged. He looked at her oddly and anxiously.

"Why, Aunt Emmie, you aren't defending that old rooster, are you? If you are, let me tell you, it's wasted breath. *He can't see himself as he is.* He gave me the merry ha-ha! He said he would ask Lee before the week was out, and I could be best man at his wedding."

He sank down on the stairs a heap of misery. "Aunt Emmie, do you think he's got a chance with Lee? Will she listen to him?"

His aunt put her arms round him and let his flushed young face hide itself on her comforting shoulder, as she patted his back softly and said in his ear, "No, he won't and she won't. Not a chance in the world."

Weston raised his head and looked at her. "Sacred Cats of Egypt! I believe you mean it. Got something on him, Aunt Emmie?"

Then, as she shrank back, "Never mind, don't tell me. Let me appear innocent. You waded in and do your damndest to him, Aunt Emmie. I'm backing *you*."

"Go and make yourself tidy," Emmie told him with a steely look in her eyes. "I'll do what I think best, you may depend on that. Go and talk to Bob Landon and learn what we've planned to do to the house, while you wasted time quarreling."

"Wait," Emmie clutched his arm as Weston moved toward the door. "Was it peace or war, when you left Tom Hastings? Can you still meet at the same table, and under the same roof?"

"It was armed neutrality," Weston told her. "Very much armed and very little neutrality, but still we speak."

He went toward the door. "Aunt Emmie," and to Emmie he seemed once more the little blonde boy, whom May, many years ago, had brought down to see her, and who ran to her frightened, when the big gander chased him, "Aunt Emmie, can you do anything?"

"I think so, Weston. I may not be able to do anything for you, but at least Lee will know the truth."

"That's something," Weston said, and swung out through the door.

Emmie, greatly agitated, sat where she was for a few moments. She could hear Tom tramping about above her. Changing his clothes, she supposed, and trying to control the temper that that very wild young cub, Weston, had roused within him.

No help for Emmie, since it was Lee as well as brickyards. She must go through with it, if she would save Lee Lansing from making a bitter mistake, and Tom from scandal.

She heard Tom's step on the stairs, and rose up to block his way.

Between those who have been, or might be, lovers, confession is seldom entirely honest, nor the truth entirely confessed.

"Tom," Emmie began, faintly, and then stopped abruptly, for though she might belittle Tom's effect upon her in his absence, his bodily presence always cruelly handicapped her. Tom's looks were such as still appealed to her strongly, and Tom had only to glance and speak in a certain way, and between old affection and old memories Emmie was helpless.

But since this disagreeable task was hers to do Emmie felt she must accomplish it without further delay, and before Tom, himself, weakened her determination.

"Tom, I'm sorry that Weston—"

"Don't let that disturb you for a moment, Emmie," Tom begged her. The slight wrinkle of annoyance between his brows disappeared as he smiled at her. "I'd be foolish to let a lovesick boy's ravings disturb me long, and—don't let them bother you." He smiled at her cordially. "I saw Fair, Emmie, and everything's all right. I can meet all your conditions, and I was thinking of employing Landon anyway."

"I'm glad. But Tom," Emmie's voice grew fainter with the effort, "I simply must see you for a moment now, before you see Lee."

Tom looked at her, a quick, puzzled look. It seemed to Emmie he was about to protest. Then, as though something in her face or attitude hushed the protest, he nodded gravely and followed Emmie.

She walked like a woman in a dream, toward the door of the dismantled dining room, already prepared for the workmen. As Tom entered, Emmie turned and closed the door. It was an odd setting. All the furniture had been moved, the paper stripped from the walls, and stark and ugly with discolored plaster, the room waited for the transforming hands of the workmen, who must wreck it to make it beautiful again.

As Emmie turned to look at Tom, she felt something analogous between the room and the situation. She, and Tom too, must strip the situation of all its false and surface values before it could be built up into something beautiful. Could that be done? Emmie wondered, and glanced at the man beside her. Her task was even harder than she thought, for this was Tom, about whom she had woven a dream. She must go through with her share of the dream, whether it came true or not.

"Tom, you may think me a meddling, tiresome woman." She paused a moment, and added a little wearily, "I hope you won't, for I'm not, and I do hate to hurt you."

Tom looked at her. His eyes contracted a little.

"Why should you hurt me?" Then seeing Emmie's face, he continued, "I suppose I should have been kinder to Weston, but he's got to learn—sometime—and boys get over these things."

But Emmie interrupted him. "I'm not thinking or talking about Weston." Then abruptly, "Tom, I've been waiting for an explanation ever since you came back. Now I must ask you for it. Tom, did you ever pay father back? Because, if not, you can't possibly marry Lee Lansing without telling her—about that money."

"What money?" Tom looked at her blankly.

Emmie's righteous indignation rose to dispel the feeling of nausea that had overcome her at the necessity of reopening, uncovering this old and, to Emmie, unsavory bit of the past. If Tom was going to play the hypocrite, she would be merciless.

"Unless you are frank with me, I shall be forced to tell Lee myself, and you can see where that will put you."

"No, I can't." Tom kept his temper with difficulty. "I'm not ordinarily a stupid man, Emmie, but I give you my word I don't know what the devil you're driving at."

Emmie laughed, shortly. How dare Tom try to dodge the question,—with her!

"Nor," continued Tom, evenly but dangerously, "what business is it of yours what I say to any girl, or whom I marry?"

Emmie flinched as though she had been struck.

"Yet I must make it my business," she answered stonily, and before Tom could speak, she asked: "When you came back to East Penniwell after eighteen years, why did you seek out my father first?"

"Because I wanted to see him on business."

"What business?"

"The same business I am here to see you about—brickyards."

