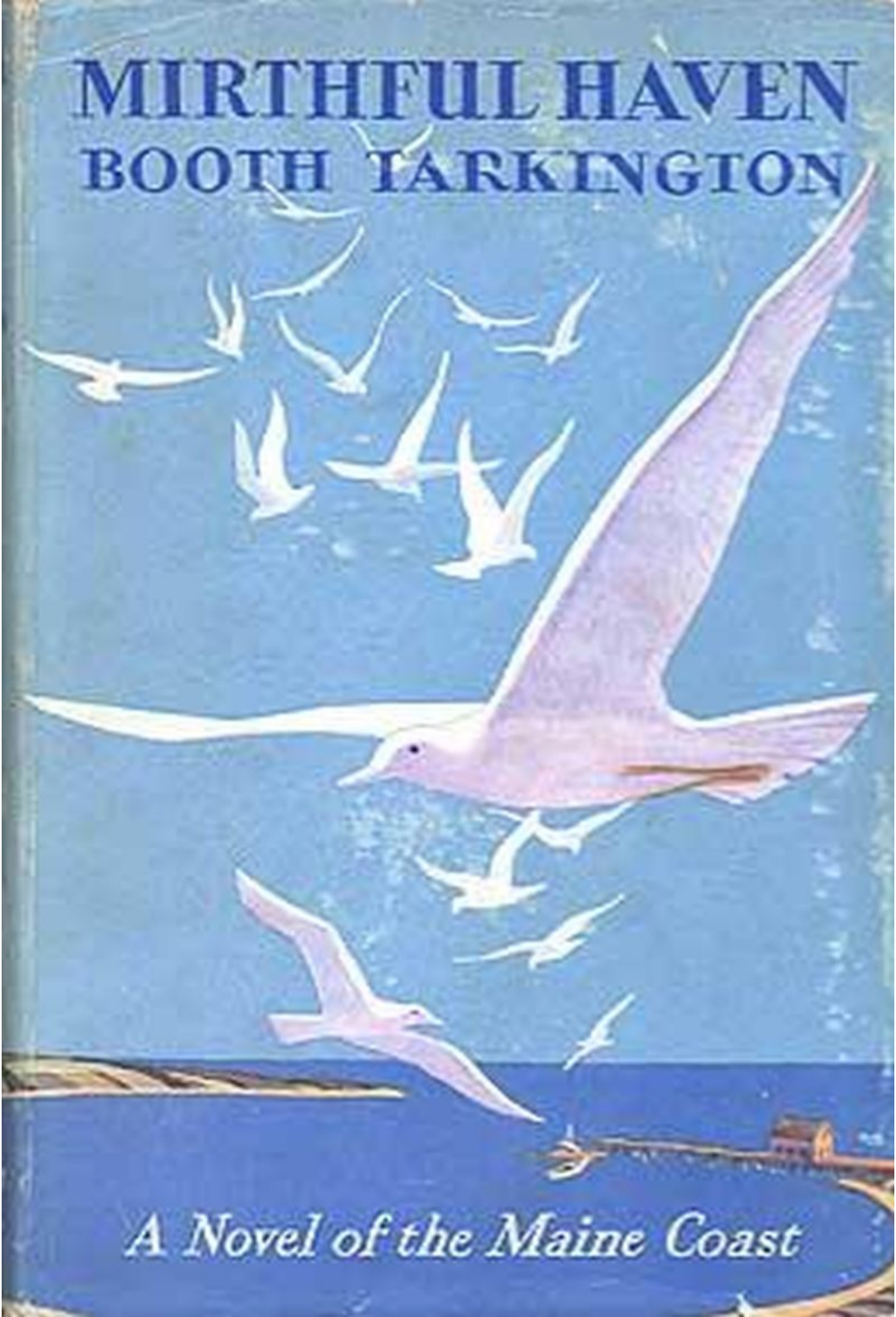
MIRTHFUL HAVEN

BOOTH TARKINGTON



A Novel of the Maine Coast

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BOOTH TARKINGTON

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BEAUTY AND THE JACOBIN

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CONQUEST OF CANAAN

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HIS OWN PEOPLE

IN THE ARENA

LOOKING FORWARD AND OTHERS

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THE GENTLEMAN FROM INDIANA

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THE PLUTOCRAT

THE TURMOIL

THE TWO VANREVELS

THE WORLD DOES MOVE

WOMEN

YOUNG MRS. GREELEY

MIRTHFUL HAVEN

Mirthful Haven

BOOTH TARKINGTON

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TO
SUSANAH

MIRTHFUL HAVEN

CHAPTER ONE

NORTHEASTWARD of the heart of New England there is a broad river that runs widening to the sea, and all along its lower reaches, where it lets in the ocean salt and the tides, it is a boundary marking more than a division between two States of the Union. New England itself seems to end there where the long and staggered coast line of the State of Maine begins; moneyed and sanctified old New England does not appear to cross that salty estuary, nor does the old New England landscape, pastoral, gardened and long completed, survive the interruption of the river. The highways near the coast pass at once into country not so sweetly in order; the farther northward and eastward they go the more rugged lies the land, and, out beyond it, keeping pace with this increasing roughness, so is the sea itself less decorous. The stony land's long buttresses run far out under the tides; reef and rock are everywhere ready to be whitely shrewish. These waters are island-strewn and surge upon an endlessly scalloped and indented coast.

In the long fringes of pine forest upon the ragged shores there is not timber enough to mark with warning spindle buoys all the rocks and shoals that may imperil a mariner; the wonder is that human speech could find names for all of them and for the innumerable bays, estuaries, coves, inlets, channels, capes and havens. In this, however, the early English navigators assisted happily, sprinkling along the coast names that have the air of improvisation and offer hints of mood and event combined, like hurried jottings in a diary. Dark Harbor seems eloquent of more than shadowy waters and Cape Porpoise probably was christened hastily upon a placid day; but hearty crews and captains must have made good cheer on shipboard when they named Mirthful Haven, Christmas Cove and Merrymeeting Bay.

Of these, Mirthful Haven was earliest seen by the discoverers and had the least time to wait before it floated ships more serious-minded than the first one. The third decade of the Seventeenth Century was new when a solemn little vessel delivered upon the shore some bales, sacks and barrels and a handful of risky folk from old England, who came to stay. A few were ploughmen; but others were already fishermen, and, with their womenkind,

nearly all somehow contrived to keep alive and cling to their foothold upon the land. They withdrew from the wintry blasts at the harbor mouth to build habitations a mile from the sea, where at low tide the narrowing water is no more than a little river; and there the village of Mirthful Haven stands to-day. To its own people, and those of the coast and countryside, the name long ago became nothing more than a cluster of identifying sounds; and only to the stranger untutored indeed could it still hint of a populace ever hilariously in carnival. For more than three hundred years the place has borne the label of a single afternoon's seafaring jollity.

Away from the tumbled coast and the rocky woodland of pine and juniper, the village itself, like some outpost wandered into alien country, wears the very aspect of that old New England left far to the south and west. There are the little streets of clean, white, green-shuttered houses as old as the great wine-glass elms that drip shadows down upon the roofs; there are the two white churches with columned porticoes and Christopher Wren steeples, and, for the landward borders, there are the stone-walled pastures that early summer powders cheerily with buttercups and daisies. But upon that other village border, the river, the resemblance is melancholy; for here is found only a New England relic, one of those faded ports where sea-borne traffic comes no more.

Only students of forgotten things would guess the meaning of the ponderous and barnacled posts that still remain, here and there along the banks, all the way from the harbor mouth to a jumble of half-submerged granite blocks, like the vast traces of a Phœnician quay, a mile above the village. Long useless, these big posts and stones are what is left of the great days of Mirthful Haven; though, of the busy shipyards they served, there is now no token at all, and pine thickets have grown high upon the ground where the old square-riggers were launched above the granite locks to be warped by those sturdy posts down to the sea. Commerce, too, knew Mirthful Haven then and was often lively between the wharves and the mercantile houses of Cargo Square, near by. Barques, brigs, brigantines and freight schooners brought everything and were the life of Mirthful Haven until they passed from the sea, leaving behind them, to live as well as it could by fishing, a village almost helplessly marooned.

Once a hopeful railroad sent a spur that way, but, upon the coming of the automobile, withdrew its tracks, as did a disappointed interurban trolley-line; the population of the village, beginning to dwindle as shipping and ship-building began to perish, still dwindles even to-day, though miraculously there is always some of it left. So is there some commerce left, not upon the soggy wharves but lingering in those same two-storied,

wooden, mercantile houses that partially enclose the patch of beaten earth called Cargo Square. The old-time ship-chandlers and merchants of the Square would not recognize the shop windows now staring at one another across that dusty little oblong, with its stone horse-trough at one end and cast-iron Civil War soldier and World War bronze tablet at the other. To those whiskered traders of another day the Square would appear fantastic not only in the character of wares displayed but because its commerce has borrowed a peculiar habit from certain animals of the neighboring woodlands; it hibernates.

The torpidity of the Square, however, sets in earlier than does that of the forest creatures. It begins with a visible abruptness always upon the same date, the first Monday of September, and is complete before the fringing birch trees of the woods are yellow within the autumn haze. Then both Square and village lie dormant except for two daily flickerings of life about the post-office, similar stirrings at the schoolhouse, and thin, occasional movements to and from the white churches. Between the tides the surface of the river thickens in the cold and dulls like pewter; sea-birds gabble and complain along the banks, uttering the only sounds heard there, unless some fisherman's boat chugs down the harbor or comes in half-frozen from the lonely ocean. The fisherman himself, desiring warmth, may find it perhaps at the grocery or the drug store, though not at noon, when both are locked; nor, if he seeks food as well, may he obtain it then at Mouse's Restaurant. For, supplementing a window display of a catsup bottle and three printed announcements, "Hot New England Dinner 40¢", "Clam Chowder with doughnut 25¢", "Fried Clam Sandwich 10¢", there hangs from the unpolished brass door-knob a placard thoughtfully explanatory: "Gone Home To Dinner. Geo. H. Mouse Prop'r."

Torpidity is most complete of all where the seven or eight largest houses of the village are neighbor to one another across ample yards pillared with grand elms. These are houses with the Georgian façade, hinting good mahogany within, and noble of aspect—appropriately so, for here lived those old nobles of the village, the ship-builders and the deep-sea captains. A height of three stories was not enough for several of the maritime grandees; they crowned the roof with a classic cupola whence the ship-owner or the captain's wife might gaze out to the open sea and early learn what craft turned in toward the harbor mouth. No captain's wife or vessel magnate carries a spy-glass up the stairs to any of the cupolas now, and from only one of the houses does a light ever fall through a window upon the snow. The others stand shuttered, locked and boarded close throughout the winter; they hibernate, indeed, from September into June and thus make

wholly obsolete that mark of the North with which they are all equipped, the covered passageway between house and stable.

Elsewhere in the village such passageways connect lesser houses with smaller stables, and two or three of them still serve their original purpose to provide a snow-bound man with easy means to reach his stock; most of the others only give him a sheltered way to reach an automobile (useless until a snow-plough carves out a road) and gaze wistfully upon a grey old sleigh extinct in an empty stall. Old age boasts of everything long past, even of ancient weather, as if that were its own possession; so the old men of Mirthful Haven maintain testily that the climate is softening. The rousing winters of their boyhood are no longer known, they say, for then the snow would be level above the fences and only the tops of gateposts would be seen; the river would freeze over and the eight-foot tide recede under the solid bridging of two feet of ice; so cold were these old winters of theirs that the ice would form far out beyond the harbor mouth and a man could walk forth upon the very ocean itself. Never again would Mirthful Haven be visited by weather of that polar heartiness, the aged men said, and when, only a few years ago, both coast and inland lay clutched and frozen for months by just such a winter, they were gracious with approval; it was like old times, they said, and inconsistently took some approbation to themselves. “Didn’t I tell you?” they asked, edging closer to the stove.

There was no thaw that could be trusted at all, that year, until April. Then days of rain began to dissolve the packed snow; patches of ground long unseen appeared here and there a little shamefully, but grew raggedly larger until at last after a week of wet Northeaster all the brown earth lay exposed and unfamiliar. Captain Francis Embury, last of the Haven’s deep-sea captains, walking home with the afternoon’s mail, a Boston newspaper, under his arm and his ivory-topped Malakka walking-stick glinting from a hand gloved in sealskin, sniffed better weather in the air. “You can smell it; you can smell it if you can’t tell it any other way,” he paused to inform a deferential fellow-citizen at a corner. “Clouds still from the no’theast; but all they are, they’re just left over. Wind’s about to shift sou’westerly; then you’ll see a mite of a break to the nor’west and we’ll get a dry nor’west wind and fair to-morrow. What’s made this whole winter so cold, it’s the moon. She got off her course—drifted ’way to the no’th of where she ought to’ve been—but now she’s back and we’ll have a regular, nice, good spring, the kind we’re entitled to. I know what I’m talkin’ about!”

No fellow-citizen of the Captain’s would have dreamed of challenging that, and this one went on, enheartened as by information acquired at the very source. The Captain sonorously hummed an air from “The Bohemian

Girl" and continued upon his way, walking with his feet wide apart and a slightly swinging motion, as if the soles of his overshoes might be descending upon a deck that alternately rose to meet them and then fell away. Yet there was a kind of gallantry, too, in this sailoring walk, as in the Captain's roving, bright blue eye and in all of the short stout figure that still expressed both power and liveliness in spite of its years and the present muffling of an antique blue overcoat lined with sealskin and collared with sable. The Haven believed the Captain fairly into his earlier eighties; but the rumor had no countenance from him, nor did anyone ever dare even mention it to him, for naturally he could be severe when roused. It was legendary in the village, learned from Mirthful Haven men who had sailed under him, that he could always make his voice heard above the roarin' of the tempest.

Turning into his own street, the elm-bordered thoroughfare where stand the shuttered, fine mansions, Captain Embury had to proceed with his feet less wide apart, for here the wooden sidewalk has but the width of two boards laid side by side; and so he came to his own big house, that only one in the ancient grandees' neighborhood still alive and inhabited through seasons other than the summer. As pleasant tokens of its life, red geranium blossoms showed themselves genially between the symmetrically parted lace curtains of the four front windows of the ground floor, and, if proof were needed that the house was Captain Embury's, two small, brightly polished brass cannon upon the broad granite doorstep stood cautiously chained to the fluted pillars of the beautiful white doorway. The Captain himself had placed the geraniums in the windows; it was he who kept them watered, and early every morning polished the brass of the two ship's guns. Forty years a widower and childless, he had never allowed any woman to get a grip upon the ordering of his ship-shape house, not even in the kitchen; and he had found no landsmen servitors who were equal to the care of his collections and instantly active or even wholly placable upon a bellowed word of command. So he lived all alone; the place was his treasure, and, in truth, no house could well have been more a man's own than this one was the Captain's.

With his hand on the latch of the picket-gate, he paused and glanced across the street at the only thoroughly ugly building in Mirthful Haven, the schoolhouse. Outlandishly Gothic in effort and faced with cement blocks unpleasantly imitating stone, it was a naive architectural insult to the fine street, and the Captain's glance at it might well have been one of annoyance. On the contrary, this glance of his was debonair. His habitual expression, in which the air of command collaborated happily with a hint of spicy jauntiness, emphasized the jauntiness decisively; and, except for the

whiteness of his small, curled moustache and the neat hair that showed between his sealskin cap and sable collar, he became momentarily the portrait of a youthful captain in foreign ports, glancing sidelong at a Venetian casement, or a latticed window in Algiers, perhaps. “Captain of a clipper ship at twenty-three, I was!” he said sometimes, sighing ruefully. “Captain of a clipper ship in the China seas at twenty-three, and I thought I was God!”

No damsel’s face, nor that of a lively matron, looked forth from any of the schoolhouse windows, however; nothing showed there at all. But a vocal buzzing and sounds of movement came from within the building as the bell of a clock struck four, and, at this, as upon a signal to himself, the Captain promptly opened his gate. He passed along the brick walk that led to the front door; but he did not enter there. Instead, he went round the corner of the house to a side door that opened inward from a long and narrow verandah, let himself in with a large brass key and closed the door behind him. Immediately he removed his heavy overcoat, his sealskin cap and his overshoes; then with gravity he took from one waistcoat pocket a small round mirror backed with celluloid and from another a little comb.

The mirror showed him a plump, handsome old face, rosy after his walk, as he used the comb first to correct a slight disarrangement of his hair and then to prepare his moustache for a hurried curling upon his two forefingers. He unbuttoned his black “cutaway” coat, smoothing back the lapels so that a genteel garniture of gold watch-chain and seals might not be deprived of a proper share of notice; then, departing from the passageway where he had completed this simple toilet, he went into the nearer of the two front parlors that opened upon the broad central hall. Here, after placing a geranium blossom in the buttonhole of the left lapel of his coat, he looked thoughtfully for a moment at the parent plant itself, and, taking it up in its red pot, went out to the granite step before the white front doorway. There he paused and appeared to cogitate, though not upon the fact that April is a little early for geraniums to be brought outdoors.

Seemingly, the Captain was arrested by the slight problem: where best to set the plant as an ornament to his doorway; but in reality his gaze was sidelong, occupied expectantly with the schoolhouse door across the street. The pupils of the lower grades had been dismissed half an hour earlier; the groups just now beginning to emerge were of the high school, and, except for the scuffling and alternately hoarse and falsetto barkings of a few of the younger boys, they came out decorously. The fifteen or twenty girls walked in pairs or trios, with linked arms, and chattered intimately—all but one, who was a little too conspicuously alone in the midst of them. That is, she

was not only alone, she was left alone by the others, for those who passed her on the way across the gravelled yard made a little distance between her and themselves, talked more busily together and walked faster as they went by her. Their eyes narrowed a little, too, as they thus gave her no chance to join them; but this exclusion of her did not seem to be founded upon some fresh emotional impulse; on the contrary, it was obviously almost unconscious and had the air of habit. The girl herself looked pensive; and to her also her exclusion was plainly no new thing but habitual.

She was marked apart from her schoolmates by more than their avoidance of her. In the main, the others, boys and girls alike, were meagre-faced and pasty with too much living near the stove in double-windowed houses under the pinch of that hard winter; in her cheeks, alone among them all, glowed a youthful, bright and healthy color, and she was the only one of the girls a stranger would instantly have called pretty. She was fifteen, shapely and lithe in the shabbiest blue sweater, rough skirt, old stockings and patched leather high boots to be seen in the schoolhouse yard; her eyes gleamed blue to the Captain more than a hundred feet away, and her hair was the kind of brown that looks red at a little distance. The Captain, indeed, believed that it was red and admired it not the less on that account.

One of the older boys, coming from behind her, made a pretense of stumbling and fell heavily against her, clutching her shoulder as if to support himself. “Oh, you Edna Pelter!” he whispered, and grinned derisively but did not take his grasping hand from her shoulder.

This, too, must have seemed something habitual to her, for she did not speak or even turn her head to look at him; she jerked herself free, automatically rather than impatiently, and went on, crossing over to the wooden footway on the Captain’s side of the street. She did not seem aware of the gallant figure standing between the two little bright brass cannon, though the Captain’s sidelong gaze had never moved from her since she had appeared in the schoolhouse doorway. With the potted geranium still apparently perplexing him, he watched her until she turned at the next corner, going eastward toward the sea, and was lost to his sight; then he carried the purely histrionic plant, its purpose served, back into the parlor and set it down upon the table whence he had taken it.

Although he had not yet made her acquaintance—did not, indeed, even know her name—it was for this glimpse of the fifteen-year-old girl, Edna Pelter, that Captain Francis Embury, nearing eighty, came directly home every day after mail-time instead of lingering for gossip in the drug store, as

formerly had been his wont. He was the only person in the world, except herself, who felt that much interest in her.

CHAPTER TWO

THE boy who had pretended to stumble against her felt his own kind of interest in her, however, and he also watched her until she had turned the corner. He was a swarthy big boy of eighteen, with a heavy figure, thick black hair that seemed never to have been combed, much less washed, and his expression was one of derisive brooding, as though he pondered upon an injustice to himself that he found grossly absurd. He stood waiting, scuffing the gravel of the schoolhouse yard with the sole of his rubber boot and sending furtive glances at the backs of his departing schoolmates until they had passed from sight; then he moved away in the direction taken by Edna Pelter, going slowly at first but walking faster after he had turned the corner. She was a hundred yards or so in advance of him and he let that distance remain between them until the village street had become a country road—Old Road, leading down to the sea over higher and rougher ground than that traversed by River Road, the straight and almost level thoroughfare by the waterside. Old Road winds and dips and rises between lonely stone-walled fields, where ledges of rock come through the thin earth like the bones of a beggar through his tattered garment; there are bordering dark thickets, too, and it was as she approached one of these that the girl heard hurrying footsteps upon the roadway behind her.

She knew whose they were and again did not turn her head, not even when the boy who had followed her, overtaking her, threw clumsy tugging arms about her and pulled her to a halt. She kept her face averted now, however, for a definite reason, and her pensive expression was shaded by a slight, patient annoyance. She scuffled a little; then stood still, enduring with boredom the boy's heavy embrace. "Oh, go on home, Hugo Wicks," she murmured, sighing. "Don't you ever get tired?"

"Come off!" he said huskily. "You can't put it over on me! I got as much rights as everybody else! You got to let me—"

But at this, as he strove to bring his lips near hers, she struggled away from him, and, disengaging herself, struck him smartly across the mouth

with a hard little hand. “Rights!” she said. “Nobody’s got any rights around me!”

Hugo was enraged by the blow, and faced her furiously. “Oh, haven’t they?” he said. “You think everybody don’t know all ’bout you and Vinnie Munson? Who do you think you are, anyways?”

“I’ll show you,” she said sullenly. “I’ll show you who I am if you don’t quit gettin’ funny around me!”

“Big talk!” Hugo jeered, and became bitterly loquacious in a series of jibes. “Big talk when Pelters try to brag about who they are! Pelters! Whose lobster-pots is your father haulin’ up after dark nowadays? Why don’t you never wear that nice sweater of Nina Grier’s you got out o’ the high school cloakroom and had dyed last Feb’uary? Say, Edna, what happened to your sister, Nettie, her never comin’ home from that trip to Boston she took when that railroad man’s wife was huntin’ around fer her two three year’ ago? Listen, Edna, has Vinnie Munson told you ’bout his mother havin’ him up before the preacher fer goin’ with you? Pelters! I’ll show you how much right Pelters got to talk ’bout who they are!”

With that, before she could move to prevent him, he flung his arms about her again and kissed her. She bore this, as she did his taunts, with apparently more mere dreariness than emotion. “Oh, get through!” she said. “Get through and go on home!”

Hugo released her and rather abruptly seemed to become discouraged. “Go on yourself!” he said, and, turning his back, walked sulkily toward the village. Edna, pensive again, as if there had been no interruption, continued upon her way.

Old Road is so crooked that it seems to have been paralysed while wriggling with indifferent success to avoid the stone ledges; it makes into two miles the one straight mile between the village and the sea, and the second mile is through forest so dense in growth and thorny underbrush that the thicket is like an unkempt hedge bordering the narrow roadway. Nevertheless, a few dim paths struggle through the woodland tangle, and, at the emergence of one of these upon the mere wagon-track that Old Road becomes in the forest, a well-dressed boy of sixteen stood waiting. He was dark-haired and dark-eyed, with noticeably long dark eyelashes, a sleek dark skin and shapely features; women of any age would have taken note of him anywhere. His desire, as he waited for the approaching high school girl, however, must have been that nobody at all should take note of him, for he did not step out upon the road. Instead, he stood pressed back into the thicket and not even upon the path itself but a few feet away from it.

When her footsteps upon the stiffened mud of the wagon-track became audible he made no sign, and still stood motionless and silent as these sounds ceased abruptly and he knew that she had halted at the mouth of the path. For a moment she stood as silent as he; but each knew that the other was there, and, after a glance over her shoulder, she entered the path, saw him and smiled faintly at him. He took her hand and with precaution drew her a dozen yards deeper into the underbrush; he would have gone farther and was evidently surprised when she stopped.

"Come on," he urged her in a whisper. "We can't stay this near the road; somebody might hear us."

"I don't care," she said; but she spoke in a whisper, too. "What if they did?"

" 'What if they did?' " he repeated, and stared at her. "My goodness, are you crazy, Edna! Come on!"

"I don't want to," she said. "Let's go sit on the rocks at Great Point."

" 'On the rocks'?" he echoed incredulously. "Why, anybody that wanted to could see us on the rocks. There's a big sea runnin' after the No'theaster and there's nearly always two three people on the Point to look at it; they'd see us."

"Well, what if they did? We wouldn't be doin' any harm, would we?"

"My goodness, Edna! You know as well as I do I couldn't go where anybody'd be liable to see me with you."

"Couldn't you?" she asked gravely. "I thought anyways you might do at least that much for me, if I ever wanted you to."

The boy's expression had become one of distressed perplexity. "But what for?" he said. "What do you want me to get seen with you for?"

"I don't know. I just thought——" She hesitated vaguely, then smiled, tossed her head jauntily and spoke as if imparting a confidential but triumphant bit of news. "Some day I'm goin' to put it all over this old town, Vinnie. I guess I been eatin' dirt in this old burg pretty near long enough."

"What's the matter?" he whispered, greatly astonished. "What's come over you? What you want to commence talkin' this way for all of a sudden, Edna?"

"All of a sudden? It's not so much as you think; I've had notions from a good while back that I wasn't goin' to stand everything a whole lot longer. I'm not goin' to have the whole burg callin' me bad all my life, I guess! I'm gettin' kind o' tired bein' picked on for the only one that's bad, too. I could

tell a few things about some o' the girls that think they're so slick, if I wanted to, I guess!"

"Sh!" he warned her, alarmed by a vehemence in her manner, though her voice was still repressed to no more than a murmur. "Don't get excited, Edna."

"I'm not. I guess by this time I ought to be used to the way this burg acts towards me because it's never been any different since I was born! Sometimes lately it just makes me kind o' tired, though, and I get to thinkin' I'm too old to let it go on so much longer; that's all. I'd like to show a few people—"

"Listen!" he interrupted, and pulled at her hand. "We can't stand around here talkin' about it; we're too near the road. Let's go where we were Wednesday."

He moved as if to walk deeper into the woods; but she shook her head. "How about your comin' to sit a while on the rocks with me, Vinnie? I just thought I'd kind o' like to have 'em see somebody wouldn't mind, and it looked to me like you ought to come if I wanted you to."

"Me!" he said, protesting. "Why, it'd be worse for me than anybody on account of my family's position; and, besides, look at all the trouble I already been in about you!"

"But this wouldn't get you into any more, Vinnie," she returned quickly. "They wouldn't know anything they don't know already."

"About *me* they would," he said nervously, still whispering. "There hasn't been anything ever injured my reputation except whoever found out about us and told my mother, and *she* told old Reverend Beedy when she took me there, of course; but he and my mother both said if I'd promise to save my soul by never havin' any more to do with you they'd do all they could to keep it from gettin' around, so—"

"Did they?" Edna interrupted, with a sharply ejected breath of laughter. "Then I guess whoever told your mother must 'a' been busy lately. It's all over town."

"What!"

"Oh, yes," she said, again with a breathed effect of laughter but not of mirth. "I guess you're fixed up with a reputation hardly any better than what I got, myself, Vinnie."

"I don't believe it! You just say so because you think maybe it'd get me to go out on the Point with you."

"No; I'm tellin' you because it's true and so's you'll see it won't do you any p'tic'lar harm if you come. It really is all over town, Vinnie, because Hugo Wicks knows it. So what difference would it make if anybody just saw us sittin' there?"

"My goodness!" Vinnie Munson once more exclaimed under his breath. "How do you know Hugo Wicks knows it?"

"Because he just asked me if you'd told me about your mother takin' you up to Reverend Beedy's. So won't you come out on the rocks with me, Vinnie? Please?" she whispered, and wistfully leaned toward him a little. "Won't you?"

But he looked away from her, and, swallowing, spoke plaintively. "I guess if Hugo Wicks knows it, then you're right and it is all over town. My mother said she'd try to keep my father from findin' out I'd been goin' with you; but I guess now he'll hear it."

"Won't you?"

"Well, my goodness!" he murmured; and, from beneath his softly shadowing eyelashes, there glinted perceptibly something of the repulsion he naturally felt for a girl who entangled him with disastrous circumstance. The tight clutch of his fingers upon hers relaxed and their hands separated. "I expect you got me in trouble enough without my sittin' around on any old rocks. I guess you must be crazy!"

"All right," Edna said, somewhat gloomily thoughtful but unresentful and not at all surprised. "I just thought I'd ask you, anyhow. I didn't expect you'd want to, maybe." She paused; then murmured unemotionally, "Well, g'bye," and, turning from him, began to push her way through the underbrush in the direction of the road. Vinnie Munson made no response to her word of farewell, although both of them vaguely understood that this parting was a farewell indeed, and meant the end of more than the short whispered and murmured conversation that it concluded.

Again upon Old Road, and not more pensive than when she had left it for the thicket, Edna walked slowly onward toward the sea. All the way from the village a sound like forest winds had been growing louder in her ears; now it became deeper, more like the rolling of continuous distant thunder heard indoors, and, as she advanced, separate crashings could be distinguished regularly in an endless series. Old Road escapes from the thick enclosure of the woods only to end the next moment at the broader highway over the sea-cliffs; thus, as if she came out of a dark corridor to look forth from a high balcony, she stepped out into the open, and there suddenly was the wide ocean uproarious below her. All the nearer air was filled with its

clamors; and yet in the distance the illimitable grey reaches of water seemed to move silently from a misty and dimensionless horizon.

She turned to the right upon the highway but presently crossed it, pressed through a broad tangle of bayberry bushes and juniper, and, having climbed a pile of great boulders and upthrust stratified rock, sat down upon the topmost stone, where only the highest flung mist of spray from the surf below could reach her. Here, a lonely, small figure upon a vast rough pedestal, she was at the crest of Great Point, the rocky jut that forms the juncture tip of two long crescents of coast line; to left and right of her, as far as her eye could reach, the green surf, rolling up ponderously, broke and plunged upon the land. Below her the seas were heaviest of all; hundreds of yards out, one of them would heave itself into an enormous and ominous ridge, gain momentum, speeding landward; then, steepening and rising prodigiously for an unbearable moment, this running precipice would crash in a white collapse that still swept onward and struck so hard upon the brown rocks that bubbles of foam were flicked almost to the feet of the girl upon the crest of Great Point.

She sat with her elbows upon her knees and her face made into a triangle by her supporting hands—a dreamer's posture appropriate at the moment; for, instead of the breakers up and down the coast, what she saw were the white manes of companies of horses, racing. The horses ran just beneath the surface, with only their flying manes visible, and to-day they were titanic steeds, galloping monstrously. In easier weather and under a sunny sky they were crystalline ponies, racing cheerily, not with the fury of these colossal submarine chargers; and this fancy, transforming the ocean into a hippodrome, was an old one with her, as it is with other watchers of the sea immemorially.