"Brickyards!" Emmie echoed.

"Yes," Tom answered steadily, "brickyards."

Then the "Aunt Em" episode occurred to his mind. He felt a little embarrassed. He took a half-step toward her.

But Emmie, seeing his embarrassment, had interpreted it in her own way, and spoke.

"Oh, what's the use! I don't expect you to believe me, or think me anything more than a jealous, middle-aged woman, but it cost me eighteen years of drudgery and that ought to count for something, even with you. I've paid for the right to say this."

"What?" Tom was too hypnotized by Emmie's face and voice to again intrude his own thoughts.

"Tom Hastings, when you left this village eighteen years ago my father told me that you had taken twenty thousand dollars out of his safe."

There was silence between them for a full minute. Looking at Tom, Emmie saw that he was evidently struggling to believe that he heard aright, or that he was still sane.

"Are you crazy?" Then, as Emmie did not speak, "Did you believe it?"

Emmie stared at him, without replying for a moment, then she said, "Father threatened to go after you, to make it public until I—I begged him to keep quiet about it. I said you'd pay it back."

She waited for Tom to speak. Tom stared at her, thunderstruck.

"Finally father said that if I'd promise not to write to you or to go near you—ever, if I'd stay with him—always, he'd never mention it, unless—"

"God!" said Tom. "You believed it?"

Emmie drew a long breath. "I—I was sure there was an explanation, if only you would make it."

"Make it!" Tom roared. "Are you crazy or am I? I have nothing to say to anyone, man, woman or child, who dares assert that I've ever taken a penny that didn't belong to me."

After this outburst there was a dead silence.

Tom leaned against the closed door as if to shut Emmie away from every other contact with the world, to bar her from escape, and said, "Have you told Lee Lansing that I stole from your father?"

"No."

"How many other persons have you told this lie to?"

"Lie?"

"Yes. How many people have you told it to?"

"No one else."

"How long have you believed it?"

"Eighteen years."

"Did your father ever repeat this lie to anyone else?"

"Lie?" said Emmie again.

"Yes, the damnedest lie that anyone could tell against a man. Did your father ever tell it?"

"No. My father didn't lie." But even as she said it she seemed to see the dead Eli's cynical face looking at her over his paper, stealing odd glances at her from time to time. Had he lied? "My father never spoke of what you had done to anyone but me. That was the bargain."

"You believed him?"

Emmie nodded. "How could I help it?"

"My God! Emmie Weston you stand there and tell me that you believed me a thief?"

Emmie looked at him bewildered. "Tom, I don't think I ever put it in those words. I just thought you had been hasty—hasty and mistaken—and young, Tom. But I knew I must make it up to father, so that he would never tell anyone else—about the mistake you made."

Tom's anger become deadly. If there was one crime in the calendar that seemed to Tom more despicable, lower, more unforgivable than any other, it was theft. Tom came nearer; his voice softer.

"I made no mistake, Emmie Weston. I am not a thief—but your father was. He kept back twenty thousand of my money when I came of age. He kept making excuses, saying that he could not get it back, but all the time I knew, through an accident, and John Fair, that he had used it, invested it in some scheme of his own, and didn't want to draw it out yet. He tried to put me off. He didn't want to jeopardize his own money. The risk was to be mine. But I wouldn't be put off. I wanted to go West, and told him I had to have it, or I would go to John Fair about it. That's what I came here for, the last night before I went West. You remember?"

Oh yes, Emmie remembered. When would she ever forget?

"He tried to make me wait for the money. The old skinflint hated to part with it. He tried all sorts of arguments. When he found that he couldn't bluff me into waiting for the money, he opened the old safe that used to be in the library, and showed me a bundle of bonds which he told me equalled twenty thousand dollars and were security for my money. He swore he could not lose in the deal he was making, and that I must wait. My answer was to call him a pious old robber, which he was, and tell him I would expose him to everybody, if he prevented me from taking my money. I leaned over and took the bonds, my security, and walked away with them. He knew he couldn't touch me, the old devil, but he was furious."

Emmie neither moved nor spoke. She felt horribly humiliated.

"The deal he put my money into actually doubled his stake, in a month or two, and he was the gainer. He knew even then, that he'd win, but he couldn't bear to risk his own money. He wanted to keep mine, handle it, and have me take all the risk. He cursed me that night. I suppose he went back and shut his safe—and cried over his loss."

"No, it was I who cried, that night, not father."

Then, as Tom looked at her, she straightened up. "How am I to know that what you say is true? It is your word against father's—and you've both tricked me."

Tom looked at her as though he would strike her, and then moved from the door, and flung it open.

"Come with me to John Fair's office. Do you believe John Fair?"

"John Fair doesn't lie," Emmie admitted. "But I want you to know this first, Tom. After father died and you came back, I sent for John Fair and told him that if in father's papers, or will, there was any reference of any kind to you, I must see it first, and then it must be destroyed."

They went through the doorway, through the living room, and out of doors, without seeing Lee, who ran down the stairs toward Emmie. They did not see Lib in the kitchen doorway, staring after them. Hatless they went out of the house, and in silence crossed to John Fair's office.

Lee started to followed them out of the house, but Lib detained her.

"My Land of Love! What you going to do, Miss Lee?"

"I've got to speak to Miss Emmie," the girl said desperately.

"Not you," Lib was determined. "There's considerable speaking been done the last few minutes, and judging from Miss Emmie's face, she's had enough. Lord forgive you, for you certainly been a little blonde trouble-breeder, Miss Lee."

Lee tore herself free, and hurried from the room.

In reality's clear, cold light, old dreams look thread-bare.

Tom and Emmietta faced John Fair across the scarred library table in Fair's old office, which had both distinction and character, despite the fact that the furniture was old and shabby. The room, like a person of gentle birth who had gone down in the world, still retained faint traces of its original grace and elegance. It was a room that unconsciously helped John Fair's clients toward a clearer view of their cases and themselves, for it had none of the ultra-modern, for-revenue-only, atmosphere. It was rather the timeworn, comfortable room of an old and satisfactory friend, who had leisure to listen and to forget the fretting rush of life now and then.

Tom Hastings felt its atmosphere even through the white-heat of his anger against this woman, who had come with him, who had accused him of the thing that was unpardonable in Tom's code of honor.

Emmie's feelings were almost too chaotic to be classified. If what Tom Hastings said was true, she had been doubly foolish, all these years, and while she could trust John Fair, it was bitter to have to trust him.

Fair, busy drawing up the papers for the land transfer, looked up at them expectantly. The sight of their two set faces silenced the greeting that rose to his lips, and he listened, apparently unmoved, to all Emmie, at Tom's request, told him.

Tom dared not look at Emmie, so furiously blazed his anger against her, and she, after all, a woman. He wanted never to hear again the low-pitched voice that, at his own request, was repeating the abominable charge she had made against him. Then she reached the end and there was silence.

John Fair surveyed them both, and weighed his words.

"This is what you have believed all these years, Emmie?" he asked quietly. "That Tom Hastings was a—"

"Thief," finished Tom himself harshly.

Emmie did not look at Tom. She looked at John Fair, and simply as a child, or rather as a woman from whom all the glamor of life had been stripped, and bare facts alone stand out, she said, "I never put it that way, John. That's what my father said, but not what I said to myself. I said, 'Tom Hastings owes my father money which he can't pay just now, but as long as I stay with father, father will say nothing against him.' You see, when May had left him she took some of his money, and he was afraid I would too. I felt that Tom would come home sometime and pay it back." She stopped abruptly.

"Then why," asked John, "did you break your silence to-day?"

He put out a hand, as Tom moved closer, to hold him back.

Emmie looked at John piteously, then set her face and went on.

"I know how it will look—to—to Tom—and to Lee, but my only thought was that since Lee was so much younger, since Lee did not know what I did, since Tom had come back and never moved to pay his debt, it was my duty, as an older woman, not to let her enter into—" Emmie hesitated,—"marriage with this man, without knowing all about him, before she took the risk."

"I see," John said. "I believe you, Emmie."

And still he did not look at Tom. He looked down at the table and then up at Emmie and seemed to have difficulty in speaking.

Finally he said slowly and deliberately, "Emmie, your father lied to you when he told you that Tom stole that money. Tom told the truth when he told you that he took only what was due him by his father's will. He told the truth when he said that your father had taken his, Tom's money and risked it in certain investments. I knew at the time.

"What it amounted to was that your father was really to blame, really the thief. That the investment paid, and paid Eli two-fold, three-fold, before Eli was through with it, doesn't alter the facts. And that Tom paid himself with Eli's bonds, doesn't alter the fact that Eli used something that wasn't his to use. Tom only took what belonged to him. Your father

tricked you. If I had known at any time during these eighteen years, I might have saved you, Emmie, my girl. Between the two men, you were badly treated. I'm sorry."

There was a moment of silence; then Emmie rose from the chair into which she had sunk, and stood looking at the two men. Instinctively they faced her.

"John," Emmie said, "don't be sorry. Don't pity me. I—I can't bear that."

She turned a little way toward Tom and looked at him. Tom found some difficulty in returning her look. There was something about her face—there was something—

But Emmie was saying very quietly, now, "I'm sorry, Tom. It was stupid of me to believe *that* of you. Maybe some time, not now, you will understand how sorry and—forgive me."

Then before Tom could gather himself together or either of them could move, Emmie went to the door.

"It will make no difference—about the brickyards, Tom," she said simply, as she motioned John Fair not to follow her.

With a quick movement, John closed the door and kept Tom in the room. He turned on Tom a look that made him start.

"My God! Hastings, what are you made of? Eighteen years of a woman's life! Eighteen years of a woman's devotion laid at your feet, and you kick it to one side, as though it were dirt."

He sat down then, his hand across his mouth as though to keep himself from saying more.

Tom Hastings, watching, listening to him in silence, sank back in his chair.

The old clock, that the first Fair in America had brought with him from England, ticked loudly and solemnly.

Tom watched, through the window, Emmie cross the street, before he met Fair's glance.

"I never asked her life or her devotion."

"You have made that plain," Fair told him. "Even Emmie sees that clearly now."

"Are you quite just? Remember I was in ignorance of the—romance she was weaving about me."

"It was her dream, man."

His voice alone told Tom that Fair had loved Emmie Weston for a long time.

It was bitter to John Fair, that Emmie must suffer in this way, for a man who had no idea of what he was throwing away. A fool, who did not understand that he was nothing—the dream, everything. It was a dream, that she had never really expected to come true, but it was a dear dream. She had paid for the right to dream it with years of her life, with her youth.

Suddenly he spoke his thoughts aloud.

"She never expected the dream to come true! She never expected you to come back! But the dream saved her self-respect, the dream made it possible for her to live, and by and by the dream became so real that she let other people see—oh, only the edge, the golden edge of it. But they brought the romance down to every day life, down to merely, 'Tom Hastings would come back, some day, to Emmie Weston.'

"Well, you did come back. You broke through her dream. Instead of the prince, the poor, misunderstood prince of her dreams, Tom Hastings the matter of fact, middle-aged business man came back,—to buy land for a brickyard! Tom Hastings, who had taken her father's money! The Tom Hastings who came back was a source of chagrin, of terror to her, because he wasn't in the least like the dream. He destroyed the dream. Any moment he might not only tear her dream to shreds, but expose her pitiful attempt to keep something interesting in a drab life. He would also tell the gapingly curious neighbors that Emmie Weston had never had a lover called Tom Hastings, that Tom Hastings came back for brickyards and not faded Emmie Weston.