For half an hour her attitude remained almost without any change at all; then her dreamily fascinated gaze shifted to follow a line of coursers that dashed themselves to pieces upon a pebbled beach a quarter of a mile to leftward of her, and suddenly she sighed, shivering a little. Her glance, happening to move slightly inland, had fallen upon the intrusive presence, not of a human being but of a long grey house, all stone and shingle, with a broad lawn framed in a clipped brown hedge. Nothing could have been more familiar to her than this house, built before she was born, and she did not shiver because of the desolate expression of vacancy imparted to it by its heavily boarded windows and doorways; the sight of it, startling her from revery, seemed to remind her of something distasteful and oppressive. Moreover, the power thus to trouble her was not a property of this house only; next to it and nearer her stood another, a long white house upon a high

terrace above a lawn where shrubberies were stacked about with straw; and other houses, two score or more, faced the sea from the ridge behind the highway, all of them expressing the same affluent vacancy; and all of them disturbing to Edna Pelter. For, as if made conscious by the first that the others were there behind her upon Great Point, she rose, turned, and looked frowningly up and down the long irregular line of these empty houses, from one end to the other. Her frown was hostile but not defiant; in her eyes was the look of the native who stares up at the walls of a foreign invader too powerful and too well established to be resisted, and, for the moment that she bore this look, she became, in instinct at least, a true part of the community that despised her. Other eyes of Mirthful Haven had that look whenever they glanced, always a little unwillingly, at these houses by the sea.

CHAPTER THREE

THE gravelled highway over Great Point lies between the rocks and the summer cottages; it still keeps near the sea where it dips down from the Point to low open acres of bayberry bushes and juniper; but, after that, having crossed a little waste of sand dunes and coarse yellow grass near the harbor mouth, it turns abruptly inland and joins River Road, the straight and level thoroughfare that leads to the village. Edna Pelter, coming home sombrely from the rocks and the racing of white-maned coursers, all at once looked more cheerful as she left the grass and sand dunes behind her and stepped upon River Road's bordering wooden sidewalk; before her, at the other end of the mile of grey roadway, the clustered houses and elms and the two neat spires of Mirthful Haven were delicately miniatured in blue against a rosy sky—but that was never a sight to bring any brightness upon her face.

Half-way from the village to the sea the river widens to form the upper end of the harbor, and from here, all the way to the massive old granite breakwater that protects the harbor mouth, there is ample riding for vessels of moderate draught, except at low tide. With the ebb complete, the channel is narrow, for then only the river itself is left winding sluggishly between mud flats and mussel shoals. River Road comes out from the village with the river upon its right and fields sloping up to Old Road upon its left; but for its second half-mile, nearer the sea, it is the crust of an embankment built over the flats and shoals, and is saved from the tidal water by retaining walls of stone and heavy old water-logged timber. Above these bulwarks, at each side of the road, runs a feebly protective, long wooden fence; the narrow board walk occupies the edge of the road toward the harbor, and here, though the sagging top rail of the fence offers a lounger little encouragement to sit upon it, he may at least rest his elbows if he chooses to brood upon curling processions of sand-eels at high water, or, when the wet flats are bared at low tide, upon the incautious spoutings of clams and the stealthy-mindedness of crabs.

The tide was low when the high school girl came to the board walk and turned her brightening face toward the distant village. A hundred yards in

advance of her the protective fence was broken by a gateway that lacked a gate and gave access to a platform of boards resting upon wooden piles driven deep into the mud. The platform was large enough not only to support the gaunt clapboarded building that stood upon it but to serve as a sort of wooden front yard next to the road, and also as the floor of two connecting covered verandahs, one upon the seaward side of the building, the other at the rear, facing the river and known to its owners as the "back porch". From it a long and narrow wooden pier staggered dubiously across the flats to a couple of landing-floats at the edge of the channel, where a small dismantled sloop and two or three rowboats reposed desolately in the mud; and all parts of this queerly cohesive group—the boats, the pier, the barnacled and slanting piles and the peak-roofed high box of a house, its whole angular shape a little a-tilt upon the platform—were the color of weathered dead wood. The place was ramshackle, haggard, lonely, and looked as if the next high wind would leave no more than the skeleton of it sprawled upon the mud; yet it was what brought light into the sombre eyes of Edna Pelter as she came toward it.

Above the front door that opened upon the little wooden yard was nailed a dingy signboard: "Pelter's. Sailing and Fishing Parties Acomodated. Boats for Sale or Hire. Lobsters Clams and Fish." Thus the place was known to Mirthful Haven, and also to those elevated and disturbing houses upon Great Point, as Pelter's; and at Pelter's Edna lived and had been born. She had grown up with the little wooden yard, the rickety pier and the mud flats for her playground; visibly her heart was lighter as she came home to this scarecrow of a place, and, when she emerged from the shadow of the long side verandah into the sunset light now golden upon the "back porch", to find her father smoking there, she even smiled. In response, he turned his head slightly toward her, and, lowering his eyelids, gave her a glance beneath the surface of which a faint surreptitious humor seemed to play; but this exchange was all of their greeting.

He sat tilted back in an untrustworthy old cane-seated rocking-chair, with his long legs stretched upward before him and his brown rubber boots upon the verandah rail—a big, thin, shabby man with tousled, thick fair hair and a face that was hollow-cheeked and cross-lined, yet remained a handsome wreckage, all beauty not yet having been weatherbeaten out of it. Recognizably, his daughter had her looks from him; his eyes, too, were seen at a distance to be blue; but his had a twinkle, at once sardonic and careless, that hers lacked, and Mirthful Haven was fond of saying that he sometimes showed the whites of them like a bad horse. Indifferent to the sharp chill of the northern April air, he sat without a coat, the sleeves of his grey flannel

shirt rolled up to the elbows, and its front exposed by the falling away of his buttonless waistcoat; his right hand held his pipe to his mouth and his left rested companionably upon the head of a dog that lay close beside his chair.

The dog, a big mongrel with some leanings toward a remote Airedale branch in his ancestry, rose, went to Edna, and, as she halted, stretched himself amiably before her, looking up at her with fond and intelligent eyes. She did not notice him, however; her father's humorous glance at her had been but a momentary one, immediately returning to observe the movements of a stout man who was coming toward them from the other end of the pier, brandishing a long boat-hook in his hand. This stout man had lately been deep in the mud, for his high boots of rubber were caked with it almost to their tops; his broad face, moreover, was reddened by an emotion easily discernible as anger, and his lips moved in mutterings not yet audible upon the verandah.

Looking at him, Edna became pensive again. "Found it, did he?" she asked in a low voice. "Not so stingy he's goin' to make a fuss over as little a thing as that, is he?"

"Go on in the house," Pelter said mildly, out of the side of his mouth, not looking at her. "Go on in and git supper."

"None of the Wickses was ever any good," she murmured thoughtfully, not moving. "All they live for is just to bother people. Don't let him——"

"Go on in," Pelter said, and moved his head in a slight gesture toward the wide doorway partly open behind him. "Freem Wicks ain't hardly so able he'd know how to bother me much, I guess. You go in git supper started."

"Well——" she said a little reluctantly; but, apparently obedient, pushed back one of the broad sliding-doors and went into the house. She made a momentary clatter at the stove; then tiptoed back toward the doorway, and, keeping herself out of sight from the verandah, stood listening.

Outside, her father continued imperturbably to watch the approach of the muddied stout figure with the boat-hook, and remained motionless, not even drawing upon his glazed corn-cob pipe, when the visitor's mutterings became recognizable as semi-profane and inimical to all persons bearing the name of Pelter. "Pelters! My Godfrey Mighty! Always b'en the pests o' this commun'ty; always will be! Wust pest-hole in the commun'ty! Always was and always will be! Pelters!" Then, arriving at the juncture of the pier with the verandah, the angry man halted and thrust the boat-hook forward for Pelter's inspection. "See it?" he asked hoarsely. "See them 'nitials burnt into the handle? What you make them 'nitials out to be? 'F' and 'W', ain't they?

Does ‘F’ and ‘W’ stand fer Long Harry Pelter or fer Freeman Wicks? Which?”

But Pelter, ignoring both the protruded boat-hook and the questions addressed to him, seemed unaware that anything intruded upon a contemplation of the farther side of the harbor. His gaze passed over the mud flats beyond the channel to rest serenely upon the rocky banks and clumps of pine trees and wind-carved sand stretches of the opposite shore. This coolness, however, did nothing to lower the temperature of his questioner.

“You answer me!” the stout man shouted. “Does ‘F’ and ‘W’ stand fer Long Harry Pelter or fer Freeman Wicks? Which?”

“Might stand fer Frank Williams,” Pelter suggested casually, beginning to draw upon his pipe again. “Might stand fer Fred Watts. Might stand fer Ferd Wilson.”

“Yes, they might!” Mr. Wicks agreed, with hot satire. “Espeshually if they was men o’ them names livin’ anywheres nigh to this commun’ty; but as it happens to fall out, they ain’t!”

“No; but there’s a man by the name of Foster Wiles livin’ down east o’ here a piece. He put that boat-hook into a little tradin’ I had with him this March.”

“So you claim it as your own proputty, do you? You’re a-goin’ to git up out o’ that chair and try to hender me from luggin’ it back to my own boat where it belongs, are you?”

“No,” Pelter returned coolly. “I never was one to kick up a hullabaloo over as nothin’ of a thing as a boat-hook.”

“I thought not!” Mr. Wicks said, breathing heavily. “You know how I found out ’twas here? Ed Ma’sh told me. ‘When’d you fust miss it?’ he says to me. ‘Last September,’ I told him. ‘I hain’t see it sence the last night I was herrin’-torchin’ in September.’ ‘Who was out herrin’-torchin’ with you?’ he says. ‘My boy, Hugo, and Jeff Miller and Long Harry Pelter,’ I told him. ‘Then you’d ought to know who took it,’ he says. ‘Where’s the place to look fust in this commun’ty when a man misses his boat-hook or his oar-locks or maybe a block-and-ta’kle or a monkey-wrench, or half a keg o’ nails fer that matter?’ he says. ‘Why, Pelter’s,’ he says. ‘Long Harry’s got his floats out again after the winter,’ he says. ‘You go down to Pelter’s and poke around near that little ves-sell o’ Long Harry’s,’ he says. ‘Poke around Pelter’s, enough,’ he says, ‘and you’ll find it!’ ” Mr. Wicks paused for breath; then added, with a bitter vehemence, “Thought by this time I’d fergot all ’bout

missin' that boat-hook, didn't you? By Godfrey Mighty, I don't see how any man can set there and smoke without the grace to feel shame! Look at them 'nitials, I tell you!"

As he spoke, he thrust the handle of the boat-hook so close to the seated man's face that for a moment Long Harry Pelter's sidewise glance showed the whites of his eyes in the dangerous look defined by Mirthful Haven as that of a bad horse. Nevertheless, all he did was to smile faintly and say, "I'll have this Foster Wiles write me a letter and prove it some day, Freem. You better talk 'bout shame to yourself. Seems to me I heard lately you made a great speech over bein' a sinner up at some church meetin' in the village. If you're such a sinner as you say you are, yourself, you ought to feel quite a mite o' shame, oughtn't you?"

For a moment Mr. Wicks's inflamed broad face showed a struggling perplexity; then he became stern. "*You* better think a little about hell fire!" he said. "You keep your tongue off o' church matters until you git grace enough into you to beg fer mercy before the Throne! When I speak in church o' bein' a sinner, that's a thing between me and my Maker; it don't mean nothin' I got to stand before any livin' man or woman fer with my head bowed. In the sight o' the Lord I'm a sinner like all mankind; but among my fellow-citizens I got a right to walk in the pride o' my self-respect, and that's somethin' you hain't never had the right to do!"

"And yet," Pelter said reflectively, "it seems to me I recklect you accusin' me o' pride once or twice in the past. Seems to me I recklect some such thing."

"I said the *right* to pride," Mr. Wicks returned grimly. "You got Satan's pride, and enough to lug you straight down into the brimstone when you die! You got the hell-fired pride that wun't give down, even when you see them 'nitials before your eyes and know in your heart what they convict you of. Yes, and takin' another man's proputty ain't all they convict you of, by a mighty sight! Look at them 'nitials right down on the end o' the handle. All you had to do was to saw four inches off the end o' that handle—'t wouldn't 'a' spoiled it none 't all—but you was atchually too lazy to take the trouble! My Godfrey Mighty, when a man's too lazy to exert himself that little to keep other people's proputty from bein' found in his keep, why, my Godfrey Mighty, you can't hardly tell what to think of it!"

"Can't you? Might think 'F' and 'W' stands fer Mr. Foster Wiles, mightn't you?"

"No, I mightn't!" Freeman Wicks shouted. "Think I don't reckanize my own boat-hook? Think you hain't b'en knowed to do the same thing before

now? Ain't it a piece with all you do? Why, jest look at you!" Here, by coincidence, the indignant man became even more vindictively loquacious than his son, Hugo, had been in the goading of Long Harry's daughter earlier that afternoon upon Old Road. "Look at you! You had a good, able woman fer your second wife; her and her mother, too, was both good, nice, able women and tried to be a good, nice stepmother and step-grandmother to your two daughters. Even got 'em to Sunday-school a while, their stepmother did, the year before she died, and after that if their step-grandmother could 'a' stood livin' at Pelter's any more she'd 'a' brought 'em up somethin' like! You think anybody in the commun'ty believes you ever lifted your little finger to keep 'em from runnin' wild like they done? I'll say this much fer Edna, though; anyhow she's showed more energy 'bout Nina Grier's sweater than you done 'bout my boat-hook—walked clear over to New Yarmouth and got it dyed blue. You and her ain't heard the last o' that, neither, I'll trouble to warn you!"

"So?" Pelter said quietly. "You're warnin' me, are you, Freem?"

"Yes, I am! Abner Grier says he can git the dyein' store clerks to swear to it, and he's goin' to come down on Pelter's with the dep'ty sheriff and a search-warrant, soon's he finds time. I ain't goin' to waste my breath on what's the rest o' the talk about her in this commun'ty, or on what happened to Nettie, all because what kind of any example'd they ever see you a-settin' 'em, and when'd you ever show gimp or godliness enough to make 'em walk the straight path? I ain't goin' to use up my voice talkin' to you on them questions. I come here to git my boat-hook, and I got it, and that's everything I want with you. All I got to say is, you hain't the decency to own even a dog like respectable people own. Look what he done last summer to them new summer people's dog that rented the J. C. Pemberton cottage! Nigh tore him to pieces! Them people swore if they come back next year and this dog o' yourn ever shows his face on the Point they're goin' to hire somebody to shoot him!"

"Did they?" Pelter inquired in a mild voice. The dog had returned to his side, and Long Harry's brown hand again rested upon him genially. "How much did they say they'd give you fer doin' it, Freem?"

The stout man, bafflingly insulted, stared fiercely. "Give who fer doin' it?" he cried. "Who said—"

"Didn't you?" Pelter said, stroking the dog's head. "Didn't you jest say you 'greed to do it fer 'em? There's certain people o' Mirthful Haven that seem to know pretty well which side their bread's buttered on, and always take the part o' the summer people against us that rightfully live here. I

thought from the way you spoke you must be one o' them certain people —'natives' that turn against 'natives' and shoot their dogs, maybe, when there's a chance to make a dolluh off o' the summer people. Didn't you say —"

"I didn't say nothin' o' the kind!" Freeman Wicks shouted. "Don't you accuse me—"

"I ain't doin' any accusin'," Long Harry Pelter interrupted. "That's more your line, Freem. I jest take note o' the fact that you drop around here like a good neighbor and find on my place a boat-hook I traded a man named Foster Wiles fer, and because it's got his 'nitials on it you think it's a smart act fer you to take it away with you in the place of one that dropped overboard when we was torchin' herrin'. Then, because you feel maybe a mite ashamed, you bluster around and taunt me and my family with all our misfortunes and git yourself so worked up sympathizin' with a summer family's dog against a dog that was born and raised in Mirthful Haven that you threaten to take the summer family's money fer shootin' him. I jest take note of it, Freem; that's all."

For some moments Freeman Wicks was speechless; his chest heaved, his short neck appeared to distend slightly and his staring eyes to protrude. "You accuse me—" he said thickly. Then he threw the boat-hook down clattering upon the verandah floor. "By Godfrey Mighty!" he burst out. "I don't believe a word about no Foster Wiles; but I ain't goin' to give no Pelter an excuse to go around this commun'ty accusin' me o' stealin' boat-hooks and shootin' dogs fer summer families!"

With that, he turned upon his heel and departed, stamping his way noisily upon the loose boards of the verandah at the side of the house. Long Harry did not move until the thumping of these enraged and defeated footsteps had subsided; then he rose, picked up the boat-hook and carried it into the house. When he moved at all, he usually moved quickly, and he crossed the threshold just in time to detect his daughter in the act of turning away from her listening-post to go to the stove. "Been busy?" he inquired dryly.

In response she gave him, over her shoulder, an adoring glance all radiant admiration, and, at this, the left end of his mouth extended slightly into a faint, lopsided smile. "Better git them cod fried," he said. "Us Pelters got to have nourishment, jest like other people."

CHAPTER FOUR

THE house upon the wooden platform had a steeply pitched roof with a gloomy loft just beneath, and the lower of the two stories under the loft could not well have been called the "ground floor"; it suggested, rather, the defining title of "water floor", for the incoming tide, covering the mud flats, gurgled about the supporting piles below the feet of Edna Pelter and her father as they finished their supper of fried codfish, baked beans and coffee. This lower story, where they sat, had no partitions and served the Pelters as workshop, store-room, kitchen, dining-room and living-room, all beneath the one long expanse of unplastered ceiling, which was richly hung with a black lace of cobwebs between the rafters. The walls, too, were unplastered and their flimsiness, providing the building with airy draughts throughout the year, may have accounted for the healthy, high color that was upon the cheeks of both father and daughter in spite of the quantity of fried food they habitually ate.

The big, brown, wooden room held the accumulating litter of useless things acquired by people too poor to throw anything whatever away. In a corner near the kitchen-stove there was even a great coverless box filled with empty tin cans; elsewhere there were coils of dead rope, clutters of broken lanterns and empty bottles, torn sails, splintered oars, cracked spars, ancient anchors, rudders and tillers, and topless kegs of rusty and bent nails; fish-nets, rotted and torn, lay in black heaps against the wall and seemed to have caught within their meshes a jumble of extinct one-cylindered motor-boat engines made of caked rust. A great fish-like skeleton in wood loomed along one side of the room, the keel and ribs of a boat Long Harry had begun to build five years before and still talked of finishing some day; but, in ironic comment upon such talk of his, there stood near the pathetic stern a capacious packing-box completely filled with thumb-worn old magazines, autumnal leavings gathered from the summer cottages year after year. Moreover, against the wall, near by, there were some shelves of books from the same source of supply and equally shabby, equally thumbed; and, as if in final ironic suggestion in regard to this boat-building, there was the

harlequin touch of a guitar hanging by a faded purple cord from a nail in the dingy wall.

Pelter used a pewter spoon to scoop the last of the beans out of the glazed brown earthen jar in which they had been baked, finished them in two gulping mouthfuls, and then, as his daughter began to carry the dishes to the sink, he walked over to the guitar, took it down from its nail and began to tune the strings. Edna was careful to make no clatter with the dishes and she washed them as noiselessly as she could. "Won't you—won't you sing Barb'ry Allen?" she asked, almost tremulously.

Long Harry had tinkled out a few chords and then apparently decided to hang up the guitar again; but when she made this timid request he laughed, threw one leg over the corner of a work-bench that stood against the wall, and, resting the guitar upon his thigh, began expertly to play an accompaniment for the doleful ballad of "Barbara Allen". Edna stood with all her body rigid and motionless, except her hands; they moved silently, with infinite care, at their task in the sink while Long Harry sang the song that was her favorite in his repertoire. He sang it in a light, resonant tenor voice of a peculiar quality, a timbre both sweet and mocking that fascinated his daughter as everything about him always fascinated her. Her hands ceased to move and she stood spellbound, still all over, when he came to the final scene of the lovers' tragedy:

"*'O mother, mother make my bed,*
O make it saft and narrow:
My love has died for me to-day,
I'll die for him to-morrow.'"

For a little time after he had finished the song, Edna still stood motionless; then slowly her hands began to move in the sink again and she said huskily, not turning, "Won't you—won't you sing some more? 'Douglas, Douglas, Tender and True', or 'Robin Adair', maybe?"

"No," Pelter answered, and there was a whimsical glint in his blue eyes. "You'll never git them dishes washed if I do. Guess I better help the job out with somethin' to make you move faster." With that, his dexterous fingers brought forth from the guitar a thumping and inspiriting jingle, and he began to sing an air livelier than those she asked for:

"*'As I walk along the Boy Boolong*
With my independent air—
You can hear the girls declare
"He must be a Millionaire,"
You can hear them sigh,
And wish to die,
You can see them wink the other eye
At the man that broke the Bank at Monte Carlo!'"

Pelter's idea seemed to be well-founded; his daughter's hands moved vigorously in time to the beat of the jingle, and, observing this, he chuckled. "Don't you never go complainin' around the village how I don't do my share o' the housework," he said. "We'll git them dishes done slick 's a whistle!" At this, she laughed to him caressingly over her shoulder; he began to play a jig in time to which her flying hands showed such energy that when the jig was finished so was the task, with the dishes stacked upon shelves over the sink and the knives, forks and spoons put away in a drawer of the deal table where the father and daughter had supped. "There!" Pelter said, hanging up the guitar. "I guess if 't wun't fer my vim and gimp this house wouldn't hardly be fit to live in! But don't ask me to do no more dish-washin' to-night, Edna. Come night, a man's got a right to take his leisure."

He turned to the packing-box that contained the stacks of old magazines, delved within it until he found what he wanted, a tattered copy of *Punch*, brought it to a rocking-chair beside the deal table, and, seating himself there, began somewhat perplexedly to turn the pages by the light of the oil lamp. "Seems like some time, if a man studied enough, he ought to be able to make head or tail o' this little magazine," he said to Edna, as she came to sit at the other side of the table, with an old brown book in her hand. "I take a go at it every now and then; but every time I do, seems to me I know jest that much less what it's all about. Odd, that is, too, because it's from the Old Country where all us Pelters come from 'riginally; so it looks like a Pelter ought to be able to make some sense out of it."

Edna had become thoughtful. She did not open her book; but, as it lay in her lap, there seemed to be some connection between it and her thoughts, for her lowered glance was fixed upon its worn cloth cover. "Yes," she said. "I was thinkin' about that some to-day. We got more old English blood in us than anybody else in Mirthful Haven, haven't we? We're the oldest family anywheres along this coast, aren't we?"

He nodded. "Yes—less'n it might be Cap'n Francis Embury; and his family couldn't be any older than what ours is, because Pelters and Emburys come at jest the same time and in the same vessel. Landed here together, they did, right mighty near where we're settin' now, and that was pretty near

the same time as the ‘Mayflower’ they boast of so much, up Massachusetts way.”

“Yes, that’s what I thought,” Edna said. “Leastways, I mean I knew it was so that Pelters and Emburys were—” Suddenly she interrupted herself with a half-suppressed laugh; then, in answer to her father’s look of inquiry, explained, “Cap’n Francis Embury’s such a funny old man I can’t help laughin’ whenever I think of him.”

“Cap’n Embury funny? Your grandfather Pelter sailed under him as ship’s carpenter fourteen year’, and I guess he didn’t think Cap’n Francis Embury was very funny! Good friend to him, too, the Cap’n was, up t’ the time he died. Cap’n Embury’s the finest man in Mirthful Haven. What makes you think he’s so funny?”

“Well, one way he is,” Edna insisted. “Every afternoon when school lets out he makes some kind of excuse to be standin’ around in his front yard to watch me and kind o’ give me the eye and pretend all the time he’s doin’ somethin’ else. Had a geranium pot in his hands this afternoon, actin’ ’s if he didn’t know where to set it. I let on, like I always do, ’s if I didn’t take any notice of him; but his eye never budged an inch from me! He must be about a thousand years old!”

She laughed again, and now her father shared her merriment and laughed with her. “ ’Tain’t to Cap’n Embury’s discredit, though,” he said. “Guess he’d have to be quite a ways over a thousand before he’d lose his eye for handsomeness in women-folks!”

Edna’s color heightened with pleasure; she glanced at him shyly and gratefully, then became thoughtful again. “Well, what I was wonderin’—” She paused. “Munsons aren’t as old a family as Pelters, are they?”

“Munsons? Munsons ain’t old family ’t all, though you’d think they was—all the airs they give themselves and the high livin’ they do! Munsons come to Mirthful Haven in my father’s time and made some money ship-buildin’ jest before ship-buildin’ petered out. Put what they made in wood-lots and pasture-land on Great Point, and that’s where their money comes from, sellin’ the land off to summer people in buildin’-lots. Munsons sold the land fer all the cottages and the hotels, too, and got twenty thutty acres of it left yet on the Point, holdin’ on fer higher prices, and, the way the people keep comin’ here, thicker and thicker, it looks like they’d git ’em some day and put on more airs than ever, likely. What got it into your head Munsons might be old family, maybe?”

“Nothin’,” she answered. “I just wondered, because sometimes they act almost ’s if they could go with the summer people if they wanted to and

were careful not to make any breaks, or anything. I knew they weren't in the list, though."

"What list?"

"The list o' the first people that landed here, in the history," she said, and lifted the book from her lap. "I mean the—"

"Give me that," he interrupted, and took the book as she extended it to him across the table. "This ain't a volume that ought to be left jest layin' around; it's got the paper with the Pelter family tree on it inside the cover, and anyhow it's valuable. It was printed in ship-buildin' times when everybody thought Mirthful Haven was goin' to be a big place some day and its early history ought to be preserved. My grandfather su'scribed fer this copy of it and it's been in the family ever since. You wun't find no Munsons in it, I guess; no, nor no Wickses, nor names of a good many people that think they can hold their heads higher'n Pelters in Mirthful Haven to-day. Listen." He opened the book and began to read aloud: " 'The names of the founders of Mirthful Haven should be held high in honor for all time because of the perils they successfully surmounted, the hardships they endured and the courage and ambition they displayed in crossing the tempestuous and uncharted sea, in the year sixteen twenty-two, to land upon a wild and mysterious coast where lurked the painted savage, the wolf and the bear. The names of those first forefathers of Mirthful Haven were as follows: Charles and Alfred Trainband, brothers. William Smith. Thomas Prentice. Alfred Embury and his wife, Frances. Joshua Butcher, his wife, Mary, and their child, Ruth. Richard Fisher and his sister, Dorcas. John Pelter and his wife, Prudence—' " Long Harry paused, then repeated these two names, for emphasis. " 'John Pelter and his wife, Prudence.' " He paused again, and added, "That's where Pelters begin—sixteen twenty-two —and there ain't a name of all that list left in Mirthful Haven to-day, 'cept Pelter and Embury."

"Yes, I know," Edna said, and, although her eyes had brightened with this reading, she smiled a little ruefully. "Nobody else acts 's if they knew it much, I guess!"

"Well, we got the proof of it here in this volume—yes, and in the Pelter family tree, too!" her father returned, with some sharpness. "Pelters been here three hunderd year' and more, while other families come and gone. Look at them fine big houses up around Cap'n Francis Embury's, all empty now, come autumn. After the big ship-buildin' times, some o' them families died out; some went away, and one by one the houses got sold to summer people. So it's dark after nightfall now in that whole part o' the village

where it used to be lighted up and cheerful, winter-time, and sleighbells jinglin' up to bright doorways when I was a little boy, myself. Them people thought they was pretty important; but all of 'em, 'cept Emburys, come and gone, with Pelters here a hunderd year' and more before they come and Pelters still here now long after they've gone!"

"Yes, I know," she said, and inclined her head in agreement, yet frowned and looked perplexed, as if disturbed by some thought in objection to what he said. "I know—but—but—"

"But nothin'!" her father took up the word as she hesitated; and he frowned, too, though not with any perplexity. His look the rather bespoke an old and stubborn bitterness. "Don't let anybody ever make you think they can come it over Pelters on the score of blood, or any other score fer that matter! I never let nobody come it over me on no score, and I ain't never a-goin' to, neither! Look here!" He took from the book a folded paper, soft and yellow with age; unfolded it and spread it open upon the table. "You s'pose there's anybody in Mirthful Haven, 'cept Emburys, got a family tree anywheres equal to this 'n? You know better! As for the summer people, if there's one among 'em got any family tree 't all it's certain'y yet to be learned of! They come here and king it over all o' Mirthful Haven and live on our land—because Munson sells it to 'em! Call everybody in Mirthful Haven 'natives'; order us around 's if we was nobodys, tell us every which and what we ought to do, and all the time never do a mite o' work, themselves, 'cept jest live on their money. Got so much money they live on the fat o' the land and leave the lean of it fer us that belong here. Money's what they got, not family, though you'd think they had, the way they talk! Here! You look at this dockament if you want to know what's old family!"

"I know," Edna said timidly. "I just thought—"

"Never mind what you thought," he interrupted, bending over the paper and tapping upon it with a forefinger. "Here's where we begin, at the top: John Pelter and his wife, Prudence. See how it spreads out from them? Pelters used to be all up and down the coast before them branches died out. Here's the Pelter—Cap'n Elisha Pelter, his name was—wrecked a brig he was owner and master of on a rock up Wenmouth way, and now they call that rock Butler's Snow and think it was named on account the way somebody named Butler thought the foam on it looked when the waves spilled down from it; but its real name is Pelter's Woe, from the wreck o' that brig. Here's my great-grandfather, born eighteen-hunderd and one, the only branch left by that time; but it's all down in black on white, traced straight back to sixteen-hunderd and twenty-two, and all the way through

people that was born and lived and died in Mirthful Haven. Where does that put Pelters? Don't it put Pelters first and foremost? Pelters don't have to be always talkin' about it, maybe; but in their hearts don't it give 'em a right to feel pride and contempt, as you might say, when they hear other people talkin' about 'old family'?"

"Yes—but—" Edna said, and her timidity seemed to increase. "But all there is left of us is just you and me and—and Nettie—and Nettie's gone, too, now, and it don't look 's if she'd ever come back, likely."

Pelter's face darkened a little at the mention of his older daughter; but he was not disconcerted by what appeared to be a feebly argumentative doubt of Pelter greatness. "Well, what if there is only me and you? Of all the Emburys, there's only Cap'n Francis left—jest one old man. You don't see him lowerin' his head before nobody on that account, do you?"

"No; but everybody looks—looks up to Cap'n Embury, and nobody seems to—to—"

"Nobody seems to what?"

"Well—" Edna's thick lashes shadowed her eyes, and her voice trembled a little. "Nothin'," she murmured; then she added, more briskly, "That sweater he was talkin' about, I didn't know whose it was when I found it in the cloakroom after school; but there isn't any trouble goin' t to come of it, like he said. I burned it up yesterday."

"What fer?"

"Well—there got to be so much talk about it around school—they're always talkin' about me, anyways."

"Well, let 'em!" Long Harry said, and he laughed a little uncomfortably. "I guess us Pelters know how to look after ourselves, let talk be what it pleases."

CHAPTER FIVE

HE FOLDED the paper displaying the Pelters' family tree, replaced it, and pushed the book toward Edna. "There. That's a good volume fer you to be readin'; you'll find Pelters in it every now and then, p'ticu'ly in the earlier parts."

She took the book and seemed to read; at least, her downcast eyes were fixed upon a printed page of it, while her father, returning to his study of *Punch*, became engrossed with the task he had set himself. He frowned as he read; his lips moved slowly with his decipherings, and, for five minutes, the big, littered room had been given to this studious silence, when footsteps were heard from the wooden front yard, and there came a knock upon the outer door. The caller did not wait for a bidding to enter, but opened the door and came in almost simultaneously with his knock. "Readin'!" he said in a cracked and husky voice. "Readin'! Readin'! Readin'! Always readin'! Dun't see how you stand it!"

His entry nowise disturbed the placidity of the scene before him. The father and daughter sat with their backs to the door and consequently to the visitor; this evening call was so customary and expected, indeed, that neither of them turned or so much as looked up, though Pelter murmured, hospitably enough, "Set down. How's Cap' Wye?"

"I'm fair, thanky; leastways, fixed to live till mornin'," the guest replied, seating himself near by. He had been a tall man in his prime but was now stooped permanently by the burden of old age; the lower part of his face was whitely frosted over with a week's beard, and, upon each side of an eagle's beak of a nose, beneath eyebrows that were like big white caterpillars, there twinkled sharp little gleamings from small green eyes still bright. He did not remove his old worn cap of imitation fur or his elbow-patched greenish overcoat; indeed, he was never seen out of them until the warm weather set in, and it was generally believed in Mirthful Haven that he slept in them and in his rubber boots—no unreasonable precaution against the draughtiness of his habitation. He was not a Mirthful Haven man, but a salt water wanderer with the lifelong habit of drifting up and down the coast in a dory and

settling himself, at times, in some cove or harbor, or at the end of a beach, perhaps, for as long as pleased him. One day the incoming tide and an easterly push of wind upon the small, patched sails of his dory had brought him casually into Mirthful Haven; but the village was too far inland for him. He had taken up his quarters in a tumbledown hut among the sand dunes at the harbor mouth, and, as no one disturbed him, or even seemed to know who owned the hut, he was still a squatter there now, six years later. Believed to be ninety, he could not have been much upon the better side of that age; yet he lived by fishing, and his dory was often at sea in weather that kept stouter boats and younger men inside the breakwater. "Seas runnin' wicked when ole Cap' Wye ain't outside," the fishermen said; and, in this abbreviation of the title they had given him as a proper courtesy to one who owned and worked his own boat, there was a slight but observable discrimination. Mirthful Haven called Captain Embury "Cap'n", for he had been one of that highest caste of captains, deep-sea men who rode the typhoon; the second syllable was denied to captains by courtesy, and the aged, coastal gypsy who had dropped in upon the Pelters this evening was never called anything except "Cap' " Wye.

"Readin'!" he croaked again in his salty old voice. "Readin'! Readin'! Readin'! Dun't never find the two of you that you ain't readin'! Dun't see how you stand so much of it! Sh'd think you'd be all wore out with it! By Orry, sh'd think it'd kill you!"

"Well, 'tain't so bad as that." Pelter tossed his copy of *Punch* upon the table, filled his pipe, lighted it, and turned his chair to face the old man. "What's the news, Cap'? You always know."

"Clearin'," said Wye. "Knowed 'twas goin' to, this mornin'. Strip' o' stars to the nor'west. Knowed they would be. Git a breeze off the land to-morrow."

"That all?"

"Well—" Wye passed his tremulous and mottled hand over the stubbly rime upon his chin. "King-pin o' the dogfish's b'en here to-day."

"Who?"

" 'Who?' " the old man repeated, and seemed a little irritated. "What you mean astin' me, 'Who?' You got any objection t' my callin' the summer people dogfish? Do it, yourself, dun't you, sometimes?"

"Guess so," Pelter said, and laughed. "I only wondered who you meant was the king-pin of 'em. Looks to me like they all thought they was king-pins."

“So they do; they think so but they ain’t. Corning’s the king-pin, and you know it well as I do. Corning’s king-pin o’ the whole dogfish tribe, ain’t he?”

“Guess so,” Pelter said, and frowned. “Thinks he is, anyhow.”

“No. He is,” Wye insisted; and he added, as if dryly amused, “Corning hain’t got no special great regard fer you, Long Harry.”

“No,” Pelter assented. “Nor me fer him, neither, nor fer none of his family. Come here ’bout fifteen year’ ago, Cornings did, and started right in ’s if they was the biggest people in the world!”

“Well, they got ’bout the biggest house,” the old man said, and chuckled. “Goin’ to build it bigger, too; goin’ to put a big ’dition to it. That’s what Corning was here ’count of to-day. Come this mornin’ and had Woodbury Fogg up there with him all day, talkin’ over the contracts fer the carpent’rin’. Sent his showfer down to me to tell me to bring up new-caught fish fer his lunch. Didn’t have none, ’count the way the No’theaster kicked up some sea all week; but afterwhile I thought I might ’s well make a dolluh, so I took him up some haddock I’d smoked and offered to cook ’em fer him, myself, ’count o’ my knowin’ the best way to make ’em tasty. Corning ain’t so stuck up as you’d think, leastways not all the time. Had Woodbury Fogg to set right down in the dinin’-room and eat with him, nice and common; showfer waitin’ on the both of ’em. Come out t’ the kitchen after, thanked me good, give me couple dolluhs, ast me how I was and all. I went out in the yard with him and Woodbury Fogg, where the ’dition’s goin’ to be, right atop the highest ground on the whole o’ Great Point. Did you ever know they’s kind of a crack in the trees back o’ that lot and you can look ’way down on the habbuh from up there?”

“Yes; you can see that high point from down here, too, at Pelter’s.”

“Be funny if you couldn’t,” Wye said; and went on, with the unblemished tactlessness of an out-of-doors man: “Because it’s Pelter’s sets right the middle o’ the whole habbuh view from up there and spiles it. It’s a right handsome view, ’cept fer Pelter’s. You can look through that crack in the trees and see the whole stretch o’ habbuh and the village and the river windin’ away off towards Green Hills; but Pelter’s loams right in the middle of all the handsomeness so’t you can’t hardly help lookin’ at Pelter’s instead o’ the handsomeness. Corning said so, himself, and Woodbury Fogg ’greed with him right off.”

“Did he?”

"Corning said he had that crack in the trees cut t' make a good, nice view fer the 'dition to his house when he sh'd come to build it. Now he's goin' to build, he said, he'd have to git that view fixed up right, *some* ways or other!"

"Did he? What'd Woodbury Fogg say to that?"

"Didn't say nothin', 'count o' you and him both bein' Mirthful Haven men, I guess; but he kind o' put on a look 's though he 'greed with Corning. Corning said Pelter's wun't hardly wuth much more'n a few hunderd dolluhs and he'd b'en hopin' every year, sence he cut the crack, that either a wind'd come along and blow it away or it'd jest fall down, like it looked like 'twas always goin' to. Said he'd made you a big offer fer the place—twelve hunderd dolluhs, which was anyways 'bout a thousand more'n Pelter's was wuth—and then raised to fifteen hunderd; but all you did was jest put on a more cussed stubbun look. Said you thought you could hold him up and gouge him because he was a summer res'dent; but he wun't that kind of a man. He wanted to be liberal with the natives, and he *was* liberal with 'em, too, he said; but he wun't goin' to be gouged—'speshually not by people that wun't the right kind o' characters to belong around Mirthful Haven anyways."

"So? That's what he said, was it?"

"Yes, 'twas," the old man answered, nodding amiably. "Said Pelter's was out o' place in a nice, good, law-abidin' commun'ty and ruined the looks o' River Road, besides. Said he wouldn't have a word to say if Pelter's was a nice, neat place and belonged to a hard-workin', respected family, like the main part o' Mirthful Haven folks; but, the way 'twas, why, the S'lectmen and the village ought to find some way to git red of it. Said if they did, the summer people'd likely put up a nice, good, handsome yacht club where Pelter's was, somethin' that'd attract more summer visitors 'stead o' discouragin' 'em, fust time they drove out from the village to Great Point and had to pass Pelter's. Said that'd mean more prosperity fer the natives and 'twas up to them to look out a little fer their own well-bein'."

"So? What'd Woodbury Fogg say then?"

"Nothin'; but kep' puttin' on that look like he 'greed with him. Corning said River Road ought to have asphalt put on it and have a nice, good concrete sea-wall and cement sidewalks, and, if the town did that, the summer folks' taxes'd pay fer it and the S'lectmen could easy enough condemn Pelter's fer bein' unsafe. Corning ast Woodbury Fogg if he didn't think so, as S'lectman, himself, and if the other S'lectmen couldn't be brought around to the same way o' thinkin'."

"So?" Pelter said again. "What'd Woodbury Fogg—"

"Nothin'. Jest looked serious; so Corning laughed and said he'd heard rumors a good many folks in Mirthful Haven wouldn't think the Pelter family no great loss t' the place, if so be the S'lectmen thought they ought to move away."

"So?" Long Harry's voice was harsh, and for a moment the whites of his eyes were conspicuous in the lamplight. Then he laughed, crossed his long legs, and said carelessly, " 'Tain't nothin' new. Corning's blowed himself up and let out wind like that often before now; ain't hardly big enough frog to puff Pelter's away, I guess. What else'd he say?"

"Nothin'. Him and Woodbury Fogg begun layin' out where the rock'd have to be blasted fer foundations, and I come away. King-pin o' the dogfish, though, Corning is, and dun't cal'late to have his view ruined fer him much longer, if he can help it, neither, I guess!"

"No; guess not," Pelter agreed placidly. The dog had come to rest a fond head upon the arm of his master's chair, and, in response to this suggestion, Long Harry gently stroked him. "Funny people, ain't they, Prince?" he said, in apparent communion with the mongrel. "Some of 'em want to 'sassinate you; some of 'em want to 'sassinate the rest o' your family, and some of 'em want to 'sassinate the very house we all live in. Funny talk, ain't it, Prince? Yes, sir, funny talk from people that got a good deal o' proputty they trust to stand around empty the most part o' the year, 's if nothin' could happen to it. Funny talk!"

"Yes, 'tis," Wye agreed, chuckling; then his chuckle became a crackling of dry laughter and he pointed at Edna. Until a moment earlier she had sat gazing absently at the book in her lap; but now she moved suddenly—the book fell to the floor, and her blue eyes, lustrous and startled, turned upon her father a look of poignant inquiry in which there was a hint of dismay. "Look at her!" the old man cackled. "Handsome, ain't she, when she opens her eyes like that!" He got to his feet, moaning a little in the midst of his laughter. "By Orry! Dun't seem like I want to git up no more, once I set down. Time fer bed, though; must be long after eight o'clock." He moved slowly to the door, alternately moaning and chuckling; but paused with his hand upon the latch to look back at Edna and cackle again. "Handsome!" he said admiringly. "High-steppin' cutter, they say she is, but awful handsome! Handsome framed, too! I ain't so old but what I've often took notice she's got as handsome a frame as I ever see. They tell me I ain't the only one!"

Cackling louder in applause of this sally, he opened the door and departed. The sound of his boots clumping over the wooden platform and

away upon the board sidewalk had become inaudible before Edna's expression altered; then her wide stare at her father flickered and narrowed, as her eyelids drooped. With bent head, she seemed to be looking at her hands, which were limp upon her lap, palms upward, and Long Harry, still stroking the dog, became conscious of a dreariness in her attitude that presently made him a little uncomfortable. He gave her a quick, sidelong glance, coughed and said, as if casually, "Cluss-mouthed old codger, Cap' Wye; he don't never say nothin' much to nobody, 'cept us. No fear he'll ever mention I said what I did 'bout summer people's proputty bein' where somethin' might happen to it if a body had a-mind to do things that come into his head sometimes. What's the matter?"

"Nothin'," Edna said meekly; but a moisture was as audible in her voice as it was visible under her eyelashes. "Nothin'; I just—"

Long Harry stirred uneasily in his chair. "Look here!" he said. "You got no call to go hunchin' up your shoulders 's if somebody was goin' to hit you from behind. I ain't a-mind to set nobody's house afire or nothin'; I ain't a mind to do nothin' 't all—anyhow not's long's they let me alone and jest blow themselves off in big talk like that. If I was a-mind to do somethin', I wouldn't 'a' spoke like I did, even before old Cap' Wye." He rose, came round the table to her and put his hand upon her shoulder. "Come a nor'west wind the sea might be down enough fer me to run outside pretty early, maybe. If you're goin' to be up in time to git my breakfast, how 'bout it's bein' bedtime now?"

At this touch of his upon her shoulder, a touch so rare that she could remember almost all the times that she had felt it before in her whole life, the tears beneath her lashes grew larger; she trembled with sudden happiness and sat almost not breathing, feeling that the more motionless she remained the longer might be that adored touch upon her shoulder. "Well, how 'bout it?" Long Harry said, shook her a little, went back to his chair, and began to fondle the dog affectionately. "Good old Prince! Sleepy, ain't he? Got sense enough to know when it's bedtime. Good old Prince!" He set his cheek tenderly against the dog's head, and, as the daughter's suffused eyes wistfully followed this gesture, an earthbound spirit, haunting the cluttered room, might have had its ethereal structure vibrated by two powerful streams of feeling—that of the daughter for her father, and that of the father for his dog.

CHAPTER SIX

ON THE morning of the first of May the early motor-bus from New Yarmouth, the railway station nearest to Mirthful Haven, set down in Cargo Square a thin, elderly woman in dark grey clothes intelligently suited to travel. The 'bus did not bring the mail, and the Square still lay bleak in its winter vacancy; the arrival of the elderly woman had the attention of only one observer. This was Willie Briggs, the one-legged, "tongue-tied" man who seldom leaves the Square, except after bedtime, no matter how calamitous the weather; his lifelong cheerful passion is to be at the centre of things, where there is the most passing of his fellow-men and the greatest likelihood of event. He turns his head frequently, with the sudden motion of a bird, lest even a cat flit across the Square and he be unaware, so sharp is his interest in life and the delight he takes in it. He cannot talk of what he sees, nor in words discuss with anyone the many matters that give him pleasure; yet he is loquacious in an expressive kind of crowing and has a talent for pantomimic gesture. Leaning against the granite pedestal of the cast-iron Union soldier, he watched eagerly, and even anxiously, the opening of the door of the New Yarmouth motor-bus and the descent of the elderly woman therefrom to the beaten dust of the Square. Instantly, he began to gesticulate and to crow with vehemence.

The 'bus went on, and the elderly woman, approaching Willie Briggs, nodded to him gravely. "You seem to remember me," she said. "I always told people you had as good a mind as anybody and I should say your remembering me after all this time pretty well proves it." She set down her travelling-bag, produced a black leather purse and took from it a dime, which she gave him. "You mean you do remember me, don't you?"

The vehemence of his crowing increased reassuringly, and, in further testimonial to his memory, he held his hand at the height of her head, for an instant, then at the height of her shoulder, then at about three feet above the ground, where his gesture seemed to indicate the patting of an invisible child's head. After that, he laughed delightedly and pointed toward the post-office.

"Exactly," the elderly woman said. "You mean me with my two step-granddaughters, one quite a little older than the other, and the three of us usually coming down for the mail together. I suppose you know only one of them lives here now?"

His response was eloquent. He crowed loudly, laughed, looked sly, winked, then kissed his hand explosively to the sky.

The elderly woman regarded him with an increased gravity. "Very well," she said a little grimly, and, taking up her bag, walked thoughtfully away. From the Square she turned into the short street that is like a grey Gothic aisle with a white New England church as an altar at the end of it, for the church faces down the street, and in the leafless seasons is framed, steeple and all, in the pointed archway of the elm branches. Half-way to the church, she opened a white picket-gate, stepped within, upon a gravelled path that divided a neat yard into symmetrical halves, went up the path to the front doorway of a small white house, and clanked the polished brass knocker. A stout woman of about her own age almost immediately opened the door and looked at her seriously. "Don't you know me, Mary?" the visitor asked.

"Martha Shellpool!" the stout woman exclaimed. "Be funny if I didn't know you, seeing't I was expecting you and you not changed a mite in eight years! Come in; I guess it's just as well you're here at last. I can tell you all you care to hear and only too likely more than that! Come in."

Mrs. Shellpool went into the house; the door closed, and thus she was removed from Willie Briggs's field of observation. He had crossed Cargo Square, the better to see where she went, and the closing door seemed to bring upon him a slight bafflement; he put his head momentarily upon one side, like a dog in acute perplexity, then slowly returned to the other end of the Square and again eased his back upon the granite pedestal. He was still there, two hours later, when a few of his fellow-citizens began to cluster about the post-office door and Captain Francis Embury, coming down for the morning mail, crossed the Square, walking widely yet commandingly. At sight of him Willie Briggs crowed loudly and began to gesticulate insistently, pointing alternately at the Captain and at the corner of the street that led to the church.

Captain Embury stopped and regarded him whimsically. "Some friend of mine's gone up Church Street, you say, Willie? Well, 't wouldn't be so unlikely. Who was it? A man?"

Willie shook his head vigorously.

"Oh, a lady! Young? No, not young. Friend of mine, though, you say. Lives on that street? No? Somewhere near here? Well, if she doesn't, I'm

sure I don't know who it could be." Then, as Willie nodded repeatedly to indicate that this knowledge could be easily acquired, the Captain laughed. "No; I don't know, and I guess maybe it's no great matter," he said, and passed on, amused and wondering a little what lady, not young, Willie Briggs had in mind.

Several times, later in the day, this wonder vaguely recurred to him, and it was not until after three in the afternoon that Willie's meaning was made clear to him. The Captain had just left his house to go down for the afternoon mail, when he saw, coming toward him, the figure of the elderly woman who had arrived in Mirthful Haven by the early 'bus. For a moment he thought her a stranger in the village; then, recognizing her, he smiled and walked faster to meet her. "Mrs. Shellpool!" he exclaimed; and, when they had shaken hands, he laughed. "It was you Willie Briggs was tryin' to tell me about this mornin', then—that you'd come back to town again after all this time and he knew I'd be delighted to see you, as I certainly am! He tried to tell me you'd gone up Church Street."

"Yes, I spent most of the morning on that street with Mary Thomas and Clara Fogg. Just now I was coming to see you, Captain Embury."

"Were you? We'll go right back—"

"No," Mrs. Shellpool said. "I was only coming to ask you to go somewhere with me."

"Well, I—" he began, and hesitated, glancing over his shoulder at the schoolhouse. "I don't know but I could, though I've got kind of an appointment for along about four o'clock this afternoon."

"It might keep you longer than that," Mrs. Shellpool said. "But it's important, Captain—I don't mean to you, but to other people. I want you to come up to Harry Pelter's with me."

"To Pelter's?" he asked, and, after another glance at the schoolhouse, became thoughtful. "I see Long Harry sometimes at the post-office and along the road; but I declare I don't believe I've been inside his house in all the long time since you left there, Mrs. Shellpool. Fact is, I believe the last time I was there was at your poor daughter's funeral—must be as much as eight years ago. I'm ashamed to think how long I've neglected lookin' in at Pelter's to see how that little family was gettin' on."

"I suppose you know it's only a family of two now, Captain? You know what happened to my older step-granddaughter?"

"I knew she left here two three years ago," he said, and added, with a little embarrassment, "I never was a great hand to listen to gossip."

"It's worse than gossip," Mrs. Shellpool informed him gravely. "The worst that could be said would be true, I'm afraid. You say you're ashamed of not having looked in on that little family for so long a time; think of how much more cause I have to be ashamed of myself for the same reason! I never could understand why my daughter married Harry Pelter, except that he had a queer, fascinating power over her and she'd never seen how he lived until he brought her here after they were married. When she died I felt I could never bear to see the place again, though I knew Providence had sent me a duty to perform toward those two young stepdaughters of hers that we were both so fond of. They were nice children then, too; it was my duty to keep them nice—and I failed to perform it. Well, every year my conscience has been heavier and heavier upon me for it, until lately I just couldn't stand its pressure. I've got hold of the older girl, Nettie, the one that ran away, and I've tried to do what I could with her. Now I've got to get hold of the younger one and I want you to help me because you're the one person in the world who has any influence with Harry Pelter."

"Me?" the Captain said uneasily. "Well, I don't know that I—"

"Yes, you have," she said earnestly. "His father sailed with you and brought him up to respect you and your opinions—about all he's ever respected in this world, I think! I haven't seen him yet; I want you to go with me because he'll listen to me if you're there and seem to be in sympathy with me. I spent a good part of the morning listening to terrible stories, Captain Embury—and if this child's to be helped at all, it must be done now or she'll be utterly lost. She can't be wholly hardened yet; she's only fifteen, and they say that in her studies she's one of the brightest pupils in the high school here. As a little child, when I knew her, she was always gentle and affectionate, and such a pretty little thing, too—beautiful I'd call her, with eyes the clearest blue I ever saw in my whole life and the loveliest light brown hair!"

"Light brown?" the Captain said inquiringly. "Not reddish?"

"Yes, maybe a little, as I recollect it; it looked reddish at a distance."

"Well, well!" the Captain said, and his eyes sparkled. "Then don't you believe a single word Mary Thomas and Clara Fogg said about her—not a single word! Pair o' biddybodies—"

"No, no, Captain, they're good, kind women, and that makes what they've told me all the more terrible. Besides, there were others who told me: Jennie Bailey and—"

"All biddybodies!" the Captain insisted loudly. "Don't you believe a word they say! Long Harry Pelter's daughter, is she? Well, well! *Old* Harry

Pelter's granddaughter! Not a single word o' truth in what those old biddybodies told you about her, Mrs. Shellpool, not a single word! Always were one o' the best lookin' families in the world, all the Pelters! Might 'a' guessed who she was, long ago! Finest girl in Mirthful Haven and don't let anybody coax you into doubtin' it for an instant!"

Mrs. Shellpool shook her head. "No. I'm afraid you haven't heard—"

"No, and don't want to!" the Captain said stoutly. "Don't want to hear! Always be jealous, biddybodies will, and stirrin' up talk because their own children look like a shillin's worth o' brass filin's alongside of a Ceylon pearl. Finest girl in a thousand! Finest in a million! Don't ever let anybody —"

"You'll go with me, Captain?"

"I certainly will!" he said with vigor. "This board walk's too narrow for the two of us alongside, but if you'll just turn around and walk ahead of me until we get to River Road I'll beg you to do me the honor to take my arm and let me act as convoy the rest o' the way to Pelter's."

He went on talking, in his hearty and sonorous voice, as they walked to the corner in the order of precedence he had suggested; then they turned into River Road, and the street of the ancient sea magnates was quiet again. Its peace was disturbed some minutes later by the noisy exodus of the lower grade pupils from the schoolhouse, and, at four o'clock, by the less impetuous coming forth of the high school students; but, at half-past four, when Edna Pelter was released, alone, from the ugly building, the stately neighborhood was once more all silent, except for a steady whispering from the distant surf. The girl's face was flushed and brooding; her eyes seemed disturbed by an anxiety and her mouth was set with the stubbornness that still remained upon it after half an hour's interview with the Principal of the high school. He had detained her for an intricate questioning into the matter of Nina Grier's sweater; this was by no means her first subjection to such probings, moreover, and she had begun to fear that the mere interminableness of the results of an act generally held to be sinful might in time break down her energy for denial. She walked home gloomily by River Road, meeting no one; but, as she turned from the sidewalk and stepped upon the outermost plank of the front yard at Pelter's, she halted, hearing from within the house the astonishing sound of Captain Francis Embury's loud, sailor voice.

"What in the world!" she murmured; and her troubled imagination presented her on the instant with the stricken conjecture that the Captain was accompanied by a deputy sheriff and had come to Pelter's upon the matter of

the sweater. Edna had read insatiably the autumn leavings of the summer cottagers and she had been often to the motion-picture theatre at New Yarmouth; the Captain was the rich man of the village and undoubtedly of late had curled his moustache for her benefit. Would he first hound her, then malignantly offer to protect her? She went on tiptoe to listen close by the front door, and what she heard was incomparably more startling than the sinister fragment of drama just sketched by her imaginings.

" 'Tisn't the most important question at all, Harry," the Captain was saying. "Whether or not legal adoption papers are goin' to be made out for your daughter, why, that doesn't so much matter. The question you have settled was the main one: whether you were goin' to keep her here or let her have a good home and higher education and a woman's care, such as she needs, and a chance to get something better out of her life than she'll ever have here under the circumstances her step-grandmother's been talkin' about. I don't for a minute say it isn't goin' to be a sacrifice or that you mightn't have needed her here to cook for you, wash dishes, make beds and —"

"Never mind 'bout all that," Long Harry's voice interrupted. "I did my own cookin' and so on plenty well enough when the children was little, and I lived here alone right enough before I ever was married. The idea of jest bein' here alone don't fret me a mite and maybe you'll laugh when I tell you what's the main cause, as you might say, Cap'n, why I keep on a-hesitatin' to do what you say, no doubt rightly, is the good thing to do. Yet I guess maybe you're the very one man that'd understand me best. You see Pelter is an old name here—"

"I know 'tis; no one knows that better 'n I do."

"Well, the name dies out with me, Cap'n, and of course that can't be helped; but, when my time comes, I kind o' would like to think that some o' the old blood was goin' on here in Mirthful Haven, and there wouldn't be any chance o' that if Edna—"

"Why wouldn't there?" the Captain's voice cried testily. "She could come back here some day, couldn't she, if she's a-mind to? After she comes of age, or 'most any time her step-grandmother'd be willin', she could come back, couldn't she? Certainly hope she will, myself, because already she's the best ornament Mirthful Haven's got, no matter about all that biddybody talk. I wouldn't urge on any man to sign papers declarin' that he'd never in his whole life even so much as lay eyes on his own child again! Adoption papers or not, the main thing is that her step-grandmother is goin' to take her away and have her for two three years or more until—"

“Take who away?” Edna gasped, and, throwing open the door, walked into the big room to stare dazedly at the three people who sat there engaged in this strange consultation. “Take who away?”

Captain Embury jumped up with a lightness of movement unweighted by the number of his years, and came to her. “I’m Captain Francis Embury, Edna Pelter,” he said. “I’m an old friend of all your family, though you may not remember me and—”

“Yes, I know you,” she said, looking not at him but at her father, who sat meditatively in a broken rocking-chair and did not even glance up at her. “What’s this talk about my goin’ away somewheres?”

“Your step-grandma’d better tell you, I think,” the Captain said gently, with a deferential gesture toward Mrs. Shellpool. “It’s what she’s here for.”

Mrs. Shellpool’s gloved fingers fumbled with a dampened handkerchief in her lap as she leaned forward to look searchingly at the agitated girl before her. “Don’t you know me, Edna? Don’t you remember me?”

“Yes. What’s this talk about somebody takin’ me away somewheres?”

Mrs. Shellpool did not reply directly. “You’re almost sixteen, aren’t you? You’re growing up to be as pretty as you were when you were a little child,” she said. “They all admit that about you, Edna; but they think it makes matters the worse. You need somebody to take care of you, child.”

“Do I? Guess us Pelters can look out for ourselves!”

“You wouldn’t mind being with me, would you?” Mrs. Shellpool asked gravely. “I don’t mean you’d be with me all the time; you’d be in school, of course. Perhaps you don’t remember very much about me. When I was young I taught school myself for a few years before I was married, and my best friend was another teacher, Miss Branch. She has one of the best girls’ schools in the country, now, at Stony Brook in New Jersey, where I live, Edna. She’s willing to take you as a day pupil next September if I prepare you during the summer, and that won’t be difficult if I take you to Stony Brook now to live with me. You do remember at least that I was kind to you when you were little, don’t you?”

“Yes, I do. But I’m not goin’ anywheres to live.”

“Wait,” Mrs. Shellpool said. “You’re old enough to understand what we’ve been trying to make clear to your father, Edna. I’m entirely alone in the world now; you and Nettie are only step-relatives, but you’re the nearest I have. I’ve seen Nettie, and I’ve done what I could for her; but I was too late for it to amount to a great deal. I can do more for you, because you’re younger. I can’t leave you any money in my will, because I live on an

annuity—I want to explain everything to you, Edna—but I can give you proper care and an excellent education. If you were my own daughter I'd rather have you at Miss Branch's school than at any girls' college, and you'll be comfortable in the cottage where I live, at Stony Brook; you won't have to cook or do housework, because I keep a servant. You'll have suitable clothes and—"

"I don't want 'em!" Edna said suddenly and fiercely; but she had begun to tremble all over. "I don't want 'em!"

"Edna, your father's consented to your going with me," Mrs. Shellpool returned quietly. "All that remains to be settled is whether or not this is to be a legal adoption; but that's a point I won't stress, because it's immaterial."

"You say—" Edna began; then she walked to her father and stood before him, while he still did not look up at her but sat fumbling with his pipe and seemingly engaged in a gloomy contemplation of it. "She claims you 'greed to it," the daughter said huskily. "Leastways, she—she claims you did!"

"Well—" Long Harry polished the bowl of his pipe against the palm of his hand. "Cap'n Embury and my mother-in-law certain'y 'peared to have some good arguments. Too stiff fer me to answer, anyways. I like to have you with me—always did git along all right together—but of course it would be a nice thing to have you fixed to do better than Nettie's done, I guess. Tells me all she could do fer Nettie was to kind o' reform her—guess you might call it so—and fix her up in a private family in Lynn, or somewheres, doin' housework. Hired help!" He laughed with some bitterness, and added ruefully, "Kind of a comedown in the world fer Pelters, you might say. Guess it'd be a good thing if you could git as far up as Nettie's gone down."

Edna's trembling increased, and she stared at him with eyes widened to their utmost. "You—you 'greed to—to let me—"

"Well—" His attention still seemed concentrated upon the polishing of his pipe. "Yes—guess I did!"

"Well, I haven't!" she said thickly, and turned a quivering face upon Mrs. Shellpool and the Captain. "Guess you better—you better ask me whether I want to get adopted or not, hadn't you? Guess you better ask me whether I'm goin' to—whether I'm goin' to leave Mirthful Haven or not, hadn't you? Guess you better—" But here her voice failed; she tried to control her trembling and the twitching of her lips and eyelids so that the intruders should see before them a firmly defiant figure never to be overcome. For the first time since her stepmother's death, somebody was trying to be useful to her; the only distinction she made between this effort and the selfish pressures that had been put upon her to do things she did not

wish to do was that she found this one staggeringly the more painful. She had usually yielded to the other pressures and had only despair to oppose to this one, since her father abandoned her to it. Dismally overwhelmed by the suddenness with which her life already seemed to be changing, and herself bereft of the one being for whom she passionately cared, she was still impelled to offer the show of a resistance that she herself knew had no substance. “Better ask me, I guess,” she said again, indistinctly; but her breathing had become too rapid and her trembling too violent to be exhibited endurably before these virtual strangers. She ran to the rickety stairway and fled upward, clutching the stretched rope that served for a railing. “Better ask me, hadn’t you?” she tried to cry fiercely as she went; but was unable to make the sounds she uttered into words.