"So Emmie Weston fought for her dream. She made herself over again, into something like the woman Tom Hastings

might expect to see when he came back. She kept East Penniwell guessing. Oh, she was clever about it. She bought new clothes, she brought down clever young men, and into her own house,—the girl her old lover wanted to marry."

Tom Hastings got to his feet and went toward him.

Fair rose.

"Oh well, Tom, you are as you are. I suppose the swine were not to be blamed that they didn't know pearls when they saw them."

"You make yourself offensively plain, Fair." Tom said slowly. "But I don't know as I blame you. You look at this woman with the eyes of—love."

John Fair laughed. "And your eyes are holden so that they do not see. I'd rather see and suffer, Tom—for Emmie will never need to look at me—than be blind,—and lose—what you have lost."

It was Fair who spoke again, as Tom stood looking at him silently, and before Tom moved toward the door.

"But there's no reason why we should quarrel. Sooner or later we'll have to take up our lives again, and meet and talk brickyards as though this had never been, and poor Emmie had not lost—even her dream."

"Damnation! Let me get out of this," and Tom brushed Fair aside and hurried out and toward the Weston place. But not the house. He went to the garage, and in a few minutes reappeared in his motor. Fair saw Asher hurry into the house. He saw Tom wait a moment, at the further gate. Then, as Asher came out with his bag, and flung it in, he saw Tom go leaping and roaring, in his powerful motor, along the New York Road.

Fair sighed and turned from the window.

There went the last of poor Emmie's dream!

The poets tell us that it is better to love and lose, than not to love at all, but an ordinary mortal would prefer a hard heart to a broken one. The first is so much less painful—to oneself.

Weston sat in the old smithy, his face in his hands. From the doorway Bunny Wells, who had been listening to Weston's tale of Tom's presumption and his own hopes, saw Miss Emmie come from John Fair's house and go toward her own.

What had happened to wipe all the happiness out of her face? How could she be so careless of what the neighbors would say? And where was Tom Hastings? Bunny's face darkened. Was he with Lee? If Lee was complicating Miss Emmie's lot, why then he himself would see that Miss Emmie knew everything. He would begin by telling Weston.

He turned on Weston with an air of authority that surprised that young man, curtly ordered rather than asked him to sit down, saying that he had something important to tell him. Weston, to his own surprise, obeyed Bunny without question.

Emmie made her way slowly to the sanctuary she craved—her own room. She was sure now, more sure than she had ever been that she did not love Tom Hastings, but this was not the way in which she had imagined she would be freed from the web of her dreams. She had visioned at least a grateful Tom, a little awed at the greatness of the sacrifice she had made for his sake. She had never imagined anything as futile as the reality had been. Her dream was dead, but there had been no peace in its death,—only humiliation—a feeling of defeat,—and John Fair had pitied her!

Emmie shivered, and then stood still. She could hear Lee sobbing heartbrokenly in her room. Lee! She had forgotten Lee. Emmie knocked, and at the third unanswered knock she opened the door and went in.

Lee was lying on her bed, her head buried in the pillows, sobbing like a child spent with grief. She looked up, as Emmie came in, and shrank back as though some one had dealt her a blow.

Emmie went to her, put her arms about the girl, and as Lee hid her face against her, said, "Lee, dear, don't be unhappy."

Lee sobbed helplessly.

Emmie began again. "Don't cry. Tom will be here—very soon."

As she said this, her heart gave a leap, in fear. She had seen over Lee's head, through the window, Tom come from John Fair's gate.

"He's coming now, Lee. Try to stop crying. I'll have Lib tell him you'll be down in a minute."

"I don't want to see Tom," Lee protested, her voice muffled, her face still against Emmie's shoulder.

Before she could protest further, Emmie's arms were withdrawn from about her. Emmie ran to the window that looked down on the garden.

She could see the garage, and was just in time to see Tom Hastings come out of it in his car. He slowed up at the gate in time to take his bag from Asher, who came plunging awkwardly from the house with it, and Tom's hat, in his hand. Asher flung bag and hat into the car as it passed him, caught at the bill which Tom thrust at him with one hand, while with the other Tom took the car carefully through the gate; then in a flash was gone, out of sight!

Even if Emmie had wanted to cry out to stop him, there was no time. Her mouth refused to open. She was ready to sink into the ground with guilt and dismay. She had indeed played havoc with Lee's life, as well as her own!

Asher came heavily into Lib's kitchen and laid a five dollar bill on the table without a word.

Lib came and looked at it, and at him.

He pointed at it, with a heavy gesture, such as an old-fashioned tragedian might have used to point out the fatal money that had lured his child from the path of virtue.

"Well," said Lib finally. "I see five dollars. What of it?"

"Woman! That ain't any ordinary money. That's Tom Hastings' fare-you-well. He's left—lock, stock and baggage, my girl, and your Miss Emmie's a left lady from this hour on. Her fortune's told."

Lib's eyes snapped. "Tain't neither. Miss Emmie's affairs ain't dependent on Tom Hastings now."

"There ain't," Asher eyed Lib solemnly, "nothing certain about men. There ain't," and his voice rose, as he saw an answering gleam in Lib's eyes, "nothing certain in this life—but death."

Lib shrank from him. Never had she known Asher to be "that wrought up."

Asher followed, glaring at her even more terribly. "What about that there vow you made about not taking up with me or any other man, 'cepting on the day Tom Hastings was laid low at Miss Emmie's feet?"