CHAPTER SEVEN

EDNA had been away from Mirthful Haven for six months before Captain Embury came to Pelter's again, this time upon a somewhat belated prompting to pay what his manner suggested was a call of condolence. "Know how you must miss that grand young lady of yours," he said to Long Harry, as they sat together upon the rear verandah above the clear waters of the incoming tide. "Miss her myself, especially since school began again. Never saw anybody with a face of a color pleasanter to look at; most of 'em get a good deal like putty, this time o' year, teachers and all. What I mean, it must be lonesome for you without her and livin' all by yourself like this."

"Think so?" Pelter said, and laughed. "Live all alone yourself, don't you, Cap'n?"

"That's different. I'm used to it and didn't have a child growin' up in the house and startin' in to blossom out to be a comfort and a pleasure just to look at, the way it's been with you. Might say I lent my help to deprive you of her, if you happen to look at it in that light; but I couldn't help believin' her step-grandmother's arguments were sound."

"Yes; guess they was."

"Nevertheless," the Captain added, "I certainly feel sympathy for you and admire the way you haven't let anybody see that this trial is wearin' on you."

"On me?" Long Harry said, mildly surprised. "I git along all right. A good dog's always been comp'ny enough fer me, 'most any time. Evenin's, old man Wye drops in on me, likely, and he's a right sociable talker, old man Wye is." (In Captain Embury's presence, Mirthful Haven had learned to be tactful in the matter of courtesy titles; without loud reproof to the speaker, he never allowed that of "Captain" to be misapplied, even with the second syllable carefully omitted.) "Old man Wye's good comp'ny, Cap'n; so's Prince, here, and I got plenty to read when I'm a-mind to. Any extra time I git from fishin', lobsterin' and so on, I'm buildin' a motor-boat that might make a dolluh off o' the summer people, takin' 'em fishin' or pleasure-partyin'—if they don't git to boycottin' me too hard."

"Boycottin' you too hard? Who's—"

"Yep; they been tryin' it. Passed around the word so't a good many of 'em wouldn't buy any fish or lobsters off o' me this season, or hire my old sloop or any rowboats from me."

"Why wouldn't they?"

"Want to make me sell 'em Pelter's fer nothin', Cap'n; but I wouldn't sell it to 'em no matter what they'd give me. Wouldn't have no other place to live and wouldn't live nowheres else if I did! They had engineers take soundin's, and this water-front stretch o' mine here is 'bout the only place along River Road where there's bottom enough under the soft mud to drive pilin'. Want to put a yacht club here so't they wun't have to git to their boats in summer from that old rotted gov'ment wharf down by the breakwater. Corning got 'em stirred up; thinks Pelter's hurts the view from that new 'dition he's built to his house up atop the Point. Been after me a good while, Corning has."

"Has he?" The Captain frowned. "Don't ever let him weaken you, Harry. I was sorry when the first summer boarders began to come, long ago; yet in a way I guess they've been a godsend to a good many of our people that didn't hardly have any other way to make a livin'. As it is, nine-tenths o' the young folks leave the village and go to the cities the minute they're of an age to shift for themselves, and those that are left have had to depend more and more on what they could skimp along on out of what all these strangers paid 'em. Hasn't anybody in Mirthful Haven got very well off at that, I guess! Maybe Munsons."

"Yep. Munsons try to be hand-and-glove with 'em."

"Guess so," the Captain assented. "Won't get very far with the best o' the summer people, though, probably, because there *are* some mighty fine people among 'em, you know, Harry."

"Yes; guess there might be—here and there and now and then."

"Most of 'em, though," the Captain added, reflectively, "I wouldn't let come in my house. They're great hands to try and get in, too, to see my collections and look at my furniture. Make up all kinds of excuses to get in. Party of 'em last summer had a dressy, big, loudspoken woman in the front of 'em said her own brother-in-law's name was Embury, same as mine, so she was sure we were related and she wanted to bring her friends in and tell me all about these New York Emburys. 'Never been any in New York,' I told her. 'Never been any Emburys that far west.' Said I guessed she must have mistaken the name and excused myself for shuttin' the door and

lockin' it. Corning brought his wife and some visitors, first summer they came here, and I let 'em in because the village was all talkin' about what a good thing it was to have such an important man here. Hardly got inside the house before Mrs. Corning began hintin' how she'd like to own the big oil paintin' in the front hall, the one o' the Embury that was province governor in Old Colony times. Walked right on down the hall and into the dinin'-room, they all did, and began to talk in whispers, excited like, among themselves; then Mrs. Corning began to smile and make a fuss over me. 'When you decide you'd like to have a splendid new sideboard in place of that old one, Captain,' she said, 'I hope you'll give me your promise to let me be the only person you consult about it.' I told her my great-grandfather had buried that sideboard to keep it from the British in the War of Eighteen-twelve, and she said, 'Well, remember! You've promised to let me know the minute you decide to part with it!' That's what happens, once a person lets such people get into his house!" The Captain coughed, and cleared his frowning brow. "Well, that's neither here nor there, just at the present time. I suppose you write to your daughter regularly? Guess she certainly hoped you would, Harry."

Pelter looked slightly uncomfortable. "Well, I never was no great hand at letter-writin'. Postal cards mainly and not too many of 'em, I'm afraid."

"You ought to do better by her; I know she counted on it. Hear from her pretty regularly, do you?"

"Yes; pretty. Letter from her yestaday. Like to see it, Cap'n?"

"I would so," the Captain said heartily, and Long Harry, bestirring himself, went into the house, closely accompanied by his dog. He seemed to have some trouble in finding what he sought; but, after a time, returned with the letter in his hand and gave it to the Captain. "Couldn't remember what'd 'come of it," he said apologetically, and, resuming his seat, stroked the dog and smoked his pipe while Captain Embury read Edna's letter.

> I guess I am sort of getting used to it. Some things about it don't bother me as much as they did at first anyhow. One thing I never will get used to though is everybody thinking my name is Edna Shellpool. Grandmother is very strict about that because she says there might be some girl in the school that might happen to visit Mirthful Haven in summer perhaps and might ask about me there and bring talk here to the school. I will never forget that my true name is Edna Pelter of the Pelters of Mirthful Haven but while I am with Grandmother I suppose I must bear it. She is very nice and so is Miss Branch's school as I have so often written to you. I would like to have some letters back when you can find

time though I was so glad to get the post cards but it is almost a month since the last one. If you could find time I would like to have a letter very much. Miss Branch is perfectly lovely and all the teachers are interesting women and very kind. They are very thorough in their methods but the studies seem almost easy after the way Grandmother worked at me night and day during the four months before the school opened most of the time to get my manners and pronunciation correct and at home she still keeps on. At first I hardly spoke to the other girls at all but it is easy enough to talk the way they do though they still think I am very quiet. I have got a great deal better acquainted with them since winning the swimming championship in the pool and some of them are the nicest girls I have ever seen. One named Mildred Kerr and I are best friends. My studies are all very interesting. It was a little hard at first to wear new clothes and have to think about them and to have Grandmother worry when my feet would get wet which was very funny to me. I would like to know how you are. Every night I wonder how you are and I wonder what you are doing. I hope nothing happened about that. You know what I mean. Corning. I hope it is all right. When you write to me please tell me how you are and how Prince is and everything. I do not like to bother you or to put any burden upon your time but indeed I would be so glad if you would make the next a letter instead of a post card—though don't make this request an excuse to forget the post card! Grandmother asks me to have you remember her to Capt. Embury and I wish you would tell him that I am sorry if I was rude to him that day when he was just helping Grandmother to do what she thought was right. Will you write to me pretty soon and in writing to you I will not sign myself Shellpool but

Your affectionate daughter
EDNA PELTER.

"Writes a nice letter, don't she?" Pelter said, as the Captain, concluding, returned his eye-glasses to a waistcoat pocket and the letter to its envelope.

"Finest letter I ever saw from a young lady o' that age!" the Captain said, beamingly. "Apologizin' to me the way she does, it shows politeness. Wasn't any need for it, because I understood how she felt that day; but that makes it all the better. Anybody can be polite when they *got* to; but to show politeness when there isn't any call for it, that's the mark of a true lady."

"Might be," Pelter assented absently. "There's one thing I think she hardly hadn't ought to been willin' to do, though."

"You're wrong," Captain Embury said promptly, comprehending without the need of further explanation. "If you were only fifteen or sixteen years old yourself, and the person that had charge of you told you your name'd have to be Shellpool for a while, instead of Pelter, you wouldn't know what to do except just be obedient. You shouldn't hold that up against her, Harry."

"Maybe not. Shouldn't thought she'd 'a' done it, though."

"Now, now!" the Captain remonstrated. "She'll change it to Pelter again when she comes back here some day."

"Will she? Don't know if she will or she wun't. Matter o' that, don't know if she'll ever come back 't all."

"You do, too, know! She's got too much old Mirthful Haven blood in her not to feel the draw. Once anybody gets the draw o' Mirthful Haven into them they can't help feelin' it the rest o' their lives, no matter where they go, and if they haven't got their liberty to come back to settle down in the old home again they anyhow come back as often as they can to look at it. Take you or me; suppose somebody offered us ten million dollars to go live somewhere else—"

"Yes, I know; but if she was willin' to drop the name o' Pelter, why—"

"Nonsense!" the Captain cried, and, laughing loudly, slapped Long Harry's knee; then rose to go. "She'll come back to Mirthful Haven and she'll come back to the name o' Pelter, too. Even an unlearned old sailorman could see how that little girl's heartstrings are all wrapped around her daddy, and you oughtn't to let her get so lonesome for letters, Harry. I went cabin-boy on the 'Star of the East' when I was eleven years old, and didn't see home again for four years; it was a long time between ports, too, and I know how 'tis to be months without any news o' Mirthful Haven. Before I go you got to promise me to spend a few evenin's writin' to her, now and then, instead o' puttin' in the time scratchin' your dog's back or listenin' to old man Wye. I want your word you'll do it."

Long Harry laughed and readily gave the assurance required of him. His intentions were sincere, moreover; he sat down that evening with a pen in his hand and some sheets of blue-ruled paper before him, and, after a period of meditation, began to write. "Well I would not thought you would change your Name from Pelter Edna but be that as it may—" At this point, his pen abruptly stopped writing, and for reasons unknown to him he found himself unable to force it to proceed. He sat long, staring at the unfinished sentence and at the curiously rebellious pen; then he decided that there was nothing for it but to substitute another postal card. This he did, though not until some

weeks later, for he was an easily forgetful man, and his daughter had already begun to seem to him remote.

CHAPTER EIGHT

IN HIS mind she verged toward the blurring and unimportunate past, that mist into which Nettie and his two dead wives had disappeared, and where they remained veiled and undisturbed, unless an infrequent memory seemed to stir them a little. He was elusive, not to be found, when Captain Embury came again to see him; the Captain chuckled ruefully sometimes, meditating upon Long Harry's extraordinary powers of evasion. Whole seasons passed but the fellow was not to be caught by anyone with a chiding in mind—not to be found at Pelter's, unless the house were searched, perhaps; not to be trapped at the post-office, nor to be pinned down anywhere else for that matter. At the Captain's age, and in Mirthful Haven, too, time goes fast but resolves to action are taken slowly; he was roused at last, however, and, upon a dismal morning of alternate rain and wet snow, drew on his goloshes, put a sandwich into a pocket of his overcoat, tramped through the slush to Pelter's, and spent the rest of the day pacing the tipsy verandahs or sitting upon a box, drowsily staring at the river. At twilight, Long Harry appeared from up-stream in a rowboat, tied it to an iron ring in one of the floats and came slowly up the pier toward the house.

"Got out the front way some time this mornin' whilst I was round at the back, didn't you?" Captain Embury inquired.

"Me?" Pelter said blankly. "You been waitin' fer me, Cap'n Embury? Been fixin' a fish-trap all day, quarter mile or so 'bove the bridge. Lookin' fer me, was you, Cap'n?"

"Lookin' for you?" the Captain returned, with satire. "Nobody's ever given you two three hundred messages from me that I was tryin' to see you, have they? It hasn't been on your mind at all that I ever stuck any notes for you under your front door to let you know I was lookin' for you, has it? It hasn't ever occurred to you—"

"Why, Cap'n, I declare I been so busy—"

"Never mind! There's enough on Gabriel's Record Book to keep you busier still if you ever get up there; don't add to it. I'm here to ask you a question and I want an answer right straight point-blank! Just exactly how

long is it since you promised me you'd write a letter instead o' postals to that little girl down at Stony Brook, New Jersey?"

"How long? Let's see." Pelter lifted one side of his oilskin hat and rubbed his wet fingers through his thick fair hair. "Well, you see, Cap'n, she wun't in Stony Brook all last summer, you know. Seems her step-grandmother took her on a long trip out through Yellowstone National Park and California and all that wild country out—"

"Never mind!" the Captain interrupted sternly. "Last summer was 'way long ago last summer. You come to the question! How long since you made me that promise? Matter of a couple o' years, isn't it?"

"Why, no, Cap'n; it couldn't be anywheres near—"

" 'Tis, too! What's more, it's maybe a month or so worse than two years. Suppose you don't know that after I saw what a cravin' she had for news o' Mirthful Haven I sat down and wrote to her myself and told her you were well but awful lazy! Suppose you don't know I've been writin' to her every month or so ever since, so's she wouldn't pine away for—"

"Yes, I know, Cap'n; she wrote me you'd—"

"Didn't it shame you?" the Captain shouted fiercely. "How much longer are you goin' to let her depend on somebody else for news that her own daddy isn't sick or dead? Says now she hasn't had even a postal from you since last July! What do you mean by it? She hasn't forgot *you*, has she? You listen to me! If you live till to-morrow mornin', you're goin' to have a good long letter to her finished and put in an envelope and brought to me by breakfast time, and I'll see it goes in the post-office, myself! If you're not at my house with that letter by the time I've finished my breakfast, I'll be back here mighty soon after and sit right over you till the thing's done, so you might as well do it to-night. Hear what I say?"

The Captain's final question seemed needless, for he could have been heard across the harbor; his vigor was awesome. That night Long Harry wrote a letter to his daughter, and was surprised to find the task less difficult than he had so long imagined it would be.

> Well Edna we have had quite a little Snow all ready but not very cold yet and mostly rainy afterwards. Looks like a hard winter coming thogh because the wild Geese went over early and moss thicker than usual on the North side of the trees in the woods. Well I will try to answer all your questions. I am well as you ought to know never haveing had a Days Sickness in my whole life. Yes the Mash Hens still croak come evening like hoarse old Sailors going home drunk the way you said and

the Tern still did thier wonderful diving off our pier up to the time they left in September like you said and Willy Briggs still stands around Cargo Square all day doing just the same he always did jerking his Head and making motions and kind of Yelping. Yes I will tell you all about that. Summer People put kind of a Boycot on me the Word haveing passed around that I was not a good Character in Mirthful Haven but I get along because I Finished the Motor boat and took out some Pleasure partys in spite of Boycot. I have been useing Her some all ready in kind of side business with Anton Sharett that lives a peice back off the New Yarmouth Road. Somebody put small Rocks all around in Cornings grass before Cornings come last Spring. He had a new Lawn-mower with a gas Engine that cost him good Money and the first time they tryed to cut the grass I hear they had a funny time. Woodbury Fogg says Corning laid it to me and was guilty of useing Profanty. Woodbury had to laugh telling me about it but said I better Look out. I do not need to Worry and you do not need to ask any more questions about this Trouble because I am alright. The People come back again this last Summer that Prince had the fight with thier dog. Thier Name is Gordon and they are some Kin to Cornings so I guess they agree with him but they did not Get Prince. I had a Warning to keep off the Point from thier Chaufer but went up the next Morning and stayed all Day with Prince fishing off the Rocks in front of thier Cottage. They will not Get Prince and they will never Get Pelter's no matter what they do. Cap Wye is still alive and we play Checkers Evenings. Hope you are well and remain Yours with Best Regards

H. PELTER.

Thus Captain Embury was satisfied; Long Harry ceased to avoid him, and, meeting the hale old man in the post-office, informed him that Edna's response to the letter had expressed gratification. "Guess you were right and I ought to've done it long before, the way she thanked me," Pelter said. "No, don't worry, Cap'n, I'll do it again; guess I can keep it up right along, now I got the ice broken."

" 'Ice broken'!" the Captain grumbled. "Wish I could get the ice broken in my kitchen plumbin'! Froze up solid some time before daylight, it did, and snow-ploughs'll be breakin' out the roads between now and Christmas. We're goin' to get another winter straight down from Labrador, you'll see!"

Pelter agreed with him, and the event proved the gloomy prophecy well founded. By Christmastime the snow was deep upon a foundation of ice; the lights of the three or four places of business upon Cargo Square showed

faintly through windows too thickly frosted over to permit a glimpse of the red and green holiday decorations bravely attempted within the shops. There was no thaw or abatement later; the north wind drove even Willie Briggs from the Square for weeks at a time; the half-buried village seemed to possess either no populace at all or a stupefied one, and Pelter abandoned until better weather that "side business" into which he had entered with the collaboration of Antoine Charette. Long Harry was cheerful enough; he did a little icy fishing on the less boisterous days, read, strummed his guitar or played checkers with the aged Wye in the evenings, and, as he had predicted to Captain Embury, even found himself able to write several times to his daughter. A letter from her at the end of February, however, failed to bring him pleasure; his lips, forming the words as he read, moved slowly, and when he finished there was a line of misgiving between his eyebrows.

Mildred Kerr made me go home with her over Washington's Birthday. That night there was a dance at a Country Club the Kerrs belong to, and the first thing I did there was almost to run out of the place and start to hike back to Stony Brook. We walked straight into the Corning family! I hardly knew what I was doing; but I needn't have worried. Every one of that family must have seen me hundreds of times at Mirthful Haven; but in reality not one of them had ever seen me at all. To the Cornings, looking at any of the "native" children would be just like looking at some of the sand on the beach or a part of the underbrush in the woods. Besides that, I've grown about three inches—perhaps you wouldn't know me yourself. Perhaps even Willie Briggs wouldn't! Both of the Corning boys asked me to dance, and it seemed pretty queer, thinking of the thousands of times I've seen them pass Pelter's. I wouldn't have done it or had anything whatever to do with any of the Corning family; but I was in a pretty helpless sort of a jam. After we got home Mildred talked about them and seemed to admire Mr. Corning very much which disgusted me; but I didn't know how to say anything. I could hardly eat my breakfast the next morning—those people all seem so powerful they frighten me. Please, please be careful!

I was sorry I went, especially as I found Grandmother not so well when I got back, and a great deal of the time she's in a state of depression that I can't get her out of. Sometimes she talks pitifully about having lost track of Nettie again and about not being able to leave me anything in her will. I laugh at her about that of course as if there were no reason to fear she wouldn't get well, and I hope it isn't heartless of me to be thinking to myself of what you used to say—that we Pelters

can look after ourselves! Surely you see that I still am a Pelter in spite of my not having been called that for so long that I usually give a funny little kind of jump when I sign it on my letters to you.

I suppose you'll laugh if I tell you that there are still times when homesickness for Mirthful Haven gets to coming over me. It's so lovely of you to write letters to me now—you can't think how grateful I am. Captain Embury wrote me you looked "well and big and handsome". I am well and big myself—at least tall—and the Pelters can take care of themselves; but some things are too powerful for us not to be afraid of if we're sensible. Oh, please be careful!

Affectionately, your daughter
EDNA PELTER.

Pelter's eyebrows did not relax, as he absently folded the letter and tossed it upon the table, nor was his misgiving caused by her troubled warnings or anything whatever she had written concerning the Corning family. True, of late, he had been able to write to his daughter more copiously than before; nevertheless, this more and more educated young lady correspondent of his seemed to him proportionately more and more a disturbing and somehow pretentious stranger. Frowning, he contemplated his dog and muttered to him in a fretful revery. "She'll be back here, Prince—if that old lady don't git well, she'll be back here sure as clams is clams! It'd what you might call compilicate matters, wouldn't it, Prince?"

The dog, half-awake, languidly thumped his tail upon the floor, and Pelter, glancing upward, seemed to be worried by a thought of the dismantled room that had been his daughter's. The room could be made ship-shape, of course; but to have a young lady from a fashionable school occupying it—occupying it permanently, perhaps—might complicate matters, as he had just said, and complicate them at the wrong time, when they were going well. If he were only a better hand at letter-writing, now, he thought, he might be able to save the seclusion of Pelter's from such an intrusion; but as a scribe he had not sufficient gift to admit in one breath the claim of a Pelter upon the roof-tree of Pelter's and in another breath tactfully to deny it to her. Regretting with dole his lack of talent, he sighed; then cheered himself with the thought that although her coming might be inevitable it was not yet imminent.

It did not become so, indeed, until he returned from an excursion to sea, upon a warm night in June, to find old Wye sitting by the oil lamp and waiting for him. Long Harry halted in the open, double doorway that gave

access to the rear verandah and the pier; he stared and stamped his rubber hip-boots, which were muddied to the thigh.

"Up pretty late fer you, ain't you, Cap'?" he inquired.

"Dun't know 's I am; dun't know 's I ain't. Have a good run?"

"Might be 's I did; might be 's I didn't."

"Guess maybe you made a dolluh!" the old man said, giggling, and, rising creakily, came out to the verandah. "See that star up there, right cluss t' the moon?"

"Could if I looked at it," Pelter admitted, scraping the black mud from his boots with a stick. "Why?"

"Better look at it," Wye said. "Look at it and dun't never fergit what I'm a-goin' tell you."

"All right," Long Harry assented good-naturedly, and, turning, he stared up at the moon and its bright follower high in the sky. "I'll look at it to please you, Cap'. What you got to say 'bout it?"

"You never knowed 'twas a warnin'?"

"No."

"Wust warnin' they is," the old man said. "Dun't try to make no run to-morrow night, Harry, and not fer three four days after, neither. Portagee fisherman told me 'bout it when I was a boy, and it hain't never failed. 'When the moon's riz with a bright star cluss to it, you watch 'em,' he says. 'If the star keeps on a-ridin' cluss t' the moon and they ride together clean up over the sky like that, with the star a-clingin' on and the moon never fit-and-able to haul away from her, you look out,' he says. 'Hug habbuhs and be ready to run in quick,' he says. 'Yes, and pick good anchorage inside at that!' he says. Hain't never knowed it to fail, Harry."

Pelter was not impressed. "Had good dry weather fer three weeks now, Cap'. All signs fail in time o' drought."

"This'n wun't! It's the wust storm warnin' they is, and you be careful!"

"All right," Pelter said, and laughed. "Too late fer a game o' checkers?"

"Yes, 'tis. Wun't waitin' fer you on that 'count. Come here early in the evenin' thinkin' maybe you wun't out on a run and we could play. Set down to wait fer you a while, and a boy come on a bicycle with a telegram; it's there on the table. Stayed because I thought you might not notice it. Thought it might be somethin' wuth while in regards to you and Anton, maybe."

Long Harry strode into the house, tore open the yellow envelope and read the message; it was from Edna. "Grandmother died peacefully this

afternoon I will have a wreath made and placed near her from you and after the funeral I will come home as soon as I can."

Wye had followed his host into the house and was on his way to the front door, departing; but he paused to inquire, with a little anxiety, "Somethin' funny goin' on, Harry?"

"No," Pelter said. "Not in that line. But I guess—"

"Guess what?"

"Nothin'." The impulse Long Harry checked was to express his thought that the celestial omen might indeed be a true one, though betokening other perils than those of the sea. When his friend had gone, he went back to the verandah and again gazed upward; the moon and its attendant star were at the heavenly zenith. The star glittered brightly—even fiercely, it seemed to him—as if it were determined not to be parted from its great companion nor to be deterred from flashing its ominous portent to mortals below, and Long Harry accepted the presage. The storm was coming.

CHAPTER NINE

IN SUMMER a motor-bus from Mirthful Haven leaves the railway station at New Yarmouth every half-hour in the afternoon, and usually the five o'clock departure is the liveliest of the day. The five o'clock 'bus is almost always crowded, and, upon a warm afternoon preceding a national holiday, may even be found a little suffocating; at least, Mr. Freeman Wicks, an out-of-doors man and heavy in body, found it so upon the afternoon of the third of July. Under the patriotic circumstances, the regulations of the 'bus company were disregarded; flushed and determined passengers jammed themselves into the vehicle somehow and anyhow, bulging warmly against one another and sometimes making more uncomfortable contacts, as they rocked over the uneven streets of New Yarmouth. Mr. Wicks, supporting painfully upon his lap an unsymmetrical bundle containing metal, maintained with difficulty a sitting posture upon the left edge of a seat occupied by two other people and intended for two only. "Guess maybe I'll reach home alive; guess maybe I wun't!" he said to an acquaintance who similarly occupied the right edge of the seat across the narrow aisle. "You up fer over the Fourth?"

The acquaintance nodded. He was a hatchet-faced, sallow young man in dark clothes that suggested a church-going city workman's apparel for Sunday; he loosened the handkerchief he wore about his neck to prevent his stiff white collar from wilting, mopped his forehead, and, sighing with the heat, returned the handkerchief to its protective position. "Yep. Got Mame and the baby up forrud, packed in somehow. Didn't see you on the four forty-eight, Freem."

"Good reason you didn't, too! Only b'en to New Yarmouth to the chandler's. Ain't b'en that fur before in two year'—not by land, and, my Godfrey Mighty, how I wish I'd done it in my boat this time!"

"Yep," the other assented. "Anywheres in a boat, that's always better and safer, too. Never get that out o' my noodle, no matter how long I live in the city. What's the news over t' the Haven? Mame and I didn't get down Christmas, and it's a full year since we b'en home. Aunt Hez wrote me Reverend Beedy had a bereavement."

“Yes; lost his woman by a shock. I was one the bearers. Seemed like I never did lug no sech a heft.”

“Guess she was! Hear they got their Casino finished, up t’ the Point.”

“Yep. Kind o’ handsome, too,” Mr. Wicks said. “Sets at the other end that shingle beach where the Point dips down on the side away from the habbuh. Woodbury Fogg had the contractin’ of it. Guess he made a dolluh! From outside, looks ’s if it sets right down on the ocean. Have their hops there, ’most every night. Handsome when you come in from outside after dark, all them sparklin’ o’ lights right down on the water. Guess them people’d be right content now if they could git their yacht club, too!”

“Yep; guess they would.” The city man laughed shortly and dryly. “Guess they wun’t.”

“Guess they wun’t.” Freeman Wicks echoed the other’s laugh. “Goin’ to stay with your Aunt Hez?”

“Yep; wrote a postal she’d ’commodate us. See Hink Ma’sh lately? How’s he lookin’?”

“Peakid,” Mr. Wicks replied, and his warm fat face betokened amusement. “If you want to know what’s the matter with him, though, better ask his brother, Henry. Ask him.”

“Ask him? What you—”

“If you could look all the way around me you’d see him, because he’s settin’ dreadful hot up agin me right now and usin’ up all the best part o’ this seat he’s only left me ’bout an inch o’ the edge of,” Mr. Wicks explained; then, turning his fat head, spoke somewhat irritably to the obscured, short, broad young man upon his right. “Godfrey Mighty, Henry Ma’sh! Don’t never pick out the same day I do to come to New Yarmouth again! Can’t you make ’bout a quarter-inch more hip-room fer me somehow?”

“Ain’t got it fer you, Freem,” Henry Marsh said, and continued to stare at the back of the seat before him. In his stolidity there was the stoniness a Mirthful Haven man expresses when he finds himself in close juxtaposition with a stranger of the summer caste. He gave Freeman Wicks almost nothing to sit upon and was oppressed by that honest fisherman’s fat back and shoulder; but he allowed a strip of yellow woven cane full two inches wide to appear between himself and the girl in black who sat next to the window.

The scramble into the omnibus had carried Henry Marsh with her and deposited them together, much as a sweep of tide may bear along and toss to one side upon the shore a chunk of rough-hewn timber in company with a bit of fine carving from a yacht. Henry was young and a bachelor, the girl

about nineteen and of a stirring comeliness; yet one glance at her had been enough for him. He would have preferred any other seat in the 'bus to his own—even the fragmentary strip of support beneath Freeman Wicks, though Henry was too reticent to suggest an exchange. For the girl beside him was recognizable not only as an invader but as one of that too elegant kind known to do objectionable things with lace handkerchiefs in the presence of a wholesome and necessary slight odor of fish.

He expected some such pretentious exhibition but was unmollified by its continued absence; one of her hands, gloved in black suede, remained at rest upon a small bag of soft black leather in her lap, and the other upon the silver head of a tightly furled black silk umbrella. Henry's frigid gaze, moving downward, found at the right edge of its field of vision other black silk and other soft black leather that strangely left him uncharmed. He loved a long fine curve in the hull of a boat but not in the heel of a slipper. The dully lustrous, high-heeled slipper now within his view seemed too foreign and remote for him to concern himself about it, either the one way or the other, gallantly or antipathetically; nevertheless, he had both resentment and a sense of being downtrodden; he hated a thing so useless and merely aristocratic, and felt the pressure of that light, tall heel upon his spirit.

Of her face he had seen only the pale profile under a black crape hat that concealed her hair; but, for some time after the 'bus began to move, even her profile would not have been visible to him if he had desired a second inspection of it. The girl turned her face to the window and she sat looking out at New Yarmouth, and then at the countryside, with a fixed, still eagerness. Beyond the outskirts of the town the paved road ascended a long slope, then wound downward through a pine wood and emerged from it suddenly, with farm meadows upon one side and a great green expanse of marsh grass upon the other. In the distance white sand dunes edged the grass, and, above the dunes, a twinkling summer sea rose to the clean, pale blue horizon line that separated it from a soft sky almost its own color. Within the 'bus there were murmurs and a turning of heads to the left; children were excitedly bidden to look, and Freeman Wicks laughed with the pleased indulgence of a man whose possessions are being admired.

"Fust sight o' salt water a good many of 'em's had in a long while, I guess! Might be some o' the childern in this 'bus never see the ocean before 't all."

"Guess so," the young man from the city said absently. He was staring at the girl beyond Henry Marsh; she had leaned forward and turned her head to catch this first glimpse of the sea, so that her face was toward him for the

moment. Then, as she resumed her former position, again looking out of the window beside her, he lowered his voice. “Freem, who is that girl settin’ the other side o’ Henry Ma’sh?”

“Couldn’t call her by name,” Mr. Wicks replied. “These childern o’ summer families all look pretty much the same and keep growin’ up and out of a man’s recollection so’t you can’t keep no track of ’em. One’s a good deal the same’s the other.”

“Yep. Seemed to me like I’d ought to know her; puts me in mind o’ somebody—can’t think who. Likely I might ’a’ done some work or somethin’ fer her folks before I quit livin’ at the Haven. Well, no matter.” The young man passed his handkerchief across his forehead again, and changed the subject. “Cap’n Embury hale and hearty as ever, I suppose?”

“Sh’d say he was! Wouldn’t take him fer a day over sixty. Saw him yestaday. Had Ben Clack to cut his grass and rake it fer him, Cap’n followin’ him up with a broom—Cap’n swep’ the whole yard up with a broom!”

The lips of the girl by the window parted in a smile that was a little tremulous; then her attention once more was concentrated entirely upon the roadside. She had last seen it in an hour of stolid despair, and, a little time before that, she had trudged home the eleven miles to Mirthful Haven with a Northeaster at her back and a dyed sweater under her rough coat. The long road had stretched vacant before her beneath the beating rain; there had been patches of sodden snow under the pine trees, and in the corners of the stone fences, on that dark day now blurred and musty with time—three years of change lead so far into the past when one is just nineteen. To-day the landscape showed a gala spread of wild flowers and lay gilded by the afternoon sun; children by the wayside shouted and waved at the speeding ’bus, and the road was alive with holiday-makers in automobiles or astride of motor-cycles and bicycles. Powdered with a thin white dust, they rode through air still pervaded by the heat of the day and smells of gasoline and burnt lubricants; but after a time the motor-bus left this main-travelled highway for a gravelled road, much less thronged, that bore to the left, and then, almost suddenly, there was a change in the air.

A breeze came in through the windows and filled the interior of the ’bus with its refreshment, cooling and enlivening the crowded passengers so that almost all of them began to stir and murmur. Mr. Wicks’s acquaintance removed his protective handkerchief, put it briskly in his pocket, sat up straight, drew deep breaths and looked about him with a brightened eye.

“Ha! That’s the ticket!” he said, and slapped the stout fisherman upon the knee. “Good fer city lungs, I guess, Freem?”

Freeman Wicks’s expression showed the benevolence and pardonable vanity of a physician who has just administered a splendidly successful potion of his own concocting. “Sh’d say ’twas! Straight from Mirthful Haven!” he exclaimed, delighted. “Mirthful Haven air! Guess you don’t breathe nothin’ much like *that* anywheres else, do you?”

“Guess not!”

“No, guess you don’t!” Mr. Wicks said gloatingly. “Nor nobody else anywheres else, either. You can always begin to git it from jest ’bout right here, blowed in across the Point, straight from salt water through pine woods. Three four mile’ inland or even right along the coast, away from Mirthful Haven anywheres, why, you look at people and they’re all wilted down and droopish; but take anybody at Mirthful Haven at the same time and he’ll be steppin’ right out like he was goin’ somewheres he wanted to go!”

Again from the passengers there were murmurs and exclamations stimulated by another view of the summer sea, and now upon the road there were tokens of the vehicle’s approach to a place favored of heaven and patronized by the affluent. Slim open automobiles driven by bareheaded youngsters swept by the motor-bus, glittering blindingly for an instant as they passed; squads of golf-players and their caddies were seen moving over the undulating ground upon the right, and, at a trim brick-pillared gateway giving access to the links, a chauffeur in livery held his machine in check to let the ’bus go by him. Beside him in the long open black car, sat a robust gentleman whose handsome face was rosy with a sunburn that sharpened the whiteness of his short moustache; his expression was of a reticent or condescending affability, and, behind him in the tonneau, the presence of three other gentlemen much of the same pattern, together with a projecting of golf-bags above the sides of the car, showed that a pleasant day’s work was over. Her glimpse of this genial tableau brought no pleasure to the girl in the window of the motor-bus, however; at sight of the elderly gentleman beside the chauffeur, a quick faint color came into her cheeks, then departed, leaving her detectably a little paler than before.

That delicate flush returned, half a minute later; her eyes widened with the tensity of her staring at everything at once and she began to tremble. For the ’bus was rolling down Church Street under the elms of Mirthful Haven; its brakes tightened and screeched, dogs barked, children squealed, a hurdy-gurdy filled the air with the romantic pomposity of the Toreador, and the

motor-bus came to its terminal halt in the midst of the carnival confusion of Cargo Square. Honking and tooting, the bright-colored, summer automobiles crossed the Square dangerously in every direction; bareheaded vociferous girls, dressed in violent colors, trooped with hatless and coatless sunburned youths in white flannels, or ran in and out of the gay little shops, the confectioners', the hairdressers' and manicurists', the "gift-shops" and the display-rooms of metropolitan dealers in costly apparel. Dozens of carefully dressed little children came whooping and scrambling from the motion-picture theatre that once had been a rope-walk; they were seized upon and urged into limousines and beach-wagons by worried nurses, governesses and chauffeurs; and into the light turmoil and brilliantly colored movement the returned natives out of the motor-bus seemed to be almost instantly obscured and lost.

In this, they were not unlike the unemigrated native populace, which seemed to have disappeared entirely, although, as ever, there was one vividly conspicuous exception. The hurdy-gurdy had stopped before a summer-fruiterer's shop, and Willie Briggs sat upon an empty orange-scented box as close to the instrument as possible, adding his crowing to its insistent stream of sound. In one hand he held a hammer, borrowed from the Sicilian fruiterer, and in the other a dozen small nails; with these simple implements he entertained himself at the expense of people so newly arrived in Mirthful Haven, and therefore so unfamiliar with all important things, that their unsophistication was fair warrant for a little mirth on the part of the knowing.

A glistening dark green closed automobile halted just beyond the hurdy-gurdy; the chauffeur went into the fruiterer's, and a cold fat face looked down from a polished glass window at Willie Briggs. It was a new face in Mirthful Haven that summer, he knew; he grinned up at it as in warm admiration, which increased its coldness; then he placed the point of a nail upon his left knee and with one blow of the hammer drove in the nail so smartly that only its shiny round head was left in sight, flat upon the shabby black cloth of his trousers. The cold fat face withdrew from the window of the limousine, apparently into a condition of stupor, and, after a moment, Willie Briggs seriously pried the nail out of his artificial leg and renewed his accompaniment to the hurdy-gurdy.

Edna Pelter stood for a few moments at the centre of the Square, where her descent from the motor-bus had left her; then she distinguished from all other sounds one long familiar to her, and made her way through the moving groups and between the gliding automobiles to the hurdy-gurdy, where she paused, looking gravely at Willie Briggs. He was instantly aware of her

glance, grinned jovially, drove a nail to the head in that same left knee, and, with a careless air, affected to dust the spot with his torn handkerchief. She nodded appreciatively but with a gravity not relaxed, gave him a dime and passed on, leaving him baffled upon his box behind her.

He drew out the nail, stared at it reproachfully, then, in like manner, at the tall and graceful figure in black just disappearing round a corner into River Road. He put his head upon one side, introducing his fingers between his cap and scalp for a brief mental massage; but the matter was too deep for him. He gave it up and again began to vocalize for the encouragement of the hurdy-gurdy.

CHAPTER TEN

THE street of the old sea magnates ends at River Road, and Edna, glancing into the street as she passed along the road, caught the brassy gleam of the two small ship's guns upon Captain Embury's doorstep. The Captain's window-boxes were gay with geraniums, pansies and lobelias, and, upon the lawn, a row of high blue-and-white porcelain pedestals, long ago brought from the Orient, supported great Chinese bowls wherein grew more geraniums, pansies and lobelias. But now the Captain's fine house was not the only one inhabited, for the whole street was alive once more. Children played in the big yards, scampering from pursuing nurses; young people chattered with girls in hammocks under the elms or lounged about the doorways, idle tennis racquets swinging from their hands—only one building in the whole street was closed, the schoolhouse. Edna's glance at it was of the briefest, yet not so brief as to leave her unmoved; her shoulders jerked with the shiver that a dulled old pain suddenly recalled to life may bring, and she hurried on toward the distant angular outline of Pelter's.

River Road was noisy with the insistent signals of the flashing cars, and the sidewalk crowded, here and there, with pedestrians going to and from Great Point; but Edna met only one person whom she had known. This was a short plump girl of her own age, pushing a baby-carriage before her, and Edna recognized her at a little distance as Nina Grier; Nina, for her own part, showed no sign whatever of any answering recognition. Instead, after one glance at the tall girl in black coming toward her, she looked away with the same stolid and veiling frigidity exhibited by Henry Marsh in the motor-bus, for, like him, Nina instantly classified this former schoolmate with those invaders who were most bearable when most ignored. This silent encounter, not wholly emotionless upon one side, took place within a dozen yards of Pelter's, and Edna was already astonished by the changed appearance of the old building. It seemed not the less scarecrow and ramshackle—perhaps all the more so—for its fresh coat of white paint and newly shingled roof, and, when she stepped into the wooden front yard, the planks were firmer beneath her feet than ever she had known them; new

piling must have reënforced the platform. “Gracious!” she whispered, and walked slowly round the house to the “back porch”.

Pelter, with his feet in rubber boots upon the rail and the dog beside him, was taking his ease in the same old insecure cane-seated rocking-chair, smoking and contemplating the river. All was as if she had never left him or gone away from Mirthful Haven.

As she appeared, he glanced toward her inquiringly; the inquiry in his eyes held place there for some seconds, but changed to a faint surprise as she continued to stand and look at him without mentioning the errand that had brought her. Then suddenly he frowned incredulously and stared hard.

“My Godfrey Mighty!” he said, in a low voice, rose, and went toward her slowly. “If it ain’t Edna!”

“Why, yes,” she murmured. “Didn’t—didn’t you know me?”

Long Harry took her hand limply in his own for a short moment. “Fer goodness’ sake, don’t cry!” he said.

“No, no. I—I won’t cry.”

He stepped back from her, looking at her. “Guess maybe you better set down, Edna.”

“If you want me to,” she said huskily, and seated herself upon a wooden stool at a little distance from the rocking-chair. “I’d like to do whatever you —you want me to.”

“Well—guess you always did.” The admission seemed to cause him some embarrassment; he coughed, returned to his chair and sat, looking not at her but out at the harbor, which was broadening with the incoming tide. “Guess maybe you might be a little tired after so much travellin’.” He coughed again and solicitously cleared his pipe of ashes. “Have a trunk or somethin’ on the train with you?”

“Yes; it’ll come over on a truck this evening.”

There was a pause during which Long Harry continued to occupy himself with his pipe. “Well—” he said, after a time. “Too bad about your step-grandmother—good woman, too, she was. Guess you miss her.”

“Yes.”

“Naturally.” He gave his daughter a quick sidelong glance. “Guess it might ’a’ been kind o’ laborious fer you, bein’ with her while she was lingerin’ so long. Little bit peakid, ain’t you?”

“No. I’m—I’m well.”

“Lost your color, though,” he observed. “Used to have a good high color all the time before you left here. Studied too much, maybe?”

“Yes, maybe.”

“Step-grandmother request you to wear mournin’ fer her, did she?”

“No; this is just the dress I had for the funeral. I thought it would do to—to travel in. She didn’t want me to grieve for her, she said.”

“No, she wouldn’t. Always was a good woman, and sensible, too. Good, kind, sensible woman. Guess maybe, though, she wouldn’t ’a’ liked—” He paused for a moment, then added, “Should ’a’ thought she might ’a’ made you promise not to come back to Mirthful Haven.”

“No; she never spoke of it to me,” Edna said, and her voice grew firmer. “I think she always knew I wouldn’t have promised that.”

“Well—” He gave her another sidelong glance and a hint of his dry, lopsided smile. “Well, you’ve changed pretty near as much as a body could, I guess—don’t know as it’s unbecomin’. Some changes around here, too, you’ll find.”

“Yes; I saw. You’ve had the house painted and the roof—”

“Yep. Thought ’twas ’bout time to house-clean a little inside, too. Hired Orrin Smith’s wife and a Portagee woman, and they made a big stew over it fer more ’n a week. Fumigatin’, too. Don’t believe there’s a spider or any other bug in the place. Fixed up your room a little fer you, too. Don’t know as you’ll like it.”

“Oh, but I will!” Tears came again upon her lashes; but she sprang up, went to the open wide doorway and looked in. The old brown room was almost neat, for, although it still contained the greater part of its ancient maritime rubbish, it had been swept and scrubbed. The cobwebs were gone; so was the box of tin cans; the old magazines were in orderly stacks upon new shelves, and, in the space left vacant by the launching of the boat, there stood a shining mahogany table with a new easy-chair, upholstered in blue plush, at each end of it.

“Got that table and them chairs some little time ago as more or less kind of a present to myself,” Long Harry explained, glancing over his shoulder. “Look kind o’ funny with everything else all so plain, I guess.”

“No, they don’t; they’re lovely. But I’m afraid—”

“Afraid o’ what?”

She turned back to him and he immediately looked away from her, facing the river again. “Everything was all right for me just the way it used

to be," she said. "I didn't want you to feel there need be any expense—"

"Guess you needn't worry 'bout that!"

"I would if my coming home made any more—any more burden upon you," she said. "Captain Embury wrote me what a hard time you had under that boycott. He told me more about it than you did. He said he admired the way you held your head up and laughed at the people who were trying to ruin you. Well, you see, I—I—"

"Never mind! Guess they done everything they could; but they haven't got Pelter's—yet!"

"No, and I mustn't make it harder for you to keep it," she went on, with more confidence. "There's something I want to tell you about that. You see, Grandmother did what she thought was the best thing for me in giving me an education; but I'm afraid it was the kind that a fashionable girl needs more than I do. I think she'd expected to live longer than she did and see me through a year or two more of special courses that might have given me a place as a teacher at Miss Branch's; but, as it turns out, I'm really not fitted to do anything useful—hardly any better off in that way than I was when I left here. She gave me everything she could and there was a little money left over after everything was settled. It's mine, and maybe it would—maybe it would—"

"Maybe it would what?"

Edna sat down again upon the stool and fumbled within the small leather bag she carried, bending low over it. "It's here—it's only about four hundred dollars—I thought it might help. I thought—I thought if you'd take it—"

"Me?" He frowned, staring at her; then laughed. "Where'd you git the idea they got me down that bad?"

"But if the boycott—"

"Oh, they tried it!" he said. "Them Cornings and Gordons never let up, and fer a while it looked 's if they'd pretty near got me. Certain'y had my livin' jest 'bout took away from me; but I guess you remember what I used to say 'bout Pelters bein' able to look after themselves. They had me pushed to the wall, all right; but I'm still here, and if you'll take a look down the habbuh you'll see they haven't got their yacht club yet and are still goin' out to their boats from that old gov'ment wharf. When a Pelter can't make a livin' one way he will another; that's an old sayin' in the family, Edna."

"Yes, I know; but if you'd just take this—"

"Listen!" he said, with a little sharpness. "I ain't bad off fer money. Got more'n I ever had—maybe more'n I ever expected to have, anyways laid by

at one time."

"It's that business?" she asked timidly. "The business with Antoine Charette? You mentioned it in one of your letters, and Captain Embury wrote me—"

"He did?" Long Harry interrupted quickly. "What'd he say 'bout it?"

"He just mentioned it. He said he thought you'd have done pretty well at fishing and taking parties out, especially since you finished the boat, if they had let you alone; but he understood you'd had to go into something else, and I mustn't worry about you."

Pelter nodded. "He was right, because I told him myself I was makin' a good profit these days. Anton's got a nice little restaurant back off the New Yarmouth road, and he likes to serve lobsters that are maybe a mite shorter'n the warden would call a full nine inches. Anton ships a few barrels of the shorts, too, now and then, to customers he's got in the city."

"But aren't the wardens pretty watchful?" she asked anxiously. "Mightn't they find out—"

"Might if they could!" he said, with a short laugh. "Got my buoys in six fathom 'way off on the outer reef; run my shorts in after dark and deliver 'em to Anton up river couple o' mile' above the bridge. Guess I might be out fairly late, some nights; but don't you worry. No warden'll ever lay a hand on me! Pretty fair engine in that boat, Edna; I'll take you out to-morrow and show you."

"Will you?" she said, and smiled quickly, looking out at the long, slim, grey boat moored in the channel, a few yards beyond the floats. "I think I'll begin to feel I'm really at home again, maybe, if I can get into a boat—especially that one."

"She's able," Pelter returned, pride in his eyes. "Guess maybe she's 'bout the ablest private boat in these waters, takin' her speed into account. She's a mite faster'n any o' them pleasure-boats off gov'ment wharf down yonder."

Edna's glance followed his and remained for a time upon the water near the harbor mouth. Motor-boats, moored there, glistened with polished brass or bright nickel; two white schooner-yachts rested elegantly at ease; and, a moment after Edna and her father had turned to look, a little squadron of small racing sloops, the white of their neat sails mellowed with pale rose from the brilliant west, rounded the breakwater and came daintily up the harbor to their anchorages.

“Handsome, ain’t it?” Pelter said. “Guess you wouldn’t see no sight like this ’way out there in New Jersey.”

“No,” she returned thoughtfully; but kept her eyes upon the harbor mouth, where a large and powerful-looking, dark grey motor-boat had just made its appearance, following the racers in from the sea. It passed them, however, and came on, moving up the harbor almost silently and yet swiftly. A slim gun was mounted upon its forward deck, and two or three men, standing near the gun, looked down with apparent interest at Pelter’s boat as their own heavier and higher craft passed close to it. “What is that?” Edna asked uneasily. “What is that boat? It isn’t the warden’s—”

“Warden’s!” Pelter echoed, and he laughed aloud. “Godfrey, no! Warden’s boat is jest the same old wet tub you’d remember well enough soon’s you saw it again. Warden’s boat’s up New Yarmouth River right now; everybody always knows where ’tis and passes the word where it’s likely to be next.”

“Then what is that boat there?”

“That one?” As if to make sure of the identity of the powerful boat moving up-stream, Pelter looked at it, shielding his eyes from the slanting western sunshine. “Oh, that,” he said carelessly. “Guess it’s one o’ them rev’nue depa’tment outfits—patrol boat, likely—what they call a rum-chaser. Runs in sometimes and lays overnight at one o’ the wharves up t’ the village.” He lowered his shielding hand and turned to look whimsically at his daughter. “Don’t git fretted ’bout no warden’s boat. Nobody’s never laid a hand on me yet as long as I’ve lived—not in that way—and nobody never will!” He stretched himself lazily, as a prelude to changing the subject. “Well—guess Prince must be gittin’ maybe a little over middle-aged; seems like he’d fergot you, or maybe he’s jest waitin’ fer you to say howdy-do to him first. Think maybe he feels it’s owed to him fer you to make a little fuss over him, Edna?”

He laughed as he spoke, indulgently amused by the dog’s supposed vanity in the precedence of greetings, and Edna tried to laugh in response as she rose and stooped to pat Prince’s head. “Yes—I—I—he’s a good old—” she said incoherently, but was unable to go on. Something in her father’s quizzical geniality, as he spoke of the dog, had released too much emotion within her; her voice failed her. She choked, and, in spite of herself, tears fell upon the dog’s head as she stroked it; but she controlled herself enough to murmur, “I’ll go look at my room; then I’ll get your supper.”

“My Godfrey!” Pelter said, genuinely startled. “You don’t mean you ain’t fergot how?”

“I—I haven’t forgotten anything,” she whispered brokenly, made bold to touch his shoulder with a swift, light hand, and hurried into the house.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE ancient Wye chuckled as he rose from the checker-board and prepared to depart, that evening. “Knowed her? Knowed her fust I laid eyes on her! Guess I still got my faculties, hain’t I? What makes you think I shouldn’t ’a’ knowed her?”

“Guess you wouldn’t if she hadn’t had her hat off, Cap’,” Long Harry said. “If she’d had her hair all hid under that hat like she did this afternoon, you’d never—”

“ ’T wouldn’t ’a’ b’en no different; sh’d ’a’ knowed her jest the same,” the old man insisted, and his eyes twinkled moistly as he looked at Edna, who had risen to put the checker-board away. “I’d ’a’ knowed her by her frame. Got even a handsomer frame on her, now she’s woman-like, than what she did in—in—” He paused; then found a phrase that obviously pleased him with himself as well as with Edna. “In buddin’ girlhood! Yes suh! Got a better frame on her in buddin’ womanhood than what she had in buddin’ girlhood! But it’s the same one—jest the same kind of a frame. And ’s long ’s I got my faculties I’d reckanize it any time I ever laid eyes on it. Knowed her from the feet up! What I care ’bout her wearin’ a hat!” He cackled in joy of benevolent and surreptitious implications, then groaned slightly and stooped to rub his knee. “Twinges,” he explained, and, still stooping, spoke in a lower tone. “You see what come up the habbuh along before nightfall?”

Pelter glanced at Edna, whose back was toward them; then he nodded.

“Guess you’ll lay up a night or so, maybe,” Wye said, straightening himself painfully. “That’s a good, nice, fast boat you got, Long Harry; but they might be some that’s faster. If I was you, I’d put a better muffler on her, too. The sound of your engine’s gittin’ right familiar like—I can tell it’s you, no matter what time o’ night you go out or come in. Well, guess you’ll lay up, though, anyways as long’s—” But here he checked himself in deference to a frowning jerk of Pelter’s head toward Edna; the old man pointed to her and elevated his white caterpillar eyebrows in a poignant questioning.

Long Harry shook his head.

"No?" Wye said. "Well, used to be a sayin' up Wenmouth way: 'How's your left hand goin' to keep your right hand from knowin' what your left hand's doin' if your right hand's got eyes?' Anyways, that's what they used to say up in all them parts and waters. Might be so or it mightn't; take it or leave it as you please!" He walked to the door, looking serious; but paused before he went out, apparently delayed by a change of mood, for suddenly he cackled again. "Face on her hain't changed fer the wuss, neither," he said. "Wait till it gits them red spots back onto it like they was!" Then, as he went out, he exploded his breath in an exclamation of uttermost, gloating approval. "*Hot* dam!"

He slammed the door behind him for additional emphasis, and Pelter, dryly amused, glanced at Edna, whose back was still toward him as she bent over the table, putting the checkers into an old pasteboard box. "Guess you might heard a few things like that out in New Jersey, sometimes—maybe from people not s' cluss to bein' a hunderd year' old! Been times when I thought, if you did come back to Mirthful Haven some day, might be with a husband and family, maybe."

At this, she turned quickly toward him, her expression a little startled. "I? Why, no, I—I—"

"Well, you might 'a'," he insisted affably. "Why not?"

"No—no!"

"Guess you could 'a' had chances if you'd 'a' wanted 'em."

"I haven't wanted them," she said hurriedly. "At least, not—" She paused, hesitating. "There's something I want to tell you about."

"All right; go ahead."

"It isn't anything about marrying," she said quickly. "It hasn't anything to do with that, at all; it's just something I was reminded of by your saying I might have had chances. It's about the Corning family."

"What?" he asked, surprised. "You mean 'bout that time you went home with your friend and saw 'em?"

"I saw them again," Edna said, speaking rapidly. "At least, I saw some of them—the two boys. Miss Branch gives dances for the upper-class girls every other Saturday evening in spring. Gordon Corning and his brother, Wallace, drove over to almost all the dances this year; Mildred Kerr invited them. I had to dance with them a good deal; I just couldn't help it—there wasn't any way out of it. I thought I ought to tell you, and—and something more, too."

"Yes. What?"

“Well—if their name hadn’t been Corning, I’m afraid I would have liked both of them. I thought I ought to tell you that. They didn’t show any signs at all of being anything like their father—I’m sure neither of them would ever do anything mean or hard-hearted.”

“Guess not.” Long Harry laughed shortly. “Not to their own kind, anyways!”

“No,” she said timidly. “I don’t believe that Gordon or Wallace would to anybody at all; they just seemed pleasant and friendly, though I was pretty stand-offish with them. I think Mildred Kerr’s about engaged to Wallace.”

“Guess you saw more o’ the other one, then?”

“Of Gordon? Yes—yes, I did. I couldn’t very well help it.” She gulped and looked at him appealingly. “You see I couldn’t, don’t you? You know I wouldn’t have touched anybody that’s an enemy to you—not with the tip of my little finger, don’t you? You do see there wasn’t any way out of it for me, don’t you? You don’t think it was wrong of me to—to—”

“No. Guess you only did what you had to. Like you say. No way out of it fer you; but—” He paused, frowned and rubbed his hand through his thick hair.

“But what?”

“Well, might lead to what the books call compilications, mightn’t it? Knowed you as Edna Shellpool, didn’t he?”

“Yes.”

“Well, s’pose he sees you here?”

“They won’t,” she said quickly. “A little care will easily keep me out of their way—with all this crowd here in summer, and, after that, they’ll be gone. It’s only a little while that they’re here. Besides, don’t you see what this evening shows? It shows it to me, so I think it must to you, too.”

“What’s that?”

“Why, that everything’s just about the same as if I’d never been away.” She smiled shyly and stepped nearer to him. “It’s seemed more and more that way every minute. While you were playing the guitar and I was washing the dishes, I was actually sure for a minute or two that Grandmother and Miss Branch’s school and Stony Brook were nothing but a dream I’d been having. I had to look down at these clothes to know it wasn’t so; yet in a way it’s truly so, because, no matter how I’ve changed outside, I’m Edna Pelter again inside, absolutely! Don’t you see I am?”

He laughed at her earnestness, said, “Time’ll tell,” and urged her to go to bed for recuperation after the necessarily wearying voyage by land from remote New Jersey. She went obediently, telling him not to forget to extinguish the oil lamp, and, for a time after she had gone, he walked up and down the room, smoking reflectively; then he sat and communed with Prince, as the dog immediately put his head upon the worshiped knee of his master. “Think ’t ain’t goin’ to be no such a ticklish matter as we expected, Prince? Guess it’ll be all right? Yep; guess ’twill. Might fret some, maybe; but guess she’ll ’commodate herself.”

The dog’s soft eyes remained inscrutable, except for their unaltering, utter affection; Pelter laughed noiselessly, fondled the brown head, pushed it gently from his knee, and began to read.

Upstairs, Edna had finished unpacking her trunk and putting clothes away in the new chest of drawers her father had bought for her. She hung her dresses upon wooden hangers taken from her trunk and hooked over pegs Pelter had driven into the wall, and, when she had done this, sat down upon the side of the bed and stared frowningly at the row of garments. Some of them were in lively colors, “sport clothes”; two were long filmy ghosts of chiffon, as they hung there, and another was a spangled thing that glittered in the lamplight. Against the background of unpainted pine wood, they were infused with strangeness; for these were the clothes of a Miss Shellpool, late of Miss Branch’s establishment for the acquisition of learning and the modish graces. Edna had told her father, a little while ago, that she was Edna Pelter, and she had meant it; but had she stated the fact? After all, there seemed to be two of her. It wasn’t just the clothes that made two of her, in spite of her wish to be only Edna Pelter; it was something confusing inside her head.

When she had put out the light and gone to bed she heard her father clumping up the stairway and the pit-pat of Prince’s feet as the dog closely followed his master. There were sounds of movement from Long Harry’s room for a time; but, after that, the flimsy old building upon the wooden platform over the water was all silent. Now and then from River Road came the quickly increasing whizz of an approaching automobile, its regardless loud buzz as it passed before the house, and its diminishing sweep into distance and stillness. Sometimes there would be an accompanying burst of voices, laughter and a snatch of song with a suggestion of alcoholic inspiration; but as the hours moved toward midnight these transient episodes became infrequent. The night grew so quiet that Edna, still awake, could hear the faint watery gurgles of the outgoing tide fumbling liquidly about the piles twenty feet below her.

Through the open window near the head of her bed, the gentle, continuous night breeze off the sea bore to her ears sounds as elusive as a scent from a distant garden; sometimes she was sure she heard them, sometimes she was sure that she did not and only imagined these barely audible, faraway strains of music. But, whether the faint rhythm of drums and fitful hints of violins and saxophones came really from the new Casino or were the mere projection of her disturbed fancy, they blended all too actually, for her, into a voice of elfin mockery. Who was she? If there was dancing at the Casino, the girl from Miss Branch's school urgently desired to be there; outcast Edna Pelter, too, would long to be there, but knew that she might as well have wished to dance on the rim of the moon.

She had been all Edna Pelter, unmixed, when she entered the school at Stony Brook, and, while her strong consciousness of being Edna Pelter had lasted, she had been the most silent and aloof figure there. "The dumbest," she thought; for it seemed to her now that young Edna Pelter was the "dumbest" creature she had ever known. Her aloofness was that of one who expects aloofness from others; but her silence had been neither that of reticence nor shyness. It was the silence of sheer "dumbness", the inarticulateness of a girl so "dumb" about everything except what was taught her out of text-books that at fifteen she had a memory permanently burdened with a dubious past acquired by that same "dumbness", and she arrived at the school knowing things unthinkable by her exquisitely nurtured fellow-students. That was Edna Pelter, who had begun a slow disappearance with the winning of the swimming championship and the heightened interest in her shown by her companions, to whom she presently found herself able to talk.

From that time onward, Edna Shellpool gradually emerged and became more and more substantial. Edna Shellpool had been "popular", though she was "only a day pupil". Her distinctions were of the classrooms, of the pool, where she was unmatched, and of the dancing-class, where she was selected for special instruction, and, upon occasion, exhibited alone in performances tortuously graceful. At first, the school's spring dances, to which boys were invited, so terrified her that her grandmother and the dancing instructor compelled her attendance almost by force; but their urgings were not long necessary—Edna's difficulties never arose from any aloofness on the part of boys, and she soon found it easy to imitate the gay patterns of chatter, with personal intimations, used by the other girls in such conjunctions. She learned how to prattle in a charming, excited voice throughout a whole evening, interspersing the right amount of laughter to show that she was "having a good time" and implanting the right hints of special interest in the

breasts of partners at moments of temporary separation. Other girls often envied her but not despitefully; there was always something like meekness in her manner toward them.

For, no matter how more and more fixedly she became Edna Shellpool, the ghost of Edna Pelter hovered. Whenever she wrote to her father, that ghost infiltrated her and she became of Mirthful Haven once more; afterward, as she reverted to Edna Shellpool, she would sit brooding upon her strange duality, and sometimes it seemed to her that she had been betrayed by her childhood. There were memories belonging to Edna Pelter—foggy images of such things as Nina Grier's sweater and of such boys as Vinnie Munson—too shivery horrid to have place in the consciousness of a young lady of the school at Stony Brook. At times she could keep her mind swept clean of them; then they would slyly creep back within her vision, pestering her with the suggestion that guiltless Edna Shellpool, even before she came to life as that, had been ruined by Edna Pelter. Yet within Edna Pelter there was one depth of feeling that was as deep in Edna Shellpool, and never altered; almost everything of her had seemed to change, but never this—her unreasoning, fascinated, whole adoration of her father. Edna Shellpool was never so much Edna Shellpool that she had lost Edna Pelter's fixed determination to come back to him when she could.

Now she had done it; she was here at Pelter's, in her room, in bed, and all evening she had been Edna Pelter as entirely as if there were no Edna Shellpool. Edna Pelter had told her father in good faith that it would be easy to keep out of the way of echoes from Stony Brook, and so it would—if Edna Shellpool concurred in the resolution. The night breeze shifted a little, and the faraway dance-music grew faintly louder; it was actual, and so was the mockery borne upon it.