Lib visibly faltered. "Well, what about it?" she asked a little nervously. "His riding away ain't proof that he ain't been laid low and rejected at her feet."

Asher scowled. "No playing, Lib. Tom Hastings has gone. Does or doesn't that there vow hold good?"

"Asher—" began Lib, stoutly, "Tom Hastings ain't the only man in the world—or even in East Penniwell, fer that matter."

"Answer me square," Asher thundered. "Does that there vow hold until Miss Emmie's married or is it kinda cancelled now and are you free to act?"

"Oh, Asher. How can I tell, till I know certain from Miss Emmie? And how do you know he's gone for good?"

Asher pounded the table. "I ain't any time for any more trifling or any more vows being set up between me and my settlement in life. Lib Candy, you see that there five dollar bill? It lies on the table five seconds more."

He drew out Eli Weston's ancient timepiece, which had never missed a minute in fifty years.

"At the end of that there five seconds, if it's still laying there and hasn't been taken up by you for to buy yourself somethin' nist, and to bind yourself to come with me in the car to-morrow to the county seat for the license, then all is over between you and me.

"Mr. Bob Landon tells me the top of the garage is to be fixed something handsome-like, into homey rooms for man and wife. I'm to be that man, you're to be the wife. If not you, there's two widows in this town that are more'n willing."

"Asher Turkle—the idea!"

Lib took up the bill.

Asher made a step toward her, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, but Morphy's entrance made them both pause.

"To-morrow," Asher said darkly, "to-morrow at three o'clock, and have Morphy, here, dish the supper. Me and you won't git home till late."

He looked at Morphy so fixedly and solemnly that involuntarily she shrank back nearer Lib, who was folding the bill small between her fingers in her nervousness. Lib managed, "Yes, Asher, just as you say," as he went out of the doorway.

Bunny Wells had seen Tom Hastings come across the road and go to the house. Bunny's brows drew together. He looked up at Weston, who after all was a decent sort. He'd taken his bad news like a man.

"You see," he said. "Tom's heard it too. You'd make a better exit Wes," he added kindly, "and incidentally please your aunt—if you went now."

Weston nodded gloomily. He rose to his feet, slowly, and went toward the door.

"You could hire a fairly good car from Smith. He has one or two presentable ones," Bunny remarked casually. "Bill Sladen could drive you to Princeton and bring the car back. You would be in time to settle down before Monday, and let the other fellows know you're in the field, and—it would mean a lot to Miss Emmie. Besides, Weston," he added, "you don't want to be out of the big game this year, do you?"

"No," said Weston. He rose and stretched himself. "After all, a woman is only a woman, and the game's—well, it's a game."

"You've got it," Bunny dragged himself to his feet. "There's also a thing to be remembered, Weston, and that's they, women you know, always flock to see it played."

"Yes," and rising to heights of cynicism that he had not believed possible half an hour ago, Weston added, "and they always think we play it for them, whereas," he paused to light a cigarette that Bunny might see how steady his hand was, "whereas, when we're playing the game, we never think of them at all!"

"That's true," again agreed Bunny, intent only on bolstering up the boy's courageous attitude, which he devoutly hoped would last until he reached Princeton.

As Weston went slowly toward Smith's garage, where questions innumerable waited him, Bunny saw Tom Hastings tear through the gate and come toward him on the road.

Swifter than lightning through Bunny's brain ran the thought, "He can't leave Miss Emmie this way. It will be town talk and Miss Emmie cares." Before he was through formulating the idea, Bunny was out in the road signalling with his crutch for Tom to stop.

Emmie at the window could not see this. She had been afraid to turn back to Lee. She did not know how to tell her that Tom had gone. It was Lee, her sobbing controlled at last, who finally asked, "Miss Emmie, what's wrong?"

"I've driven Tom away!" Emmie turned toward the girl. "My dear, what shall I do?"

"Nothing," said Lee promptly and rose. She went toward the other women with outstretched arms. "Nothing, and don't look as though the last day had come, Miss Emmie-darling. It's absolutely nothing to me whether Tom Hastings comes or goes, but—oh, you poor dear—what does it mean to you?"

"But Lee, it's because of me—and what I said—that Tom has gone. Oh my dear, what haven't I done to—"

"Miss Emmie-darling, you have done nothing to me, or my young life. But I've done a lot—myself. This time you've got to listen to me. I—must tell you. I'm married!"

"Married!" Emmie echoed and then her face underwent a swift change. "To—to Tom?"

"No, I wouldn't marry Tom Hastings for all the money there is." She paused. "Can't you guess?"

Miss Emmie shook her head helplessly. "How can I?"

"Bob Landon."

"Bob Landon?"

"Hush! He won't have me," Lee whispered. "He won't have anything to do with me, and I just can't bear it, Miss Emmie. Help me!"

Emmie threw her arms about the girl. "Tell me."

Lee leaned against her.

"I'm hard and modern. You'll probably hate me, but oh, Miss Emmie, whether you do or not I've got to tell it to some woman."

"Tell me instantly," Miss Emmie said, controlling a strong desire to shake her. "Of course, I'll stand by you. I'll make him behave, too."

Lee looked up at her. "Oh, what a relief! You're the first woman I have told."

"Doesn't your mother—"

Lee shook her head.

"Could I go to my mother and say 'I'm married and my husband doesn't want me'? You don't know mother. It will be bad enough when I tell her it's Bob, and he's poor."

"What does that matter?" Emmie said impatiently. "He won't always be poor."

"I know it," Lee said, "but mother has no imagination."

"Is it his poverty that keeps you apart?"

Lee shook her head. "It's my cowardice."

Emmie looked at her scornfully.