CHAPTER TWELVE

FROM old Wye's hut among the higher sand dunes, the beach, lying below and at some distance under a mid-July noon sun, was a whitely glaring crescent apparently decorated with confetti. A wide irregular strip of the varicolored particles seemed to have been strewn before the bath-houses, where the gaudy bathers lay drying and the summery-clad spectators sat upon the sands under overgrown green or scarlet or orange umbrellas, or lounged in violently striped chairs with fringed awnings; but down at the water's edge, where the sparkling white foam hissed in upon the sand, and the bathers rose from it in glistening clusters, the surf seemed to be delivering itself of groups out of mediæval, stained glass windows. Other groups, plastic, in apparel seemingly more painted upon the figure than worn, sculptured themselves in momentary repose just out of reach of the waters, or, breaking up, made a classic frieze of themselves, youths pursuing maidens, or fleeing from them, against a background of curling green wave, flying crystal and hot yellow sunshine. Multitudes of wingless pink cupids fluttered everywhere, dug futilely in the sand, splashed one another and fought in the foam; and, for further Bacchic touch, brilliant clusters of toy balloons, like Olympian bunches of grapes, drifted up and down the sands. To a tune from Broadway, a monkey in scarlet turned somersaults before the gay lookers-on; Indian women peddled baskets woven of sweet-grass, and radiant destinies were offered, at small cost, by a little band of bold-faced gypsy girls dressed apparently in strips of soiled rainbow.

Old Wye was seldom content to observe from the distance of his shack all this fluctuating play of color and life. Being still possessed of his faculties, he liked a closer view, and yet, conscious that he was not wholly appropriate to the general picture, he was artist enough to offer an excuse to himself for going into it. "Left that clam-rake down there somewuz nigh the edge o' the beach this mornin', dog' if I didn't!" he mumbled, as if in conscientious chiding of himself. "Got to go git her else some o' them high-heelers 'll be carryin' her off. Got to go git her, dog' if I hain't!" Thus self-justified, he went upon his errand, and, as he returned, walking slowly

across the beach with the clam-rake over his shoulder, he had a better part in the joyous panorama than he knew.

At least he was given place in it by the fancy of one of the spectators, a dark-eyed young woman reclining in a beach-chair. “See that old, old man coming so slowly over the sands,” she said. “That thing over his shoulder should be a scythe and he should be wearing a long white beard and carrying an hour-glass. He knows that all the young life out there in the surf is here only for a moment; year after year, he’s seen it playing there for a little while, and then disappearing while a younger life takes its place, and he trudges on. He moves so slowly that he barely seems to set one foot before another, yet you see he never does quite stop moving.”

“I think you flatter him, Mrs. Arden,” the man seated next to her responded. He was the robust and sunburned elderly gentleman disquietingly recognized by Edna Pelter from the motor-bus window on her return to Mirthful Haven; and now, upon the beach, like the interlocutor at a minstrel show, he occupied the middle chair of a semicircle and had the air of being affably the commanding personage of this group. “That old fellow may remind you of Father Time; but he’s often been known to ‘stop moving’ for hours! He’s just a tramp fisherman, Mrs. Arden, rather a sly old cuss, too; but one of the local characters and rather an entertaining one, for all that. Mirthful Haven’s full of ’em.”

“Of characters, Mr. Corning?”

“Yes. You’ll gradually get to know ’em, too, especially if you like the place enough to come back another summer—as you certainly will.”

“You say I ‘certainly’ shall, Mr. Corning?”

“Why, of course!” he said. “It’s almost impossible for anybody not made of wood to spend only one whole summer at Mirthful Haven. You could come here for two or three weeks, perhaps, and go away and never come back; but if you stay the full season, as you’re doing, the fascination of the place will get such hold of you that you’re bound to return to it. When you leave here in September you may not be aware that you’ve been captured by Mirthful Haven and may think that you’re not coming back—in fact you may succeed in staying away a year or two—but some time you’ll be drawn back, perhaps almost in spite of yourself. You won’t be able to avoid it, Mrs. Arden.”

“So? It’s a spell the place puts upon one? What’s the secret of it, Mr. Corning?”

"No one thing," he answered seriously. "It's all of it together. To begin with, we're a pretty congenial crew here; we don't go in for an immoderately showy life, and we like one another. We're so friendly, indeed, that we're rather fond of speaking of ourselves as just one big, happy family. When you come to know us better I think you'll find that expression of us pretty well warranted; but, in addition to the charm of the simple and rather intimate social life we lead, there's the fascination of the place itself. There's the champagne in the air we breathe—we're quite boastful of our Mirthful Haven air, Mrs. Arden—and there's the undeniable picturesqueness of our strip of coast line here; we venture to think our little harbor rather a pretty one, and we're human enough to feel flattered when we hear visitors exclaiming over the quaint charm of our little Yankee fishing village. Altogether, we rather think we possess about as fetching a corner of Mother Earth as you'll find on this side of that ocean yonder, Mrs. Arden, and, when you've finished looking us over in September, we'll only say au revoir to you, because we'll be sure we're going to have the pleasure of welcoming you back, year after year."

An applausive and corroborative murmur came from other members of the group. All of the elderly gentlemen said, "Yes, indeed," or, "Indeed we shall," and Mrs. Corning, a large woman still of a blonde comeliness, clapped her hands cordially. "Trust my husband to put things in a nutshell! He's the greatest champion Mirthful Haven's ever had and he knows how to select his converts, too! He means every word he says, Mrs. Arden, and you're adopted as one of us from this moment; you've been made a Mirthful Havenite." Mrs. Arden smiled and murmured appreciatively, though her dark eyes first sought Mrs. Corning's face in a look of doubtful inquiry, as if to ascertain whether or not that lady had intended to make a little fun of her husband for assuming, with such easy confidence, the wardenry of the citadel; but there was no hint of satire in the loyal wife's expression—like her husband, Mrs. Corning meant every word she said. Moreover, she went on: "Though I say it as shouldn't, it's pretty generally admitted that Mr. Corning's done about as much for the place as—"

"More!" one of the elderly gentlemen interrupted earnestly. "Everybody knows George Corning's done more for Mirthful Haven than anybody else ever has."

"No, Mr. Vandenbrock," Mrs. Corning returned, becoming judicially impartial. "We can't say that; we can only say George has done as much, not more. You, yourself—"

"No," Vandenbrock insisted. "The rest of us only followed his lead and helped out. If George Corning hadn't put his foresight and energy into the service of the general good, you wouldn't have had that pretty and comfortable new hotel to stay in, at the edge of the woods, Mrs. Arden, and, what's more, Mirthful Haven wouldn't have a decent golf course or its splendid new Casino or—"

"Now, now," Corning interrupted benevolently. "Don't believe them, Mrs. Arden. They love to flatter me."

"Not at all," Vandenbrock insisted. "Everybody knows it's true, Mrs. Arden, and he ought to take the credit of it; only he's too modest. Mrs. Corning knows it's true. Now don't you, Mrs. Corning?"

"Well, I will say this much," the stout lady admitted amiably. "If it hadn't been for Mr. Corning and these devoted friends of his sitting here with us right now, Mrs. Arden, I really don't know what Mirthful Haven would have done, because the place was running down frightfully until they took hold of it. This year they've even got those green cans you've noticed at the corners of the village streets for the natives to throw their rubbish into. They've certainly done everything they could, in spite of opposition."

"Opposition?" Mrs. Arden inquired. "You mean some of the cottagers didn't—"

"Cottagers, no!" Mrs. Corning stared, surprised. "I mean the opposition of the natives, of course."

"Not opposition precisely," her husband interposed. "Inertia, rather. Failure to coöperate for their own benefit."

"You mean the—the natives didn't want all these splendid improvements?" Mrs. Arden asked.

"Oh, they wanted them, I suppose," he explained. "They know that they benefit by things that enlarge the desirable class of people here; but they're a very peculiar sort of clan, Mrs. Arden, and difficult to understand. They seem not to like changes, even when it's obvious that the changes are beneficial. One has to deal with them very carefully and they're not easy to know. I doubt if anybody really knows them, no matter how many seasons he's spent here."

"Do you?" Vandenbrock asked dryly. "That's because you're always just a little too optimistic about human nature, George; you shrink from taking them simply for what they are. I've been coming here for more than ten years, Mrs. Arden, and I think I know the natives pretty well. Frankly, I don't like them. They've tried to hold up every one of the enterprises for the

general good that we've been speaking of, hoping they could get a little more money out of us. I happened to discover, myself, that they charged us half a dollar more for a load of stone delivered at the Casino than they did for exactly the same thing delivered to a native who was repairing his foundation. That's only a sample. All they care for is money, and they want to do just as little as they possibly can to get it. What's more, they haven't the slightest appreciation of anything done for 'em. They'll fight among themselves; then turn right around and stick together against us. What do they care how much George Corning's done for the community? He's been trying for years to get an improvement through for the road between the village and the Point, and they've simply balked him. Look how they've stopped him and all the rest of us in our plans for a yacht club that would bring any amount more boats into the harbor every summer, and naturally increase the trade in the village. Frankly, I wish they'd act more like human beings!"

"No, no," Corning protested. "You're too hard on them, and besides, they're not all the same kind. They have their own social differences, and moral ones, too, just as we have ours, and many of the villagers are very intelligent and likable people. I don't agree with Vandenbrock at all, Mrs. Arden. As for that 'balking' of me he's just mentioned, well—I have been accused of wanting to put that through for my own personal benefit!" He laughed genially, explaining, "The accusation is that I want to improve the view from a wing of my own cottage by getting some disreputable shacks torn down, and I can't deny that I should like the view better with the shacks out of the way; but of course the important thing is that we'd all like to see the principal avenue of approach to Great Point made a little smarter. That's the very hardest thing to get most of the villagers to realize—the value of smartening up the place." He sighed. "We'll bring them to our way of thinking some day, no doubt; but it takes time."

" 'Time'!" Vandenbrock gave utterance to a short laugh. "Certainly takes time to get rid of Pelter's! There's a sample for you of how they stick together when there's a point to be made against us. That fellow had his living out of us for years, until his place got so dirty and generally disreputable that it just wasn't possible to buy fish from him or let our children go there to hire his boats. What's more, the village never has approved of him any more than we have, ourselves, and yet stands back of him when he laughs in our faces and tells you to go to the devil, George, although you offer him any amount more than his old woodshed is worth. You can't deny he's been a thorn in your side for years—in everybody's, for that matter—and yet you stand up for natives and say you like 'em!"

“Oh, I didn’t say I liked all of ’em; you mustn’t judge ’em by Pelter.”

“Well, when you do finally get rid of him,” Vandenbrock said, “I hope you’ll have the Selectmen smarten up the sand dunes behind us here a little. There’s a shack and some sheds lived in by that old ragamuffin, Wye, whom you were calling Father Time, Mrs. Arden. The Selectmen ought to send him to the poorhouse, where he’d be looked after and a lot better off; then they ought to burn down that hovel of his and clean the place up.”

“Oh, I don’t know about that,” Corning said. “The poorhouse is too far away from salt water; I doubt if the old man would last long. Besides, he’s such a character I rather like him. He’s amusing to talk to, and his poor little old hut doesn’t seem very offensive.”

“No?” Vandenbrock said, with some crispness. “You don’t see it from your cottage, George. From mine, I do!”

“That does make a difference,” Corning admitted, laughing. “But Wye’s a very, very old man and at least fairly honest. That’s not the case with Pelter, who is powerful and active and a thoroughly bad lot. He’s really never had any place in Mirthful Haven, and is altogether a nuisance. Wye, on the contrary, is a harmless old fellow distinctly to be tolerated, I think.”

“I do, too,” a florid woman in pink linen agreed, speaking drowsily from beneath the awning of a chair next to Mrs. Corning’s. “I’ve heard him say lots of absurd, quaint things, if I could just remember ’em. I do think some of these droll characters about here are perfectly killing! My husband’s a kind of walking collection of the queer things they say and do.” She waved a plump hand toward a withered long grey man at the other end of the semicircle of chairs. “Frank, tell Mrs. Arden some of the funny things about ’em you’ve collected.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE gentleman she addressed roused himself from a revery that was almost a nap. "Mrs. Warbeck thinks everything in the world except a bad dinner is more or less humorous," he explained to the newcomer in Mirthful Haven, alluding to his wife. "Over at Eeler's Cove, a few miles from here, a woman seventy-eight years old killed her husband with an axe, one morning a few summers ago; they'd been married fifty-three years, and she said she did it because she just couldn't stand one more day of him. Mrs. Warbeck laughed all through the dinner where she heard about it. She even laughed the other day when she'd been apologizing to a lobster fisherman here for inadvertently speaking of him to himself as a 'native' and he said he didn't care what she called him so long as the term she used didn't imply he was 'one o' them summer people'."

"There you have their extraordinary attitude toward us perfectly," Mrs. Corning said. "They haven't the slightest appreciation of the fact that if it weren't for us and what we do for them the place would be virtually the same as one of these abandoned farms you see in the back country about here. No doubt, these people say and do amusing things sometimes; but my experience of them rather points to their being pretty consistently on the make. When we first came here I heard of extraordinary bargains some of the cottagers had picked up from time to time—high-boys, gate-legged tables, wonderful old chairs, chests-on-chests, pie-crust tables and such things. I didn't find many bargains myself! Old Mrs. Sinclair, who claims to be the earliest summer resident here, showed me a Sheraton sideboard she'd bought long ago from a native family for seven dollars and a half, and a set of old dining-room chairs for eighteen. What's more, she'd got a genuine Chippendale armchair for six, and a perfectly lovely old portrait, probably a Copley, for seventy-five cents out of the hay-loft of an old barn! Well, just try to do anything like that now! They've got the idea that everything they own is just about priceless, and what they'd ask you for an old pump-handle, if you wanted such a thing, would make your hair stand on end! If you take a fancy to a thing they begin by telling you they'd never think of selling it at all—like that pompous little old Captain What's-his-name with the curled

moustache and manners, in the village. George took me down to look over his house, the first summer we came here, and I must say he did have some rather gorgeous old things mixed up with a lot of ridiculous curios—stuffed albatrosses and giant clam-shells, South Sea native dingoes, aerolites he said he'd seen fall, himself, and a lot of other sailor junk. The minute one hinted at buying some of the better pieces, he shut up like a trap. You could see you'd have to bargain with him for years; but it struck me that life was rather too short!"

Mrs. Arden had turned to her. "But it sounds fascinating! Can one go to his house and ring the bell or flap the knocker and be admitted?"

"Goodness, no; he'd bite your head off!"

The emaciated Warbeck took exception to this. "I don't think he would; not Mrs. Arden's. I have the pleasure of some acquaintance with Captain Embury, whom I hold to be a grand old party. He's eighty-something, almost without a wrinkle, and, when he stands or walks, his feet are beautiful upon the mountains—mountains of water over which he appears to balance himself with security. He's a fount of wisdom, mingled with bits of singular zoölogical and astronomical misinformation in which he profoundly believes; he's seen the great sea-serpent face to face, and he has an old sailorman's heart made of solid gold, yet perfectly impressionable by whatever else is golden. If Mrs. Arden would allow me to be so personal I'd risk suggesting that she needs only to stand on Captain Embury's front step and lift her eyelashes a little when he opens the door; but if she prefers a less romantic beginning of the acquaintance I think I could arrange a party of inspection at the Captain's for her."

"Do!" Mrs. Arden returned. "I'd feel more confident of admission that way, I think, and you've made me anxious to obtain it." He nodded, and she glanced at three slim figures just out of the surf and slowly approaching this group. "Are these young people yours, Mrs. Corning?"

"Two of them are."

One of the three bathers was a girl of seventeen, small, thin and eager; at least, she was eager in look and manner as she chattered to the tall dark boy upon her right. His face and figure were of notable symmetry; his wet black hair gleamed wavily and his dark eyelashes were comparable to those just admired by Mr. Warbeck as the compelling possessions of a lady. The other boy, four or five years his senior, stalwart, ruddy and commonplace, had an expression that Mrs. Arden thought slightly dissipated and, at the moment, somewhat moody and discontented, too.

“What a charming girl!” she said. “And that poetic looking youth, like a young Florentine out of Boccaccio—”

“The one with the eyelashes?” Mrs. Corning laughed. “That one isn’t mine. Agatha’s at the age when his sort of limpid sleekness seems divine; but he’s quite a nice boy, for all that, I—” She broke off, two of the three young people now being close by. “Mrs. Arden, this is my daughter, Agatha, and Mr. Vincent Munson.” Then, as the other boy came up, more slowly and a little sulkily, she added, “This is my son, Wallace. Yes, Agatha?”

“Vinnie wants me to motor over to Langley’s Rocks for lunch after we’ve had another dip. Can I?”

“Yes, if you like.” The two turned and immediately ran back toward the surf, hand in hand, while Wallace Corning slumped down upon the sand at his mother’s feet, muttering grumpily. “Grouching, Wallie?” she inquired, amused. “That’s what you call it, isn’t it? ‘Grouching’?”

“S’pose so,” he grunted. “Why wouldn’t I? She makes me sick!”

“Who does?”

“Agatha! Gets floppy all over whenever that slick-faced local Lothario comes near her, and she shows it! I don’t see why you let her make such an exhibition of herself. You ought to tell her to cut him out altogether.”

“Wallace, don’t be such a snob! All the other girls of that age seem to be much the same way about him, and there’s no reason he should be snubbed by Agatha, or anybody else for that matter, merely because he’s technically a ‘native’. He’s perfectly well-mannered; he’s at Harvard, I believe, and you and Gordon are rather silly, I think, to show prejudice against him. The Munsons are considered quite gentry here, and you needn’t be so—”

“I’m not,” he interrupted. “I don’t care who he is or whether he’s gentry or not. Go on and let him hang around her if you want to have him in the family some day!”

Mrs. Corning laughed again. “I don’t think there’s much danger of it going quite that far,” she said, and he growled, subsiding. “Where’s Gordon?” she asked. “I want him to meet Mrs. Arden.”

“Gordon? Probably still in the water. Want me to bring him?”

“No; he’ll come by on the way to his bath-house, no doubt,” she said, and, shielding her eyes with a large, white, soft hand, tried to discern the figure of her younger son among the shifting groups of bathers in the surf. But the sunshine, dazzlingly shot into her pupils from thousands of watery facets, was blinding; she turned to Mrs. Warbeck and began to talk of their

mutual engagements to amuse themselves with cocktails and food, cards and music.

Young Gordon Corning was not in the surf where she had sought to discover him. He had withdrawn himself from that shouting and merry exuberance, had walked along the varying edge of the water to the far end of the beach, near the great granite breakwater at the harbor mouth, and here, a quarter of a mile from the nearest bathers, he sat down on the sand, alone. Unlike his brother, he was neither stalwart nor commonplace, although he was of a good height and tanned to the same prized khaki tint shown by Wallace and most of the muscular young men at the other end of the beach. Just twenty-two, he was younger than Wallace; but a stranger would have thought him the older. There were delicate, permanent lines upon his forehead and at the corners of his sensitive and gentle hazel eyes; moreover, his shoulders had the protective stoop that betokens not the studious habit so much as the consciousness of some inward physical vulnerability.

He had removed himself from the crowd because he was tired of responding to the joyous appeal, “Great to-day, isn’t it?” in allusion to the energy and temperature of the surf; it seemed to him that he must be getting old, so many hundreds of times, this year and in past years, he had struggled to produce an enthusiasm responsive to that same interminably repeated cry. If he had gone to his bath-house to dress he would have had to cross the line of older people, drying bathers and spectators; there inevitably he must have had to conjure up a decently polite effect of jauntiness in answer to jovial, ancient inquiries concerning his pleasure in the bath. All these people had an amazing delight in endless repetitions, he thought; year after year and day after day they said and did the same things over and over and over, and always with the same marvelous, genuine high-spiritedness. He helplessly did and said the same things over and over, himself; but his appearance of being sprightly about them had to be manufactured out of a sense of courtesy, and sometimes, he knew, the appearance was as feeble as the effort to produce it exhausting. Nevertheless, he had to continue the dreary performance of his part in the light-hearted routine; his family expected it of him, and the specialists who had studied his internal disabilities had advised it. “You’ve got to do the rest, yourself,” they had said, a year ago, when at last they released him from the hospital after the automobile wreck that abruptly ended his university career and his room-mate’s life. Repairing a nervous system might be slow, they told him; to hasten the cure, he must go forth and enjoy himself.

“Enjoy myself!” he murmured now, with a faint, wry smile, discovering a dull ache in the back of his head and knowing that he had caused it by

incautiously thinking of his prospective activities for the rest of that day. After lunch he would have to drive out to the links and drag himself over the course with his brother and two girls whom he hadn't yet met, new visitors at the cottage of his cousins, the Gordons; his mother had made the engagement. They would be just like all these other girls; they would chatter in the prevalent pattern, of course, and he would be obliged to simulate more laughter than usual, because the girls were new. Later, he would have to go to the Gordons' for a youthful dinner-party and stand about during half an hour or so of increasingly noisy and hilarious cocktailing, the period most unfair to himself, he felt, of all the day. For it seemed to him that lacking this preliminary drugging the diners could not possibly bear one another's conversation, yet he had not only to bear it but to seem merry over it, all without any liquorish alleviation. One of the girls would shriek, "Oh, you scavenger!" or something like that, and everybody would scream with laughter in which he would have to join; then they would all go to the Casino and he'd feel obliged to dance with the seven or eight girls about whom his mother would make inquiry to-morrow morning at breakfast. "To-morrow morning at breakfast"—and then would begin another just such day.

"Enjoy myself!" he muttered again, brooding upon the familiar ache, and, turning, stretched himself face downward upon the warm sand, but found no pleasure in his altered position. He became aware of a sensation added to that of internal discomfort—the feeling that someone was looking at him intently, and this faint pressure upon some subtle part of his consciousness irritated him a little.

Suddenly he sat up and stared about him. No one was near him; but out upon the high, topmost granite block at the end of the breakwater, where that huge old buttress projects some fifty yards into the sea, there stood against the warm sky a figure like the statue of a girl-bather about to dive—a tinted statue, it would have been, with a tense, pale green body, straight ivory legs, and, above a green-capped head, ivory arms extended as in some invocation to the ocean and the sun. There was not a sign that the disturbing gaze had come from this figure, yet there was no other visible source for such an emanation, and Gordon Corning's thought was first that the girl must have turned away quickly indeed to assume this pose, then that a fine tableau was about to conclude with a destructive accident. Savage rocks were just beneath the surface, off the end of the breakwater; at this stage of the tide some of them had no more than three feet of water over them, he knew—the incredibly ignorant bather was about to dive into them from a height at least three times her own, and already her straight, tall figure had begun to incline slowly out from the granite.

Gordon leaped to his feet, shouting loudly. “Stop it! Don’t do that—don’t dive there!” He ran down into the surf that heaved along the breakwater. “You’ll be killed! Don’t—” But he was too late; the bather’s feet left the granite; the inclining figure disappeared from his view, and the corner of the breakwater intervened between him and the culmination of the dive. “Why, this is awful—awful!” he gasped aloud, sick in spite of the waves that slapped and smothered him in hearty stimulation. It seemed horrible, too, that a thing so feeble in the water as himself should be confronted with the task of bringing in a dying girl or, it might be, recovering a body. “Poor slob!” he panted, in comment upon himself, splashing forward. Then abruptly he stopped in surf that broke over his shoulders; he dashed the salt water from his eyes and stared, for a white arm and green bathing-cap decorated the crest of a wave not a dozen yards in advance of him. A second white arm immediately made a graceful appearance in rhythmic action; the girl was serenely swimming along the beach, just outside the breakers.

A natural revulsion took place within the young man’s shaken being. “You fool!” he shouted. “Haven’t you got any sense at all?”

She heard him, though indistinctly. “What?” she called.

“Don’t do that again!”

“I don’t understand what you’re saying,” she cried, and, turning, swam toward him.

“I said don’t ever do that again because it’s—” But she was nearer him now and suddenly, to his amazement, he recognized her. “Why, good Lord!” he cried, stepping back. “When in the world did you come to Mirthful Haven?”

She swept to him, then, on the breaking surf and rose to her feet beside him, with the foam receding behind her. “I? Oh, I’ve been here before,” she said. “That’s a good place to dive if you know where the deep water is, between the rocks.”

“ ‘Good place to dive’! Good place to commit suicide!”

She laughed excitedly, but, after one direct glance at him, avoided meeting his indignant stare. “Oh, no; it’s all right. I—” She hesitated; then turned abruptly and poised for a plunge through an oncoming breaker, evidently intending to continue her swim. “Well, good-bye!”

“What!” He made a struggling leap forward, caught her by the arm and held her, so that the impending wave curled and broke over them both. “No you don’t!” he said, when he could speak again. “You’ve got to come out of

here and talk to me long enough to tell me what on earth you mean by not having decent manners enough even to answer a letter of condolence!”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THIS episode of meeting, by the breakwater, was too distant to be observed from the festal quarter of the beach, before the line of bath-houses, where there began to be tokens of a coming depopulation. The daily unwilling exodus toward bread and milk and spinach had begun for the pink cupids, who were dragged, vociferating, from the foam or from warmer shallow pools in the sand, while their elders moved in a suaver departure toward cocktails and caviar, clam-chowder and lobsters. Young Wallace Corning, in white with a tweed coat over his arm, saw his mother beckoning to him from her chair, as he stepped out of his bath-house. He came toward her inquiringly; but she rose and met him at a little distance from the group of people with whom she had been sitting. "Gordon didn't come by," she said. "He hasn't gone home, has he?"

"I don't think so. Sometimes he goes mooning off down toward the breakwater and sits there alone. Probably that's where—"

"Then I wish you'd go and bring him, because I'd really like him to meet Mrs. Arden. She's a widow, not much older than he, I think, and she's really very charming. If he just *could* be interested a little in something—"

"Match-making?" Wallace interrupted, and laughed. "I don't think a widow'd be just the—"

"Never mind!" Mrs. Corning said hurriedly. "If we could find anything whatever to rouse him out of this state of morbid lackadaisicalness he's been in so long—and sometimes at his age a pretty woman a little older and more sophisticated and—"

"And pretty well off?" her son suggested banteringly, as she hesitated.

"That'll be enough from you!" Mrs. Corning returned gayly. "You skip along and find him before she goes off to lunch." She waited, while Wallace walked away, whistling, in the direction of the breakwater. He went half the distance, stopped, stared, and returned to his mother. "Not there?" she asked.

Wallace looked amused. "Yes—sitting on the sand talking to somebody I took to be a girl because she was wearing a green bathing-suit and cap."

"Who is she?"

"Too far away to see," Wallace replied. "But since it's good for him to be interested I thought I'd better not disturb him, because his attitude was at least that, I should say. I'll go back and bring him if you want me to, though."

"Gracious, no! He can meet Mrs. Arden later, and she's leaving the beach now, anyhow. If he's already found a girl—or anybody—that he's able to take some interest in—"

"I think he has," Wallace said. "The girl seemed to be sitting pretty still; but Gordon had got so unlike himself that he was making gestures, and I thought you'd agree that anybody who put a little animation into him ought to be left in charge of the case."

"Yes—at least until she remembers it's lunch-time. Gordon never does, no matter whether he's interested or not. But you say he really did seem to be?"

"I told you he was making gestures, didn't I?" Wallace said as they turned and began to walk back toward the disintegrating group Mrs. Corning had left. "Judging by that and the fact of his having got the girl to come so far away from the crowd with him, I'd give odds that the talk they're having is principally upon personal matters."

His conclusion was a correct one: Gordon, at the moment, was speaking rather pointedly of himself, of his companion and of their personal relation to each other. "I'm at least a human being and an inoffensive one," he was urging, with some heat. "You may not feel called upon to act like one, yourself, or to treat me as one; but I believe it can be proved that we both are, and it's usually supposed that every human being owes every other one certain courtesies if they come in contact at all. Even at the school dances, when you couldn't help seeing that you were why I came to them, you were just barely civil to me. Isn't that so?"

Edna sat partly turned away from him, leaning upon one hand and looking down at the sand. "Well—" she murmured. "Didn't I dance with you whenever you asked me to?"

"You couldn't have helped that very well. And when we were dancing—or when we sat—I don't think you ever once volunteered a remark of any kind. You spoke when I asked you questions and yet when you danced with anybody else you prattled the whole time. Isn't that true?"

"I don't—I don't know."

"You do, too!" he said brusquely. "Yet when I asked if I'd done anything to offend you or—or was personally distasteful to you—you said, 'No'. Then you'd go right on treating me the same way, although I showed you again and again that you interested me and that I wanted to know you better if you'd let me. Now you're beginning just the same thing over, aren't you?"

"What?"

"I think you heard me perfectly well; but I'll say it again. Aren't you treating me now, to-day, just as you did then?"

"I don't know," she repeated, not altering her attitude.

"I think I've got a right to be told at least why you do it," he said. "I think just as one human being to another you owe it to me to explain why you didn't answer my letter. It was a pretty sincere expression of feeling, Edna. Mildred Kerr told me your grandmother was the only relative you had in the world, and I think I understood what it must have meant to you to—I—I've had some rather—rather bitter trouble, myself, and—" His voice trembled and he hesitated. "I tried to tell you something about it that night—I mean the night of the last of the dances, when you seemed to be a little kinder to me, at least in your expression when you looked at me. I thought a good deal of my room-mate, you know, and I told you that I was driving the car—it was my fault that he was killed. Well, last month, when Mildred told me you'd been left alone in the world, I thought that what had happened to me made me able to understand something of what you must be feeling. When you didn't answer, of course it was like being told I'd been intrusive. That was what you meant me to understand, was it?"

"No—I—"

"You what?" he asked, as she sat silent.

"Nothing."

" 'Nothing'!" he repeated, in sharp exasperation. "I suppose you'd say that to Mildred Kerr, too? She wrote Wallace that she'd written to you three times and couldn't get an answer. You got her letters, didn't you?"

"Yes; they were forwarded."

"Why haven't you answered them? If you wouldn't write to me, you might at least have let your best friend know where you were and what you were doing, I should think! Aren't you going to answer her at all?"

"Well, I'll probably—probably—"

"You'll probably what?"

"I don't know."

“You don’t!” he cried. “I think I do. You mean you’ll probably not! Isn’t that so?”

“I don’t know.”

“Edna! What the devil makes you insist upon being so baffling? Sometimes it seems to me you picked out a school girl ‘line’ for yourself—to be mysterious because you think it’s fascinating!”

This seemed to sting her into showing a little life. She turned her head slowly, gave him the edge of a glance and a wan smile. “I? I’m trying to be fascinating?”

“Well, if you’re not, what are you doing?”

“Nothing.”

“Oh, dear me!” he said desperately. “If being mysterious intentionally is what you’re doing, it succeeds to a miserable extent, all right! Yet you don’t need to do it. You’d be quite as fascinating as you like without the mystery. Aren’t you ever going to talk to me?”