"Oh, not the kind you think! I was willing enough to live with him in two rooms—or one—and do my own dishes. But—you see—he blames me for Bunny's lameness." Lee began to cry, much harder than modern girls are supposed to cry.

"Stop that, Lee! You go on and tell me." Emmie sat down in the big armchair and drew the slim girl on her lap. "Stop crying and tell me—everything. When did you marry him?"

"Six years ago."

"Six years ago? My Grief!"

"Don't interrupt or I can't tell you. I'm nearly twenty-four—older than you thought. Six years ago I was just a flapper—not quite eighteen. Full of all sorts of ideas. Bob had been over and was late in coming home from the war. I met him—in uniform. You haven't any idea how stunning he looked in uniform. I went crazy about him. He and Bunny were chums. Bob fell in love with me, but he didn't like the things I did."

Lee looked at Emmie. "He was right not to. They were awfully dangerous, but when does a kid of eighteen think of that? Bob was a lot older, of course, and he had been abroad and all, and he'd ideas about how a girl should behave. I didn't fit into any of them—yet he fell in love with me. Then he thought, if we got married, I would settle down. I promised I would. As soon as he got a job we were to tell mother and set up housekeeping. Neither of us wanted a 'big wedding'. Bob thought they were 'barbarous' anyway.

"If we'd told then, mother would have raised a row, and—and Bob thought mother wasn't bringing me up as she should. My father had been dead a long time and Bob thought I needed a man's guiding hand. We were going to live somewhere in the country, with Bunny nearby, when they both got jobs. We had all sorts of lovely plans, and it was so interesting to steal off and meet Bob, and know all the time other girls were admiring him and that I was his wife. Anytime I liked I could put my hand on his arm and say, 'This is *my* husband.'

"But he didn't get the job, and he hadn't much money to spend, and—I was a fool about dancing and going about, and there I was married—and yet not married, and I couldn't tell anybody, because mother would have screamed and sent for lawyers and locked me up in some school or other, while she annulled the marriage. She would have thrown Bob right out, and Bob couldn't help it because he couldn't support me yet.

"Well, of course, being a fool, and not being regularly married and all, and always having a lot of boys around, I couldn't help breaking out once in a while and going to places with the crowd.

"There was one fellow in particular, with plenty of money. He'd always liked me. I couldn't see any reason for going about moping, when I could have a good time with him, and no harm done."

"No harm! Lee!"

"Oh stuff! Emmie-darling, I know it now, but I didn't then. And Bob had no money, and he was getting gloomy about everything. He had lost a good job by going to war, and nothing turned up. If Bob hadn't fussed I don't think anything

would have happened.

"One night,—I went to a party with this fellow, and Bunny happened to know about it. Bob didn't. This—this man played me a low-down trick. He took me to a, well—rather questionable place. Fast, you'd call it. He said we were just going to stop in there to collect some of the crowd and go on, when I objected. But Bunny had happened to hear where the crowd was going, and came straight down there,—for me. The place, he'd got word somehow, was to be raided that night and padlocked for breaking the Eighteenth Amendment—and other things. It's still padlocked.

"Bunny came along in a funny little old car he had, and insisted on my coming away with him. Well, he made it plain to me that I'd *better* come. I got in his car, and we were on the road home before the raid happened. We were speeding away at a good pace, but nothing extraordinary, when this fellow I'd left came racketing round the corner trying to escape, and going ninety miles an hour. He smashed into us. Of course, *he* wasn't hurt. He took me out of the wreck. His car could still run. Bunny's was smashed. And Bunny pinned in under it.

"Miss Emmie, I wasn't myself. I had been struck on the head. I was stunned. Honestly, I remembered nothing. I didn't know what I was doing, or who I was with. I only wanted to get home—to get home and lie down. Well, the man who smashed us got me home, and it was not until next morning, in the papers, that I learned that Bunny had been found by the police, hours later, and rushed to the hospital to save his life. If he had been rescued at once, he—wouldn't have been lame."

Miss Emmie gave a shuddering sigh and the arm about Lee unconsciously relaxed. "How can they tell?" she began, anxious to defend Lee from herself, and yet even then hating her for what she had done to Bunny Wells. And yet, Bunny didn't hate Lee!

But Lee was going on, feverishly. "Wasn't that punishment enough,—to know that about Bunny? But worse was to come. In his pain and anxiety about me, Bunny told Bob who had been with him in the car. He had been unconscious when—that fellow—took me out of the wreck. Well, Bob came to see me and told me Bunny would always be lame and that it was my fault.

"He said everything was over between us. He was most explicit. It wasn't because of my going with that man, after he had told me not to, it wasn't because I had gone to that place, after he had told me it wasn't a place for a decent girl, but because I was a damned coward. Yes—that was what he called me. He said any girl that would think about saving her own miserable reputation when a fellow like Bunny was hurt, dying for all I knew, deserved a far harder fate than that of a poor man's wife. He said his wife would need courage—and I had none."

She clung to Emmie silently, as the past rose before her, and she saw herself facing Bob, pale and shaken from all she had gone through that night, and the shock of finding out about Bunny in the morning. She had been ready to throw herself into Bob's arms, to sob out, against his shoulder, all her misery, to tell him how she hated herself for going to that place, as she had done, with a man she cared nothing for, to beg Bob to take her to Bunny, to let her work for and with them both, to help her—and let her help him—and Bunny. She was frightened, shaken, weak, and she wanted him to be strong for both of them—to love her. And before her Bob had stood, white, raging, wooden.