“What about?”

“Good heavens! About yourself!”

At this, another edge of a glance from her seemed to indicate that she was startled. “About myself,” she said in a whisper. “Why, I—” Suddenly she rose and began to walk down toward the water.

He jumped up, strode after her, caught her by the wrist and swung her about to face him. “Where in the world are you going?”

“Well, it’s time,” she murmured, standing before him meekly, her eyes downcast. “Time for me to be getting back, I mean.”

“Back where?”

“Where I—where I’m staying.”

“Oh, dear me!” he said again, in despair. “If you’re so bored by the idea of coming to speak to my mother and father—I told you they’d be delighted to see you again, and it’s certainly only decent to show a little politeness to older people—well, that won’t bother you now, because by this time I’m sure they’ve left the beach; it’s pretty nearly empty. So you can at least walk back to the bath-houses with me, can’t you?”

“But I’m not going there.”

“No? Going to spend the rest of the day in your bathing-suit?” he inquired with satire; then spoke in a tone more amiably argumentative. “See here; I’ll let you alone if you’ll give me a reason for it. You told me I’ve

never done anything that offended you and that you don't find me personally repugnant to you. Are you sure that's true?"

"Why—yes."

"You're sure? Then why are you so anxious to get rid of me? Why won't you tell me where you're staying? Why won't you say when I can see you again? Will you come here to-morrow at the same time?"

At this, she looked at him; her lips parted, and, for an instant, as a quick, soft light seemed to glow in her blue eyes, he thought she was about to smile and consent with even eagerness. "To-morrow? Oh, no—but—"

"But what? When will you come?"

"I don't think I can."

"Not at all?" he asked sharply. "Why not?"

"I—I can't say," she said indistinctly, and moved her wrist with a gentle urgency to be released. "You must let me go."

"Certainly!" He set her free, stepped back from her, and spoke with the frigidity usually employed at his age as a demonstration that wounded self-esteem has not even been scratched. "I beg your pardon for detaining you!"

"No, no!" A warm color suffused her cheeks, and she leaned toward him. "Ah, don't be hurt with me!" she said quickly in a pleading, sweet voice; then turned, ran down into the froth of the surf, shot herself, like a green and ivory arrow, under the curl of a breaker, and, a moment later, showed her green cap and a swift arm upon the next crest, as she began to swim out to sea.

He advanced a few steps as if to follow her; then stood, uncertain, watching her. The tide was sweeping in through the harbor mouth; fifty yards out, she turned, entered this powerful current and went with it, passing rapidly from his sight as she was sped inward upon the other side of the breakwater. He climbed that edifice with some difficulty, scratching himself and barking his shins upon the rough granite, and, when he had finally hauled himself to the topmost row of blocks, she was already distant from him, swimming steadily up the harbor with the tide. "Wouldn't have any trouble getting away from me in the water!" he muttered ruefully, aloud. "No wonder you had the school championship for swimming! Now, where in the world are you going?" Apparently she was going straight ahead; she had passed the moored yachts and motor-boats, and the green cap and flashing arms were tiny in the distance. He had to narrow his eyes to keep her in view; then, when the green speck upon the water had slid by a grey

boat moored at the edge of the channel, he could see it no longer and relaxed the strain upon his eyelids.

She must be going all the way to the village, he thought; probably she had a bathing-robe there upon the bank, or a car would be waiting for her at the village end of River Road, perhaps. It might be that she was a guest in one of those fine old houses now owned by summer residents; it might be—if a car waited for her—that she was staying at someone's country place in the neighborhood of Mirthful Haven, or it might be that she was spending the summer in a boarding-house in the village. It might be, moreover, that her grandmother hadn't left her anything, so that the girl had become someone's secretary, perhaps, or a governess or even a nursery-maid; but she wasn't a snob and surely she couldn't mistake him for one—she could have told him. No, her manner toward him to-day had been just what it was during those evenings at Stony Brook, and especially during that last evening there, when, after a persistent, monosyllabic aloofness, she had given him a final moment of something stirringly different in the one parting glimmer of blue eyes suddenly become ineffable. As she had been there, so she had been here, and none of his guesses answered the riddle.

He went slowly back to the bath-houses, puzzling and still irritated, too, by what he thought the needlessness of such a puzzle's existence. Yet contrarily there was a warm, queer elation within him—as if he had found the grotto of a voiceless sea-nymph and had sat with her there, with something golden hovering between them in spite of her silence. It seemed to him that he had passed an hour of great beauty, one to be treasured closely within his memory and kept to himself, like a magic prize that might disappear if others beheld it.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

HE WAS not able to keep quite all of it to himself, however. He was late for lunch, and, when he sat down at the table, found his father and mother and brother in an approving but inquisitive mood. Mrs. Corning beamed upon him. "We waited a little while for you before sitting down," she informed him. "But this time we aren't going to find any fault with you for your tardiness."

"No, indeed!" her husband assented. "For my part, I think we ought to be glad we've got a son attractive enough to persuade a pretty girl to spend the morning with him in seclusion."

"Seclusion, sir?" Gordon asked blankly. "I? What seclusion?"

At this the three others laughed benignly, and Corning explained. "It won't do, son! Your mother wanted you to meet that lovely young Mrs. Arden, so she sent Wallace after you, and he was discreet enough not to be intrusive; but he did ascertain the facts before he came away."

"Away from where, sir?" Gordon asked; and, to the pleasure of the three observers, his color heightened. "What facts, sir?"

"I wouldn't have mentioned it if I'd thought you didn't want it known," Wallace said amiably.

"Oh!" Gordon exclaimed, apparently enlightened. "You mean when I was sitting by the breakwater."

"With a girl in a green bathing-suit," his mother said, nodding. "Yes, that's what we mean. Who was she, dear?"

"Who was she?" he repeated thoughtfully. "Oh—a Miss Shellpool."

"What do you mean, 'a Miss Shellpool'?" Wallace asked, staring. "You don't mean Edna?"

"Yes—it was she."

"Well, why couldn't you say so!" Wallace turned toward his mother. "You and father remember her—a very attractive girl from Miss Branch's school who came up with Mildred for a dance at the Country Club. She was

an orphan living with her grandmother at Stony Brook, and after school closed this year her grandmother died and Edna went away somewhere; Mildred hasn't been able to find out where, because Edna hasn't answered her letters. Gordon knew all about that, because I told him, and here he is, spending his mornings with her down at the breakwater and never mentioning—"

"No," Gordon interrupted hastily. "I hadn't seen her until this morning. I __"

"I remember her quite well," Mrs. Corning said. "Miss Branch's girls are all nice, and I remember her quiet, well-bred manner, a little reserved. We must call her up and ask her to something. Where's she staying, Gordon?"

"Ah—I don't know."

"You don't!" Wallace exclaimed, and burst out laughing. "You're a marvel, Gordon!" He explained to his parents. "At the Branch school dances he wouldn't dance with anybody else—except once or twice with Mildred, to be polite. Now she's turned up here and he didn't even ask her where she's staying!"

"Never mind," Mrs. Corning said soothingly, and she gave Wallace a glance of warning, not wishing her younger son's new interest to be discouraged by family teasing. "No doubt she'll be at the beach to-morrow and Gordon can ask her then. You won't forget, Gordon, if she's there?"

"No, I won't," he said. "If she's there."

His doubt that she would be there was strong; yet behind its shadow enough hope glimmered to keep him in the neighborhood of the breakwater throughout the bathing-hours of the next three days. When he had begun the fourth of these noontide vigils, however, his mother sent for him. "I walked down that way a little while ago," she said to Wallace. "He sits with his head in his hands; then he gets up and throws a stone in the water—then sits down and holds his head in his hands some more. It seems to me it's beginning to make him dismal, and that's bad for him. If he's as interested in Miss Shellpool as you think he is, why isn't he here where all the girls are, looking for her?"

"Because she isn't here, mother. I've looked for her, myself, and she hasn't been here since the day he got her to go and sit there with him."

"Then she's probably gone away. Quite possibly she was only in Mirthful Haven for a day, and he's so dreamy he didn't even ask her—"

"He wasn't dreamy when I saw him," Wallace objected.

“Perhaps not; but it isn’t doing him any good to poke around down there alone all the time everybody’s at the beach, and it’s a little ridiculous, besides. I think you’d better go and tell him we’d like to have him meet a very charming lady and sit with us a while.”

Gordon accompanied his brother meekly enough, when this message was delivered; the diminishing hope of the sea-nymph’s return had finally flickered out, and the young man bowed and murmured before Mrs. Arden, then sat down on the sand beside her chair. He placed upon his face an expression of amiable interest that became almost at once absent-minded and melancholy in spite of him, and his responses to his mother’s efforts to draw him into the talk were feeble.

“I was just telling Mrs. Arden how much you love the sea,” she said. “I told her I was sure she’d find you congenial on that point, Gordon. Do you remember the poem you wrote about it when you were only ten years old? Couldn’t you recite it to her?”

He muttered, “Murder!” huskily, and Mrs. Arden laughed. “I’m afraid he means he declines, Mrs. Corning!”

“He oughtn’t to,” the older lady protested. “It was really very good, and they printed it in his school magazine, too. Gordon, Mrs. Arden loves hearing what these quaint characters say around here. Tell her some of the things you’ve heard them say.”

“I’m afraid I don’t recollect anything particularly, just now,” he returned plaintively. “I’m sorry.”

“You needn’t be,” Warbeck said. The emaciated, grey gentleman had just joined them; with the aid of a walking-stick and the arm of Mrs. Arden’s chair he lowered his long figure and sat upon the sand beside Gordon. “If Mrs. Arden’s making a collection it’s already pretty well supplied, though I might add a new item for it. I had a man digging holes for fence-posts behind my cottage in the hot sun yesterday, and Hink Marsh, one of the lobster fishermen, came by and stopped to watch him. I asked Hink how he’d like such a job, himself, and he said, ‘I’d a’most a’ soon go fishin’!’ I expressed surprise and mentioned that we of the cottages thought the ocean a field of sport and pleasure. ‘Guess you do’, Marsh said. ‘Guess you wouldn’t if ’twas your place o’ business!’ It seemed to me there was something in that point of view. In the meantime, however, Mrs. Arden, I saw Captain Embury this morning and he said he’d be delighted. The Captain seldom goes out after nightfall and without any further warning to him we can call upon him any evening this week that you have free.”

"Not to-morrow or the next night, then—I could go to-night if that's convenient for you."

"Perfectly," Warbeck assured her. "You'll see the famous sideboard, buried in the War of Eighteen-twelve, the meteorite, the noble ship-model that took the Captain eight years to—"

"Yes, that wonderful ship-model!" Mrs. Corning exclaimed, interrupting. "It wasn't finished when my husband took me there, years ago, and Gordon and Wallace were too small then to go with us. Gordon's simply wild about ship-models!"

"Am I?" he asked, in mild surprise. "I didn't know—"

"Why, certainly! Didn't you buy one once and have it in your room at college?" She turned to Warbeck. "Gordon's simply wild to go with you and Mrs. Arden to Captain Embury's, only he's afraid of being intrusive, so he won't ask you to take him."

"But I—" her son began; then, bethinking him that he would at least be saved from an evening at the Casino, he subsided, let his mother make the engagement for him, and, with some show of pleasure, thanked Warbeck and Mrs. Arden for including him.

Their inclusion of him in this small party, moreover, involved little effort on his part, as he discovered on the way to Captain Embury's with them, early that evening. Even during the drive from Great Point to the village, in Mrs. Arden's open, long automobile, his two cheerful companions gave him little opportunity to say anything. "At least they'll do all the talking; thank goodness for that!" he thought, and sank his head, turtlewise, as far as possible into the soft collar of his camel's hair overcoat, for Mirthful Haven midsummer evenings may be chilly or even cold.

"You see, Captain Embury's the great man of the village," Warbeck was explaining. "He's the one relic remaining of this place's heyday of seafaring overlords; he's an ocean spirit left over from another age—an age dead long ago—left over on the land, poor salty spirit, but with as much of the old sea, and of old Mirthful Haven, too, as he can keep about him."

"Dear me! I'm afraid you're making him seem rather ghostlike."

"Ghostlike?" Warbeck laughed. "Not the Captain! You'll never find anybody less like a relic, either; heaven alone truly knows his age, though I think you'll take him to be an extremely vigorous person edging toward sixty. He doesn't wholly approve of many of us summer residents; but I don't think you need be nervous about the impression you'll make upon

him, Mrs. Arden—he'll never get over being a sailor if he lives a thousand years."

"You mean he'd need to be that for me to make an impression?"

Warbeck protested, and the two exchanged persiflage upon the point, while the automobile turned from River Road, and, the next moment, drew up at a stone mounting-block before Captain Embury's gate.

The front windows of the house were all dark; but there was a faint glow through the fanlight and glass side-panels of the doorway. "He's here," Warbeck said, leading the way. "As we drove up I saw that his dining-room windows are lighted; he lives in that room principally, and, besides, he told me he would certainly be at home any evening this week." He pulled the knob of the old-fashioned door-bell, producing a faraway jingling; then there was silence, and, for a minute or two, the three callers stood waiting between the two chained brass guns upon the doorstep. Finally there was the sound of an interior door's opening and closing; the light in the hall brightened suddenly; chains rattled; heavy locks clanked; the outer door opened, and Captain Embury, rosy of face, with his moustache perfectly curled, a cameo pin set in his satin neck-scarf, and his gold chain and seals gleaming across his waistcoat, stood before them. For one moment he seemed a little taken aback; but almost immediately he extended his hand and spoke cordially in his mellow, big voice.

"Mr. Warbeck! Glad to see you! I didn't look for you to turn up quite so soon as this evenin'; but no matter—no matter. Always welcome to my house, and any friends o' yours, too! Come in! Come in!" Then, as his glance moved to the face of the lady standing beside Warbeck, the Captain's bright eyes became even brighter. "Dear me!" he said. "I wish I'd known you were comin' to-night. I'd have liked to provide better refreshment for you than just the sight of an old sailorman's house; but no matter. Come in! Come in, and heartily welcome!"

In the wide hall, where there was a white stairway, and shadowy flesh tints gleamed faintly from portraits browned by time, he continued his hospitable protestations, although the slightest possible shade of disquiet came upon his expression when Warbeck mentioned the name of Corning. The alteration was imperceptible to the visitors, however, and abated nothing of the Captain's cordiality. " 'Tisn't often that this old hallway sees anything as becomin' to it as you, ma'am," he said, as he took Mrs. Arden's fur coat from her and she stood forth in an evening dress of black lace. "I declare it makes an occasion to be remembered, gentlemen, for the old house to have in it two young ladies of such magnificent handsomeness on

the same evenin'!" He lowered his voice a little. "The other one that I speak of was here to supper with me and cheer up a lonely old sailorman, as she does sometimes when I can persuade her—a splendid girl, Mrs. Arden, and one you gentlemen won't look away from in a hurry!"

He led the way to a wide, deep-panelled, white door at the end of the hall, and, opening it, stood aside to let them pass into a spacious bright room, where a fire crackling under a white mantelpiece brought out highlight glints of reflection from dull mahogany and old silver. It was a room that drew from Mrs. Arden, upon its threshold, the half-breathed exclamation, "Gorgeous!" but could not, itself, immediately hold the attention of the callers. The girl who had been sitting beside the fireplace, gazing thoughtfully into that glowing little cavern, seemed fully to justify the Captain's preliminary hints of her.

With the approach of footsteps, her short revery had ended abruptly; she sprang up, startled, and, upon the opening of the door, half turned, as if under an impulse toward flight—neither she nor the Captain had expected this interruption of their tête-à-tête—but, as Mrs. Arden, Warbeck and Gordon Corning stepped into the room, she faced them, and for an instant her gaze met that of the open-mouthed young man fully and gravely. Then, smiling suddenly, like one who unexpectedly recognizes an old acquaintance of other times and places, she stepped forward and held out her hand.

"Gordon Corning!" she exclaimed, in a clear, loud voice. "You remember me? I'm Edna Shellpool."

"Remember you?" he said incredulously. "Remember you!"

"Yes; I'm Edna Shellpool."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

CAPTAIN EMBURY'S shrewd eyes shot one blue gleam of acute scrutiny at her face, saw instantly much of the truth and comprehended the message to him. "Remember you?" he said jovially. "You haven't met many young men—or old ones, either—that ever had a look at you and forgot you, have you? Miss Shellpool, this is Mrs. Arden and my good friend, Mr. Warbeck. Likely, Mr. Corning had the good fortune to meet you at Stony Brook. That gives me a big advantage over you, Mr. Corning, because I've known her for three hundred years."

"You've—you've what?" the dazed young man stammered. "But you—"

"I think Captain Embury means in the person of his ancestors and Miss Shellpool's," Warbeck explained. "You weren't speaking of a former incarnation, were you, Captain?"

"No, sir; I mean through our great-great-great-grandfathers and grandmothers—I don't know how many times you'd have to say 'great'—that came over on the same ship from England, sixteen twenty-two. You won't meet many young ladies that can show a family tree straight through three hundred years and better like Miss Shellpool's, I guess! Doubt if there's a dozen families in the United States as old as hers; doubt if there's half a dozen! Talk about old families!" He beamed upon her fondly, and added, "Yet I don't believe I ever heard her mention it!"

"No?" Edna said, and laughed a little nervously. "It wouldn't do to be bragging about that to Captain Francis Embury, would it?"

"You?" he said. "You wouldn't brag of anything! Wouldn't ever have heard about the prizes you won at school if your grandmother hadn't written me!" He turned, beaming, to his other guests. "This young lady's got a terrible fault of underratin' herself. You'd never know from her about anything splendid she did; yet I guess she's got plenty pride enough, hidden down deep, to be about as stiff-necked in some ways as you'd care to see!" He laughed rallyingly, patting her lightly upon the shoulder. "I guess so! Glad to see you're gettin' some color back in your face, too, instead o' that pallor your schoolbooks gave you."

“There seems to be some excuse for the color just now,” Edna said. “I think Mrs. Arden’s looking at the model of the ‘Martha Embury’, Captain, and would like you to tell her about it.”

Mrs. Arden, smiling, shook her head. “No, Miss Shellpool, I wasn’t looking at the ship-model; but if it’s a relief to you I will.” She went to the other end of the room where there stood, in a glass case upon a table, a miniature white-hulled ship with masts and yards almost veiled in an intricate miracle of silken rigging; and her eyes widened as she saw it more closely. “Dear me! I’ve seen ship-models before; but never anything like this, I think! Someone told me it had taken eight years in the making; but now I shouldn’t be surprised to hear that it had needed twenty, Captain.”

“No; only eight,” he said, much gratified, as he and Warbeck followed her. “Of course there were whole days durin’ that time, too, when I didn’t even touch her.”

Gordon had detained Edna near the fireplace. “What did you say that for?” he asked in a low voice. “I mean asking me if I remembered you and telling me that you were Edna Shellpool?”

“Well, I am!”

“More mystery!” he groaned. “Well, I give it up! Where have you been? Why haven’t you come back to the beach? Why on earth aren’t you willing to tell me where you’re staying?”

She shook her head; but, for the first time since he had known her, she looked at him smilingly and seemed friendly. “I will again some day—perhaps.”

“You’ll what again some day? Tell me where—”

“No. See you.”

“Look here!” he said, upon a sudden suspicion. “It may be a far-fetched idea; but have you any particular reason to regard the Cornings as a parvenue family? We’re not, and I hadn’t thought you might be a snob about such a thing; but I have known people, otherwise sane, who did set themselves up to be pretty high-hat because of ‘family’, and what Captain Embury says about yours—”

“No,” she interrupted, with a little sharpness. “Don’t talk nonsense.”

“Well, when will you see me? Where—”

“I can’t tell you.” She touched his arm. “Come; the Captain’s telling them about the ‘Martha Embury’, and you mustn’t miss anything he says.”

Unwillingly, he followed her to join the group at the other end of the room, and then stood looking at her and hearing but vaguely the Captain's story of how the model had been made correct to the last tiny block and minute stay, years after he had lost the original, the finest clipper ship of all the seas, upon an uncharted rock off the Brazilian coast on a calm day.

Mrs. Arden was fascinated. "Don't stop!" she said, when he seemed to have finished this narrative. "Don't!"

"No? Be careful—bright eyes make old sailormen a great deal too talkative! Yet she's worth talkin' about, the 'Martha Embury'. Named her for my mother, I did, and she lived up to the name. She held the record from Singapore to New York; made it on her second voyage. Had to be re-masted twice, after typhoons she was in—wicked, dreadful winds, they were; I never thought to last through either of 'em. Took her up the Straits after Krakatoa blew up—these three young people could hardly remember when that was, even if they were three times older than they are; but you might remember the red sunsets of that summer, Mr. Warbeck—you'd have been only a little boy, of course."

"You always flatter me, Captain," Warbeck said. "I was a pretty big boy, I'm afraid, that summer, forty odd years ago, and I recollect the red sunsets."

"Came from fine powder in the air—powder that the island of Krakatoa exploded itself into," the Captain went on. "Blew all the way round the world three times, that powder did, and made the reddest sunsets ever seen by mortal beings. Headed to go up the Straits, the 'Martha Embury' was, when Krakatoa blew up, and a British gunboat warned me off—said I couldn't get through and they were turnin' all ships back; I mustn't go on. But I knew I'd lose three weeks if I turned back and went all the way round instead of right on through the Straits, so I didn't heed 'em. Ashes had begun to fall already; but nothin' to what they fell mighty soon after we started in. Came down thicker and thicker until we had darkness by day and blackness by night, and ashes deep on the ship like a heavy snow. Set a man the whole time to swab ashes off the glass over the compass; kept him busy, too, just doin' that and nothin' else. Went through miles and miles and miles o' pumice-stone afloat on the sea, and sometimes we'd see snakes writhin' on it and sometimes we saw corpses on it, too. No wonder we saw them when that dreadful island had made thirty-six thousand of 'em out o' livin' people! Cut clear through the 'Martha Embury's' copper sheathin', that pumice-stone did; but she made the passage, and I guess we were a queer sight to ships we met up beyond—" He broke off, laughing chidingly at himself. "Mercy! I mustn't get to spinnin' sea yarns or pretty soon I'll be

tellin' you all about stern guns and Chinese pirates—how they'd lie in among the islands with their boats all covered with green branches so't a ship couldn't tell they were there and—There I go!" He stopped again, and, gayly resisting immediate pressure from Mrs. Arden and Warbeck, "No, no!" he said. "Not the sea-serpent, either, Mr. Warbeck—'twas only a giant sea-snake that lives in those tropical parts, anyhow, swimmin' with three monstrous hoops of him out o' water and—There I go again! Let me show you some o' the other rooms where there's matter o' more interest to the ladies, I'm sure."

With that, he opened a door and began to lead the little party upon what proved to be a sight-seeing tour of this floor of the house. He showed them capacious closets shelved to the ceiling to give space for delicately gleaming Chinese porcelains; he opened chests of embroideries, brocades, silks and Venetian velvets and laces; explained the symbolism of oriental bronzes and of Eastern carvings in crystal and jade and coral and ivory; tapped with a little ebony mallet upon great vases to prove the difference in the ware by the difference in the ringing vibration of the sound, and Mrs. Arden observed, with a twinkling eye, that all of these vases, which stood upon high pedestals of carved teak-wood, were neatly lashed by small ropes to brass rings in the wall behind them. The Captain fondly yet modestly exhibited to his guests inlaid boxes of satinwood and sandalwood and camphor, other boxes of tortoise-shell, of mother-of-pearl, of filigreed ivory, all of them exhaling a faint, ancient odor; he had Warbeck and Gordon compare the deceptive weight of chunks of pumice-stone with that of giant clam-shells, and brought forth barbaric implements and weapons, and garments of dully dyed fibre from the South Seas, including a narrow, tapa scarf given to him by an island chieftainess. "Pleasant, she was," he said, pausing for a moment of reminiscent appreciation. "Generous, too, because 'twas all she had on. Fine people, they are; but they just swim and eat and wear flowers and laugh and die—no better 'n the animals!" The Chinese mandarin of the old school, he said, was typically the noblest human creature he had ever known. "Finest gentlemen, too," he added, and brought from a cabinet the small meteorite that he had, himself, seen fall in a mandarin's garden as he sat feasting close by. "Had it dug up right away, still hot, he did, and gave it to me the minute he saw me look at it. Knew how to make presents, those men did, so't you couldn't refuse 'em, no matter how selfish you felt about takin' em." He returned the meteorite to a shelf of the wide and high glass-fronted cabinet wherein were chunks of yellow sulphur the Captain had brought up from the craters of smoking volcanoes, bits of petrified wood, spider-like dried vegetable growths from

the depths of tropical waters, dried sea-horses, orange-colored starfishes, groups of delicate shells and dozens of specimens, large and small, of contrasting varieties of coral. With the exhibition of his coral, however, the Captain became slightly argumentative. “I suppose you ladies and gentlemen think the learned men are right when they claim coral’s the work of an insect, do you?” he asked, with a hint of testiness in his voice. He turned to Gordon. “Now this young gentleman is probably fresh from college where likely he heard learned men lecturin’ on such matters; they told you coral was the work of an insect, didn’t they, Mr. Corning?”

Gordon, thus directly addressed, looked confused, like one suddenly roused from a vivid dream. “Well—of a polyp,” he said.

“Yes, sir, of a polypus. Did you believe ’em?”

“Naturally.”

“You did!” the Captain exclaimed, and the rosiness of his handsome old face became a little deeper in tint. “I’d like to have those learned men here to look at this collection o’ corals I made from all over the world and answer me a few questions. I’d like ’em to tell me why some o’ these specimens are like moss, some like mushrooms, some like buddin’ flowers, some like ferns and some exactly like little trees and twigs and bits o’ bushes—every bit of it all like growin’ plants. I’d like to have ’em tell me why coral isn’t petrified vegetable, plants turned to stone; I’d like to have ’em answer me why this polypus insect that they claim makes coral turns it all out to look and grow exactly like plants. Insects don’t grow branches, do they? I’ve seen islands made o’ coral raised up fifteen feet above the water—I’m not a learned man, myself, because I shipped as boy on the ‘Star of the East’ when I was eleven years old, and all the schoolin’ I ever got after that was at sea—but I’d like to have somebody that is a learned man show me any insect that could h’ist a rock up fifteen feet in the air!” He turned to Mrs. Arden and inquired with some heat. “Would *you* believe a learned man who told you any such a nonsensical thing as that?”

“Not if you didn’t, Captain Embury!”

“Of course you wouldn’t!” he said emphatically, unaware, in his testiness, of her tactful implication. He closed the door of the cabinet decisively; then turned to his visitors, beaming again, his good-nature restored. “Now we’ll go back to the dinin’-room, and, if the ladies’ll permit, I’ll offer the gentlemen some Manila cigars that have been kept in tea-leaves for thirty years.”

He went ahead to open the door; Mrs. Arden and Warbeck followed him, and the three passed out into the hall and turned toward the dining-room. For

a moment young Gordon Corning did not move but stood, staring after the Captain and frowning. “Aren’t you coming?” Edna asked.

“Not if I can get another few seconds with you,” he answered. “Curious old bird, isn’t he? He seems to be pretty wise on some points and a queer kind of ignoramus on others—like his ridiculous notion of coral. But I don’t want to waste any time talking of anything except when I’m going to see you again and—”

“I do!” she interrupted sharply, and he was astonished to see that her color heightened instantly and her eyes sparkled with anger. “I do! I do wish to talk of Captain Embury! How dare you say he’s an ignoramus about anything? What somebody else has told you and me about coral at school doesn’t count very much compared to what he’s learned of life and this earth for himself, I think! If you haven’t intelligence—and imagination!—enough to appreciate him—”

“Oh, misery!” Gordon groaned. “I’m out of luck if you’re going to keep on looking at me like that! What’s the good of being furious with me for nothing? You’re trouble enough to me without attacking me because I made a casual remark that has no reason to count with you one way or the other. The Captain’s a fine old sailor, with a lot of tang and flavor to him; but, good heavens! you aren’t going to make him a reason for treating me worse than you already do, are you? After all, he’s only—” He stopped.

“ ‘Only a native’! That’s what you were going to say, wasn’t it?”

That had been indeed what he was going to say, and there was no denying it, although he had checked himself, leaving the sentence incomplete. Like most well-to-do young Americans, Gordon had learned that undemocratic assumptions of superiority, when definitely expressed, have an unchivalrous sound, incite attack and are impossible to defend becomingly. Suspicion that Edna herself might be a ‘native’ had not the remotest lurking-place in his mind; she was a girl of the Branch School, Mildred Kerr’s friend, of Stony Brook, and, although Captain Embury’s ancestors might have known hers three hundred years ago, the old man had claimed this as a distinction for himself and shown her great deference. Gordon felt that he had put himself in a poor light; but he failed to understand what expelled her risen color and left her pale—pale with rage, apparently. “I didn’t mean anything of the slightest consequence,” he said. “For heaven’s sake, don’t be unkind to me any more! It hurts worse than you know.”

“Does it?”

“Why, just look at me!” he said huskily, and upon this plea her eyes stared full and straight into his.

During that exchange, something even more eloquent than the genuine pain he simply and pathetically put at her mercy moved her. Her color returned; her gaze softened to a wistful sweetness. “You mustn’t mind anything I say or do,” she said hurriedly, in a troubled, low voice.

“But it’s all I do ‘mind’—what you say and what you do. You don’t hate me—I’ve just this moment seen that you don’t and that I could mean something to you if you’d let me. Why won’t you let me? You won’t keep up this nonsense of hiding from me any longer, will you? You’ll tell me now where you’re—”

“They’re waiting for us,” she interrupted, moving away from him. “We can’t talk now.”

He stepped between her and the door. “We can talk long enough for you to tell me what I want to know! My mother’s been asking me where to find you and I had to tell her I’d forgotten to ask. I know you’re not at any of the cottages at Great Point; but I don’t know every house in the village, naturally. Are you—”

“No; not in the village.”

“Then you’re—”

“I told you I’d see you again. Isn’t that enough?”

Just then, at least, it was almost enough to content him, for as she spoke he had from her eyes one of those soft blue flashes like a sudden, unhoped-for caress. Without saying anything more, or indeed feeling a need of further speech for the time being, they stepped out into the hall, walked side by side down its strip of faded carpet and came into the dining-room together.

Mrs. Arden and Warbeck were examining the inscription upon an old silver punch-bowl, a jovial and capacious shape unabashed among the severer silver of the famous sideboard. The Captain stood firmly implanted, with his back to the fireplace, his short and manly figure not to be swayed whatever shock of waves or tortuous heave might move the deck beneath him. “Guess it means the people o’ the coast towns presented the punch-bowl to that Hon’able old Embury for abusin’ the Indians,” he was explaining. “Got his sword upstairs—heavy and with some wicked hacks out o’ the front of it—never heard he was much of a peaceable man. Died in church, though, he did. Right in his pew in that old church up at the head o’ Church Street. When I was a little boy I heard sermons there, myself, long enough to do that to almost anybody; those old-time preachers made piety a

dreadful gawky load on a body's shoulders." He paused, and added in an apologetic tone, "I hope the ladies won't think I mean to be sacrilegious."