All he had said to her was hateful, and she felt she was hateful in his eyes and there was nothing she could do to make him believe her. She heard again his cold hard words as he told her that all she wanted was money and a good time. "I'll have to support Bunny now, as well as myself, for some time to come," he had said. "I can't provide for you. I've no money to spend on a wife. That's a luxury beyond my means. You'd best go ahead and annul the marriage. It was a mistake anyway—for you. I'll do anything in my power to help you undo it. Annul and forget it."

As he had turned to leave her, there in her mother's luxurious room, he had given a last ironical look at the place—at the girl.

"I'll never claim you," he had told her, and he had meant it.

She remembered how she had screamed aloud, as he went toward the door and begged him to give her another chance; told him that Bunny would believe that she didn't know what she was doing.

Lee's eyes, tear filled, closed at the hateful vision of how she had clung to him, at the last, voiceless, tearless, anguished. But Bob had not believed her then, did not now. She could still hear the door as it closed behind him, shutting him out of

her life.

She opened her eyes to see Miss Emmie, white-faced, to cling to her crying, "Oh, Miss Emmie, you must believe me! Bunny does. I can't bear it unless you do too!"

"I do."

"But nothing will make Bob believe it."

"Have you—"

"No. I haven't annulled the marriage."

"Why haven't you? Why don't you?"

Lee turned on her. "I never will. He will have to get rid of me himself, if he wants to marry anyone else. I won't give him up."

"Why?"

"Oh, you know why! Why did you wait years for Tom Hastings? I know Bob is one of the best men ever made, but oh, Miss Emmie, how *dumb* men are! Do we have to tell them everything?"

"Does Tom know?"

"About Bob? No, of course not. Nobody knows, except you—and Bob and Bunny."

Miss Emmie thought for a moment, her arms about the girl. Then she rose, and patted Lee's shoulder. "I'm going down to Bob, now."

Lee clutched at her, "Oh, no, no, you must not."

Miss Emmie heard the library door open. She put her arms about the girl, and held her, soothing her, as Lee frantically whispered how Bob had refused to speak to her even here, even to-day, when Bunny begged him, and she would not, she could not, ask him again.

Emmie listened with only half her attention, until she heard the creak of the old stairs. That meant Bob had come to the last step, but one.

Then as Bob came quietly down the hall, and the girl in her arms stiffened, Miss Emmie called, "Bob! Bob Landon! Help me!" She clutched the indignant Lee so tightly that she could not break away. "In here! In Lee's room!"

She clung to Lee as the door opened, and turning she put Lee in Bob's arms.

"Your wife has told me everything and I believe her. Any doctor will tell you she is speaking the truth, when she says she didn't know what she was doing. I'm going to leave you and beg you to listen to each other. Don't let yourselves waste years,—as I have done."

She went out of the room before they could detain her, and with a twisted smile Lee looked up at Bob. "Go, if you like, I would in your place. But the trick was hers—not mine," Lee said.

A good woman may be above rubies, but if she has both rubies and virtue, how hard is the path of the poor man!

Emmie had watched Bob and Lee go away on a belated honeymoon, and to tell Lee's mother. Emmie had whispered to Bob an assurance that there was going to be plenty of work for him down here, whether Tom Hastings employed him or not. They were coming back to East Penniwell and Emmie.

And Weston had gone to Princeton without a murmur, promising to come down "every week-end."

Emmie sat near the window, waiting for Bunny Wells to come in, so that she might tell him the good news. She was tired, spent with emotion, but neither sorrowful nor downhearted. Emmie could see, with a clear, unbiased vision, now that Tom had gone irrevocably out of her life, and she did not despair. That she had misjudged Tom was her only lasting regret.

As to her father's trick—well, he was her father and he was to be judged only in the light of his attitude toward life. It was not her father whom Emmie condemned in her final judgment, it was herself. Blind she had been, but she was blind no longer and so able to see that the trick would not have worked if she had trusted Tom a little, and used her native intelligence.

To wait eighteen years for any man was a mistake, Emmie conceded, but after all had it proved so disastrous to her? Here she was, instead of having her life behind her, as it might have been but for her dream, wide awake now and with the health, looks and money to get what she wanted.

Lee, Bob and Weston would come back to her—and as long as Peter Rabat Wells was her neighbor life would be full and interesting for Emmie. She would be content with that.

Emmie looked about her. The first shadows of the coming night had fallen across the day. The room was softened, made lovely by the light. It seemed almost prophetic to Emmie. That's what her life would be from now on. Her dream might be dead, but her life could, it would, be lovely.

The same softening shadows fell across the old smithy walls, but to Tom Hastings they did not seem beautiful.

"It's getting late," he reminded the man who had, much against his will, lured him in there, and shut the door. "When will this farce be over?"

"Over now, if you like," Bunny told him cheerfully. "Ten minutes ago I saw Lee and her husband ride away in Miss Emmie's car."

"Lee and *her husband!*"

"Yes, and now that the village will have *that* to talk about, and leave Miss Emmie alone, I don't care how soon, or how quickly you leave."

"Lee *married?*"

It was Bunny's turn to stare.

"Didn't you know it? Wasn't that why you were tearing off when I stopped you?"

"No," said Tom, between his teeth, "and I wish to heaven I'd run over you and left you lying where you fell."

Bunny grinned at him. "As a helpless cripple, I knew I had you, and that you'd have to slow down, especially when I waved a crutch."

He looked at Tom speculatively, as though wondering how much explanation was strictly due him, then volunteered, "You see, I couldn't have the whole town gossiping about how you'd run off and left Miss Emmie, until Lee's marriage

came out. Now they'll talk about that."

He paused and looked at the glowering Tom, hesitated and then said joyfully, "You mean to tell me you fled because Miss Emmie slammed you down *hard*! Glory Hallelujah! My faith in woman's restored!"

"I don't mean anything of the kind! I didn't give her the remotest chance—"

"How cautious! But be very careful. Crow's not nice, but crow is what you'll eat, if I find you've let Miss Emmie down."

Tom Hastings turned on him impatiently. "Did you stop me and bring me in here to try and talk me round,—as John Fair tried to? It's useless. He gave me full particulars about the wonderful romance she'd built up out of nothing—and about me. Rubbish! I tell you it's no use. I'll make brick here, but that's all East Penniwell will see of me—bricks. I'm through with the place, and," he added savagely, "the people."

"Lee," Bunny observed quietly, as he tried to see his way clearly, and to understand the man before him, "was married long before she came to East Penniwell."

"What's that to do with it?" Tom asked, so fiercely that Bunny suspected it had much to do with it, but he hazarded, "If it wasn't Lee, what was it?"

Tom did not answer.

"If it's your last appearance, Hastings," Bunny continued amiably, "then you owe it to Miss Emmie to make a graceful exit."

Tom swore, very hard but not very long.

Bunny regarded him happily. "I think I'll leave you here, while I see what's in Miss Emmie's mind regarding you."

Tom rose to his feet and stared at him. "Are you crazy, too? What is there about Emmietta Weston that turns the heads of fellows like you and John Fair?"

"John Fair!" echoed Bunny.

"Oh, he hasn't a chance," Tom assured him. "Emmie never would look at him, or any one else, according to Fair, while I am on the map."

"I wouldn't be too dead sure about that," Bunny told him modestly, but, if Tom had had sense to see, dangerously.

"Granted you have a better chance than John," Tom sneered, "you haven't a chance beside the poor, innocent man she hung bells on, that all the village might know he was the man she'd handicapped by eighteen years of silly, romantic devotion. Put yourself in my shoes, Wells, and I bet you'd be shaking the dust of East Penniwell from them."

"Eighteen years!" Bunny repeated softly. "Eighteen years of waiting, and then to get you back! Good God!"

He was through the open doorway before Tom could quite gather what he meant, and when Tom called after him, Bunny never turned his head, but went steadily toward the Weston house.

Tom went toward his car thoughtfully.

To Zebra Ballins, sitting on the woodpile, contemplating life and his axe, which needed grinding, came Bunny Wells breathlessly, holding in his hand a bill, which he waved before the fascinated Zebra as he spoke:

"This," said Bunny slowly and carefully, "is yours, provided you manage to hold Tom Hastings for ten minutes, if his car comes down the road."

"Yassuh, Mr. Bunny, 'ats a ve'y clear statement, ve'y clear and understandable."

Bunny handed him the bill and, before his courage ebbed, went up the steps. He had faced machine guns with less

hesitancy. He admitted to himself that he was "scared."

With his hand on the door knob he remembered Emmie's money, and groaned aloud. It was possible that if he made the greatest sacrifice a poor and proud man can make for a woman, he would be misunderstood by everybody—except—Miss Emmie. And even Miss Emmie might well be amazed, as well as suspicious. When had she given him any encouragement—to—to interfere.

"She can only throw me down hard," he assured himself, "and that's exactly what I deserve. I've got an appalling nerve to do it, but Miss Emmie shall have the refusal of a man who loves the ground she walks on better than Tom Hastings will ever love any woman."

Zebra, sitting on the steps fingering his tip, watched Bunny go to the door, then turned to watch the Hastings car.

Tom sat in the car, and thought. So Lee and Bob Landon were married! The sly little devil! He hoped Landon would keep her in order. Well, that was *that*. He had time still, if he wanted, to tell Emmie that he'd like to be friends,—maybe, later on, something else.

He was saying to himself, "Funny how wild those two men are about her, but she really cared for me all those years; lived like a nun; bargained with her father to save my good name." Tom's chest expanded with pride. "Nice little woman, too, handsome, wellto-do." He was glad now that Bunny had stopped his headlong flight from East Penniwell. Since he'd had time to think things over Tom meant to be very kind to Emmie. He smiled to himself as he thought how easy it would be to be nice to Emmie Weston.

He threw away his cigarette, and started the car.

Zebra, waiting for him, fingered his bribe.

"C'mon, Mr. Man," he said chuckling. "C'mon. Brickya'ds is what you come after, and brickya'ds is all you gets. And even 'em you'll have to kinda ast off'n Miss Emmie's Man."

Bunny had opened the door of the room where Emmie was sitting alone. She looked up at him, all her brave thoughts in her lovely eyes.

And Bunny, who had meant to carry it off gallantly, even a little swaggeringly, for Miss Emmie's sake, quite forgot the scene he had planned. He put his crutches from him, and stood leaning against the door, through which Tom must come. He met Emmie's smile gravely, and spoke in a voice she had never heard before.

"Miss Emmie, darling, I'm lame and poor and I've no business to look at you, but I love you so much I can't think of anything else. Could you—would you try being engaged to me, or something like that—until you learn to love me?"

He paused, and gave a little gulp, for Emmie had risen, and her face was a wonderful thing for any man to see. How could he guess how splendid he looked to her?

"And," Bunny continued bravely, "if you don't come and take me, here I am helpless, and Brickyard Tom will knock me down and trample over me, when he returns to tie you to his chariot wheels."

But Emmie was across the room, her dazzled eyes meeting his, reading in them all her dreams, the best dream of all, come true. Here was the comrade she had longed for, ready to share—to understand! Emmie's arms went up and about his neck. She hid her face against his shoulder. Bunny's arms went round her, and he dropped his cheek against her bright hair.

"Better an antic shop and love—withal—" he whispered unsteadily, but Emmie raised her head, looked at him, and that sentence was never finished.

[End of *The Left Lady* by Margaret Turnbull]