"No," Edna assured him, for he had turned toward her. "We won't think that, Captain."

"I wouldn't like to have you think it," he said. "What's more, I believe in churches, and I believe in God, too."

"Do you?" she asked, coming near him and looking at him gravely. "Do you?"

"Why, of course I do," he said, addressing her with great earnestness. "It isn't reasonable not to. Just look at this universe and this little speck of it, the globe we're on, all scrambled over by millions and millions of different-colored people—every one of 'em wantin' to go about his own business his own way and pay no attention to anybody's interests except just his own and his own family's—and this globe and all the other planets keepin' true to their courses, and our tides and the moon and the Gulf Stream and the Humboldt Current and all the ocean rivers, and land rivers, too—everything movin' regular as clockwork, except sometimes the moon maybe driftin' a degree or two off her course, and the Gulf Stream edgin' over a mite—why, the greatest human mind that ever lived couldn't begin to imagine the awful tangle everything would get into in the hundredth part of a second if there wasn't Somebody at the head of it and always watchin' over it. Isn't that so? How could it be any other way?"

Edna did not answer; but the attention of Mrs. Arden, drawn from the inscription upon the punch-bowl, was caught and held. She had an impression that for reasons now elusive she would long afterward remember the picture before her—the sturdy figure of the old sailor, ruddy in the firelight, as he stood looking up earnestly into the face of the tall and graceful girl beside him. Warbeck, too, turned from the punch-bowl to listen with attention sharply arrested and his lips murmuring, " 'He holds her with his glittering eye. . . . She listens like a three years' child: the Mariner hath his will'."

"Why, it's plain as day," the Captain went on; but now he turned, and, in the tone of a man who pleads reasonably for certainties, addressed himself to all four of his guests. "This universe would blow up in one minute higher than Krakatoa went if there wasn't any God over it! But the Chinese worship many Gods; they say there are hundreds and hundreds of 'em, and I believe they're right, because there are hundreds and hundreds of universes—some of 'em thousands of times bigger than this one we're in, and awful far apart. Time and time again I go out on my front doorstep and look up and down

the sky until I can see the star Algol; it's so dreadful, dreadful far away that sometimes you can't find it at all, even on a clear night. Why, a learned man told me that the star Algol was likely worse'n four hundred quadrillion miles away from that front doorstep—it's in a universe four hundred quadrillion miles away! That's a terrible distance—the star Algol would be too dreadful far away for our God; Algol must have a God of its own. Every universe must have its own God—that's why I think the Chinese are right, and these hundreds and hundreds of universes all have their Gods. How can anybody think any other way?"

"So every man makes vast his own image," Warbeck whispered to Mrs. Arden. "It's a gorgeous picture: unthinkable black space traversed by the shining universes, each with its own Captain commanding from a quarterdeck of blazing suns! The infinite void of Cosmos an ocean for Captains to navigate eternally!"

"Yet whose guess is better?" she returned, under her breath. "Not mine! Listen."

" 'Way out there on Algol," the Captain was saying, "learned characters are lecturin', likely, on how this earth of ours was made by us polypuses that swarm all over it. If they can see us through their telescopes, guess they wonder why we behave to each other the cussed way we do sometimes. Must think we need all the disciplinin' we get, and I guess we do! Old Captain Cisapah Jordan was the worst disciplinarian I ever sailed under. 'Call me a hard Captain, do they?' he used to say. 'Well, the devil's got a reputation for bein' a pretty hard man, too; but look who he's got to deal with!' " Here Captain Embury remembered an admonition he had delivered to himself earlier in the evening, and laughed apologetically. "There I go, doin' all the talkin' as usual! Told you ladies that bright eyes have a terrible effect on old sailormen! Forgettin' that cigar for Mr. Corning, too, I was. Came from Manila thirty years ago and been deep in tea-leaves ever since, it has, Mr. Corning," he concluded, as he made the offering.

"Thank you," Gordon said, and, a moment later, after a first gasping inhalation of smoke, he easily comprehended why the ash of the similar dark cigar held between two of Warbeck's fingers was slight and without a glowing rim. Recovering, he wiped his eyes with a handkerchief, and, observing that Mrs. Arden was moving forward to utter the preliminary courtesies of departure, he turned to Edna. "You'll go with us, won't you? We came in Mrs. Arden's car; but I'm sure she'll be glad to—"

"Indeed yes!" Mrs. Arden assented quickly. "You'll let us take you to wherever you're staying?"

“Thank you; I’m not leaving just yet.”

“Indeed she’s not!” the Captain intervened warmly, and began to protest against the breaking-up of the little party at so early an hour. “Nobody must go,” he insisted, and continued his hospitable pressure all the way to the front door.

Gordon could linger for no more than a final urgent word. “You might let me wait for you.”

“No, no! I said I’d see you again.”

“But you—”

“Soon. I promise!”

Again he had to be content; his friends near the door were waiting for him. Mrs. Arden pointed to the wall above the staircase where between flattened outspread wings the stuffed head of an albatross was mounted.

“Good heavens!” she cried. “I thought that was a frightful omen! But perhaps you didn’t shoot him, yourself?”

“Yes, he did,” Warbeck informed her. “But you see he’s avoided the curse pretty successfully, so you needn’t ask him, ‘Why look’st thou so?’ ”

“No,” the Captain said, chuckling, and, somewhat to her surprise, “Nor say, ‘God save thee, ancient Mariner!’ ” he added, “Yes—‘I shot the Albatross’, though not with my cross-bow, and they didn’t hang him round my neck, either. I wanted him because I thought when I left the sea I’d have a soul like my own to keep me company in this old house.”

“A soul like your own!” the mystified lady exclaimed. “Why, what—”

“It’s what was used to be believed by some on shipboard,” he explained, continuing his chuckle. “They used to say that albatrosses were the souls of drowned captains, and gulls were the souls of drowned mates, and Mother Carey’s chickens were the souls of drowned old sailors. Thought I’d better keep one o’ the captains with me.”

“I don’t think you need another,” Mrs. Arden said. “At least, only one was necessary to make complete the pleasure of this evening.” Then, when she and Warbeck had gone out, drawing the reluctant Gordon with them, and the door had closed upon their still hospitably murmuring host and the motionless taller figure behind him, she added, in a thoughtful, lowered voice, “Of this strange evening,” and when Warbeck asked the meaning of her adjective she delayed her reply until Gordon was some paces in advance of them, on his way to open the gate. “Undercurrents and enigmas. Something curious in the relation between your ‘grand old party’—he’s

certainly that!—and that lovely, silent girl. Our young friend yonder, by the way, is furiously in love with her."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

BY NO striking coincidence, this final thought of the departing fair visitor was simultaneously occupying the mind of Captain Embury, as he and his remaining guest sat down, facing each other across the rosy, marble hearth in the dining-room. "A little bit thin and hollow-eyed, maybe," he observed reflectively. "Handsome, though, and not so full-bodied as the rest of his family. Got what I remember the young ladies long ago used to call 'burnin' eyes'."

"Who?"

"Who?" He laughed at the futility of the disingenuous monosyllable. "Guess you knew well enough he had burnin' eyes when he was starin' at you, young lady! No call for you to feel upset over it," he added, as Edna put her hand uncertainly to her cheek. "All three of 'em looked at you as much as they could with politeness, for that matter."

"I ought to have slipped away when I heard them in the hall. I should have—"

"No, you shouldn't, either!" he said emphatically. "Where's anybody got a better right to hold her head high and face people—"

"But that's just what I didn't do," she interrupted, in a voice of distress. "I called myself Shellpool and made you call me that."

"Well, what of it?"

"Why, it's a treachery to—to my father. I think already he may have guessed that I've committed one treachery to him—he saw me swimming up the harbor from the beach, the day I went there; but he didn't speak of it. What I did to-night is worse; it's a treachery to him and a lie to Gordon Corning!"

The Captain gave her troubled face a grave scrutiny from the side of his eye; then sat looking into the fire for some moments before speaking again. "You like this young Corning a good deal, do you?"

She bent her head, and her voice was so faint that the word just reached him. "Yes."

"I see," he said gently. "Matter o' fact, I thought so pretty soon after they came in."

She looked up. "You mean you thought that was why I called myself Shellpool?" Then, as he nodded slowly, she went on: "Well—it was! It seemed pretty cowardly to you, didn't it?"

"No, it didn't. It only seemed to me he'd known you by that name and you liked him—maybe a little more than liked him—and that you thought maybe—maybe—"

"That I thought he wouldn't go on liking me if he knew I'm Edna Pelter," she finished for him, as the Captain hesitated. "Well, that's a part of my cowardice, yes! Another part of it is that when I *feel* like Edna Pelter and not Edna Shellpool, I know I ought to hate him and all his cold-hearted crew that have treated my father as they *have* treated him!"

"But even when you feel like Edna Pelter, as you say, you don't hate him, do you?"

"No—I can't."

"I see," the Captain said again, still looking into the fire.

"But I ought to! I think you know better than I do what they've done to my father. They've forced him into something—something he never would have touched if they'd let him go on making a living as he used to. It's this business with Antoine Charette—I don't know what it is; he hasn't been willing to speak of it to me, and since I was a child we've never asked each other questions—but I'm horribly afraid I've almost guessed what it is. I think you know what it is, Captain Embury."

"No." He shook his head slowly. "I don't *know*. Guess the village has its ideas; but there wouldn't be any danger from there, even if the ideas are founded on fact. Close-mouthed people, we are, except sometimes just among ourselves mainly."

"Yet you think there is danger for him from somewhere—in what he's doing?"

"Danger?" He turned to look at her disturbed wide eyes and smiled reassuringly. "Why, even when a body's at sea in a fine, staunch vessel, there can be times when there's *some* danger. Ashore, nobody ever knows what's goin' to happen from one minute to the next; but when there's ice on the sidewalks I put on my rubber overshoes. Your father's about as active a man as I ever knew, when he wants to be, and I guess he knows how to look after himself. Don't you worry."

"But I do!" she said huskily. "I—I'm frightened—and I'm—I'm so terribly confused! I don't know whether what he's doing is right or wrong, and I'm confused because I don't care—I only care for him to be safe. I'm confused because I don't seem to know the difference between right and wrong. I don't know the difference between right and wrong in what he does, or in what I do, myself. Sometimes it seems to me I'm back just where I was before I went away with Grandmother. I didn't know right from wrong then—everything was just the way of least resistance. We had a lecturer on art at Miss Branch's; he said we must never be banal enough to say of a picture or a statue, 'I don't know whether it's good or bad art; but I know what I like!' Yet it seems to me that's exactly my attitude toward life itself—I don't do what's good or bad, I just do what some unreasoning thing within me makes me do. And I do it no matter how dangerous it may be."

"Dangerous? To yourself you mean, Edna?"

"Yes—to myself, too." Then, as though a flash of intuition had vaguely yet surprisingly illuminated some depth of darkness in her mind, she suddenly put a hand out toward him in questioning appeal. "Do you suppose that's what it is?"

"What what is?"

"The difference between right and wrong: that wrong's what's dangerous to anybody and right's what isn't? Do you suppose that's all the difference there actually is?" She waited for him to answer; but he sat gazing fixedly at the dancing lights upon his polished brass andirons. "Is it?" she asked urgently, as if his age had given him certainty of the right answer.

"Right and wrong," he said, and shook his head with an amused ruefulness. "Old-time church preachin' would answer you straight off and tell you, 'Yes, that's all the difference. Anything you do is wrong if it puts you in danger—danger of hell fire!' Then it'd go ahead and give you a set o' rules for keepin' out o' that danger. If you broke any o' those rules you were doin' wrong, as would be proved to you by torments after you died. But since the time I was a boy there've been more and more that lost their faith in hell fire, until nowadays, although the bulk o' the population is just as ready as ever to put a finger down on one o' the two sides of any question and say, 'This side is right and good, the other is wrong and wicked', why, they haven't got any way to back up their opinions with proofs. There's only a handful left o' those who can do that, and the trouble even in their case is that we still don't get the proofs they offer until after we die."

"You mean you don't know?" she said, with naive wistfulness. "Yet you said you believed this universe had a God."

"Of course! Looks as if our troubles come on us because we're too ignorant to understand the word o' command. Have to get knocked down sometimes for not obeyin' it, because it's got to be obeyed; there's no two ways about that! It's got to be obeyed, no matter if we're too stupid even to know the language it's in."

"Then I guess I'm going to be knocked down—again!" she said with a brief, disconsolate sound of laughter, as she rose to go. "I don't know the language—I don't know anything. I don't even know what I'm going to do."

"You mean about that young Mr. Corning, I guess."

"Yes."

"Might leave some o' that question to him!" Captain Embury suggested, rising, too. He took her hand and patted it, and her fingers, grateful for this friendly touch, closed warmly upon his. "He's a man, I take it, and it might be expected of him that he'll act like one. Judgin' from the way he looked at you all evenin' long, I guess he'll do most o' the doin', himself—if he gets the chance!"

The closing phrase of this prophecy contained a cautious implication, leaving a question open and suggesting that in spite of Edna's assertion that she was only a mechanism moving in response to reasonless impulses from within, she had nevertheless the power of free will and might or might not give Gordon his chance as she deliberately might choose. But as she sat on the "back porch" at Pelter's, the next morning, thinking over what Captain Embury had said, she was not sure that he had left the question quite open; the fact that he had added "if he gets the chance" seemed significant, and she began to feel gently but earnestly advised that the course of wisdom would be to avoid offering the chance. Within her, there was a spurring urgency to offer it; indeed, she had intended to yield to the urgency that very morning, and under a workingman's blue overalls and an old jacket of her father's wore her bathing-suit.

How easy it would be, she thought, to slip into the water and glide down the harbor, just to see if he happened to be waiting near the breakwater; if he didn't happen to be there, then no harm would be done: Why shouldn't she just go and find out? From where she sat she could look out through the harbor mouth; the midsummer sea lay in an inviting sweetness under a hazy sun, and twice Edna made a movement to rise and drop the coat and overalls from her. Twice she resisted and sank back; but, when a third such impulse came, she rose, muttered, "I will!" and dropped the coat from her bare shoulders. Instantly she picked it up, put it on doggedly and spoke aloud, through her teeth, "I won't!" Then, the better to hold to her resolution, she

went into the house and set diligently to work with a mop and a bucket of soapy water. “I won’t!” she said again. “I won’t! I won’t! I won’t!” Thus she used this fierce reiterating to build props for a determination already so tattered and sagged that soon it might consist of little more than the props themselves. They saved her from offering Gordon his chance that day, and a few other days, too; but every time they saved her they were weakened by the effort.

The young man whose eyes had burned when he looked at her, as Captain Embury thought, was principally occupied, meanwhile, in trying to make a chance for himself; but had his trouble for his pains. He even contrived to secure an interview with the Captain, under the pretense that a pair of gloves had been left behind upon the occasion of the Warbeck expedition; he got nothing of what he wanted from the Captain, though the old man was even loquacious upon the desired subject. “Finest girl that ever lived—yes, sir! Noble as she is handsome, too! Where she lives, guess that might be a question, now she’s lost her grandmother. Not goin’ to live at Stony Brook any more—told me *that* much. Where she might be found around here right now, I couldn’t say. Might be one place one time and another place another time. Didn’t happen to mention to me where she’s stayin’, no.”

“I know she isn’t at the Point and not in the village, either; so there’s no other place she could be, except visiting in the country somewhere about here. I thought perhaps you—”

“Yes, sir, a splendid girl! Never saw one more so. Educated, too! Talk to you about art, or anything. Grandmother an old friend o’ mine, a fine, good woman—knew her well when she spent some time here—quite a while ago, that was, and Edna was only a little child then, of course. Not many with that nice, keep-to-herself manner, are there? Not talkin’ much but ready to be obligin’—that’s what I like. Lively, too, sometimes, I guess, if she felt like it; got a pretty laugh, even if you don’t hear it so often. Sorry about the gloves, Mr. Corning; but you’re heartily welcome—any friend of Mr. Warbeck’s is welcome here at any time, day or night. Come again! Come again!”

Gordon told his mother, desperately, that Miss Shellpool would not easily be obtainable for Great Point hospitalities; she was visiting friends at a camp on an inland lake many miles distant from Mirthful Haven, he said, being forced into this explanation by remarks on the part of Warbeck and Mrs. Arden at the beach. “A picturesque young woman,” he heard Warbeck saying to Mrs. Corning. “Captain Embury’s manner to her and his praises of

the nobility of her lineage made me feel as though I were a spectator of some scene out of an Eighteenth Century play—a sturdy old retired British Admiral visited in his quarters by a great young court lady, a cousin to Royalty, no doubt. We were delighted to see that your son approached her on terms of equality, even of intimacy—a Miss Shellpool—"

It was then that Gordon made his explanation to his mother, and, upon pressure, he added to it the promise that the next time he saw Miss Shellpool he would urge her to motor over to Mirthful Haven for tea or lunch upon a convenient day. Then, when he had betaken himself to the surf, Mrs. Corning asked Warbeck if he noticed the change for the better that had taken place in Gordon since the beginning of the summer. "Doesn't he strike you as a great deal more cheerful?"

"Well, if not more cheerful at least a great deal more alive."

"That's just it!" the mother assented, with a nod of satisfaction. "It's precisely what his nervous system needed—to come to life again. Wallace is to go into his father's business in the autumn, and Mr. Corning has been very anxious to take Gordon in at the same time; but the specialists said that unless a bracing outdoor summer made the poor dear boy show more signs of life they thought it wouldn't do. But now it really does begin to look as if the plan could be carried out. Open air, sunshine and salt baths—and a little flirtation with a nice girl, who is so ideally correct for the purpose that she keeps the flirtation mild by remaining out of reach most of the time—by the middle of September I think the cure will be complete and Gordon ready for stocks and bonds and decimal figures! He seems to take so much more interest in everything, lately, than he did a month ago."

In this detail she was mistaken, for Gordon's interest had lessened in all persons, places and events, except those traceable in his imagination to some faint connection with the evasive girl. The seaward end of the breakwater, the bit of beach beside that granite bulk, the waters of the harbor and Captain Embury's house had a wistful, haunted eloquence for him, like shrines with the saint's figure gone; Captain Embury, Warbeck, Mrs. Arden and Wallace he saw shimmering in a vague radiance because they had spoken with her; but the fluctuant routine of pleasure-seeking was duller for him than ever before. All these people so busily employed in making for themselves, over and over, day after day, the same incomprehensible petty joys, were a little like insects, he thought; they fluttered and chirruped in the sun, and he was amazed by the chirruping. How in the world did they ever find so much to laugh about, he wondered, and how in the world, too, could they be so inconsistently serious about their pleasures? His father and other

older men held earnest conclaves, hours long, before a golf club election; in groups they manœuvered against one another over the managing of the Casino like Venetian potentates over the Dogeship. Mrs. Corning took the dinners she gave as seriously as if something worth listening to would be said by any of the diners; but when the festival was made for older people there would be a decorous preliminary cocktailing and caviaring, a somewhat livelier buzz of sound signifying nothing over the glass of wine or two that accompanied the eating, and afterward a long, almost silent solemnity at the card-tables. When the dinner was for younger people, the cocktailing would be sprightlier, the noise at the table would be fuller of sound and the fury of laughter signifying nothing, and later would come the dispersal for dancing at the Casino or at Langley's Rocks, or even at a combined speak-easy and cabaret at New Yarmouth. Sometimes, before the night was over, Wallace would drink a little too much and Gordon would have to cover the entry of the brothers into the cottage, for their father's opinions in the matter of alcoholic lapses were rigid. Not at such dinners and not at such dances, Gordon knew, could he hope to catch the gleam of eyes that were still blue above the water three waves out from the shore, nor a glimpse of brown hair that seemed red in the glow of Captain Embury's firelight.

One night Wallace was more convivial than usual at New Yarmouth, and so was Sally Gordon, his cousin; Lena, Sally's sister, drove them home, with Gordon sitting between the two merrier spirits in the rumble behind, and trying to keep them quiet. They were quiet enough, indeed almost comatose, when Lena stopped the car upon the crest of Great Point at a little distance from the Cornings' cottage, an hour before dawn; Gordon descended with Wallace, the car went on, and, after an interval of five precarious minutes, the brothers were safely in Wallace's room. "Shame to give you all this trouble," Wallace said, with some difficulty. "Trouble with me, I get so sore every time I see Agatha with that Munson sheik, I got to get myself jolly to keep from doin' somep'n' about it. Got myself a little too jolly to-night, didn't I?"

" 'Jolly'! Is that what you call it? Do you remember trying to knock a waiter down because he was 'too polite', you said?"

"No. Did I? But don't tell me 'bout it—I don't want to know 'bout every little thing that happens that I don't remember. Hope I'll remember to give Agatha a piece o' my mind to-morrow, though. She's got no business in a place like that, anyhow not with that spaniel! Told her so, and you know what she did? Swore at me—our own sister! Bet I land on that silky-haired Claudio some day!" He giggled plaintively, then complained that he'd lost

his cigarette case. “Heard somep’n’ clink when I got out o’ Lena’s car. Let me sleep now; but you go get it, like a good old Gordie, and give it to me in the mornin’.”

Gordon descended the stairs softly and went out to look for the cigarette case. He found it, and was returning to his own gate, when suddenly he stopped and stood staring at the rocky crest of the cliffs just beyond the low thicket of juniper and bay on the other side of the road. The late moon, in a clouded sky, shone clear just then, hanging low over the tip of the crescented shore to the west, and its light had revealed something moving on the peak of the cliff: Gordon had a stirring, strange impression that a figure had risen there and a white hand waved to him in the eerie light.

“What—” he whispered under his breath; then he crossed the road, pressed through the bordering thicket and began to make his way out upon the rocks. There was no wind; he heard no sound except the intermittent small splashings of the almost pulseless sea below. Stepping with care, for the soles of his dancing-shoes were slippery, he went forward until he reached the point from which had seemed to come the white shimmer of that beckoning hand. Then he uttered a half-suppressed cry and stood still.

Bareheaded and wrapped in a long cloak, Edna was sitting upon a shelf of rock, with her back against a higher ledge. “Yes,” she said quietly. “I didn’t mean to do it; but I did, and you saw it. Now it’s done, come and sit here beside me—a little while.”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

HE OBEYED without speaking, and, after an interlude of silent tension as they sat together, she became aware that his shoulder, touching hers, was trembling. "You mustn't do that," she said gently.

"Do what?"

"Tremble."

"I can't very well help it, I'm afraid. Perhaps it shows you what it means to me to find you again. How long have you been here?"

"About three hours."

"Not—not waiting for—for me, Edna?"

"No."

"I thought not," he said. "I know of course I couldn't be the reason you'd do anything."

"Yes—you could."

"But you've just told me—"

"Wait," she said. "I'll tell you all I can. I've seen you and your brother come home at night, before this. I didn't dream I'd ever let you know I was here; but when you came out alone just then, I—I couldn't stop myself. Before I knew what I was doing I found myself standing up and waving to you. Then I hoped you hadn't seen me—but you did."

"Why did you hope I wouldn't see you? Why are you—"

"Wait! When I promised you at Captain Embury's that I'd see you again, I meant I'd come to the beach perhaps—just one more time. Then I thought I mustn't do it—that I'd better not see you again, even though I'd promised to. Well, it seems I couldn't stick to it—for here I am—and here you are." She laughed faintly and helplessly. "It's just happened! Could you be kind enough to me not to ask me any questions?"

"I don't think so."

"Couldn't you?" she said pleadingly. "I promise I'll tell you all I can. I come here sometimes—that's all. There's no one to forbid my being out at night if I care to be, and there's no reason anyone shouldn't be out here on these rocks at night if she likes to be. I used to come here years ago—I've always liked to come here. Doesn't that answer you about why I happen to be here?"

He seemed uncertain. "Perhaps—but—"

"Wait," she said again. "I hate being 'mysterious' to you more than you hate my seeming so. Can't you believe that I wouldn't be if I could help it? After all, too, I needn't be if you don't want me to be."

"What?" Gordon cried. "Then in heaven's name tell me—"

"No, no!" she said, checking him. "You don't understand. I mean the real I—the person that I am—needn't be mysterious to you. Only things about me—background things—have to be that. You could know *me*—without knowing them—couldn't you?"

"How? What you call 'background things' are a part of anybody, aren't they? I don't mean I have to know whether you're staying now at somebody's country place or at a farm house or at a camp in order to know you; but doesn't every more essential thing I know about you help me to know you better? For instance, I knew you better because of your being at Miss Branch's school and because you were Mildred Kerr's best friend. When Captain Embury spoke of your coming of a fine old family I felt I knew you a little better. Wouldn't I know you better if I knew what your daily life is now, what you're doing, what people you spend your time with, and all—"

"No. You don't understand." She pointed down the western crescent of the land to where at its tip there twinkled a minute white spark. "That's Old Bareface Light atop of Old Bareface Rock. Did you ever hear of the 'Mirthful Lady' and Old Bareface?"

"No."

"No, I suppose not; yet any of the village people would have told you if you'd ever got them to talk of old Mirthful Haven. The 'Mirthful Lady' was a barque built and rigged above the old locks on the river, here, a long, long time ago. She was made and manned by Mirthful Haven men, and when she was ready for her maiden voyage they warped her down to the harbor mouth yonder and said good-bye, with all the town cheering and drinking toasts to her from the shore as she got under sail. She went straight out as far as Mile Rock, in sunlight with a breeze behind her, and then, all at once, the wind

shifted and the sky clouded over and there was such a thickening in the northeast that the people on shore hoped she'd turn back; but she didn't, and the Northeaster struck her. They could see her all afternoon trying to beat out far enough to clear that point; but she couldn't do it, and just after dark she drove in on Old Bareface, and that was the last of her and of the thirty Mirthful Haven men aboard of her. I often think of them when I come here and look over yonder to where I know that cruel, old, straight-up-and-down rock rises out of deep water. I often wonder what those thirty souls said to one another just after their bodies were drowned. Don't you wonder what they said, Gordon?"

"I?" He shivered, and laughed ruefully. "Why, no, and I don't see why you want to dwell on such gloomy things. I thought you were going to tell me—"

"About our knowing each other, yes. I mean that those poor old sailors who died over there, so long ago, weren't sailors after they died. Maybe their souls began to talk to one another in sailor fashion and using sailor language; but they must have understood that they weren't sailors any longer and really never had been—that even the names they'd had on earth and ocean weren't real and didn't mean anything. Don't you see? I mean that then, as those souls came up out of the water and began to talk with one another, they must have begun to feel at the same time that at last they could understand one another and really know one another better than they ever had before. Don't you see?"

"No—I don't."

"Oh—don't you?" she said with eager entreaty, in a tremulous, low voice. A cloud had obscured the moon and night was deep about them; but Gordon could see that her eyes, close to his own, seemed to beseech him. "I don't know any way to make it clearer—it seems so clear to me! Between us—our real selves—there needn't be any mystery, and there really *isn't* any. Here *you* are and here *I* am—there isn't any 'background' for either of us, here; we're just ourselves, and we could know each other just as well as if we both were dead. I can think of you without remembering your father and mother or that you live in that cottage behind us, or even that your name is Corning—I'm thinking of just you yourself. Can't you think of just me myself, and can't we be just our two selves—for just this little while?"

" 'For just this little while'!" he repeated, with a trace of bitterness. "That means you'll be kind to me for a few minutes now, and then be mean to me again."

“So you can’t!” She turned from him and her head drooped; he heard from her a deep sigh and the words, “We can’t have—even that—together.”

He made no immediate response; but, becoming aware of almost imperceptible movements of her shoulders and of mere breaths of sound from her lips, he asked abruptly and harshly, “Are you crying?”

“No,” she said in a voice that made the denial futile, and went on, brokenly, “I see—it couldn’t be—it couldn’t be at all. I was—I was a fool to hope it might be—some time. All it does, it just makes you think I’d be—mean—to you, other times. I wouldn’t be mean to anybody—last of all to you. I never would—”

“Edna!” he exclaimed. “Is that true?”

“Of course you think I’m crazy!” She fumbled at a fold of her cloak to bring it to her eyes; but he caught the groping hand and pressed it against his cheek.

“Edna!” he cried. “You do care for me! You—”

“It would never be of any use,” she sobbed. “Never! Never! Not to either of us!”

“But you’ve told me—”

“No, no! There’s no use saying it. We can’t have anything—never, I tell you!” His arms were about her, now, though she tried feebly to push them away; then suddenly he felt her give a great start, and she sprang to her feet, uttering a half-choked cry of fright.

He jumped up and caught her about the waist. “You can’t deny what you’ve practically said to me! Edna, you can’t—”

“Be still!” she said imperiously. “Listen!” She was staring intently out to sea; far away, a faint, long cone of light had come abruptly into being and moved upon the darkness of the waters. Gordon, thinking that he understood her nervousness, laughed reassuringly.

“It’s a searchlight on some torpedo-boat or a yacht or maybe a rum-chaser, Edna; but even if they turned it on this shore, here, it would be too dim at that distance for anybody to recognize us—and besides, there isn’t anybody within miles of us who isn’t asleep. You needn’t be the least—”

But she checked him again. “Listen!” In the air was a faint deep sound of whirring and beating. Gordon at first mistook it for the humming of a night-flyer’s motor; then, as it grew louder, he perceived that it came from the water.

“That must be a motor-boat pretty well inshore, Edna. It’s a powerful one but throttled down—very likely it’s the coast guard patrol boat that comes in here sometimes for supplies. Probably the searchlight out there, ’way off shore, was from a revenue cutter signaling this other boat. Look. The searchlight’s disappeared.”

“Listen!”

The deep humming grew louder, was dulled as it passed upon the other side of the breakwater, became almost a muffled rolling of far thunder from the flat water of the harbor, dwindled away and was heard no more. Gordon felt the relaxing of the hand he had taken in his own. “There, you see, it’s nothing. You’ll sit down again here with me now—dear?”

“No; it’s time for me to go.”

“But why—”

“Look there in the east, Gordon,” she said gently, and, with her free hand, pointed to where a greyness hovered above a vague revelation of horizon line. The moon was down; the clouds were slowly in retreat before the first dawn breeze, and momentarily the plane of the sky was becoming visibly separate from that of the sea. “I must go, Gordon—I must.”

But an exhilaration possessed the young man who had put his arms about her—had called her “dear” and now clasped her hand—all unrebuked. “You can’t!” he said, laughing happily. “I haven’t any chance with you at all in the water when you want to get away from me; but I don’t think you’ll shake me off so easily on land!”

“Ah, but you won’t—”

“Yes, but I will!” he assured her. “Every step of the way wherever you’re going!”

At that, she gave him an uneasy look; but said only, “Very well,” and, turning, walked slowly back with him to the highway before the cottages. “Don’t go any farther,” she pleaded, halting there.

“Every step!” he returned gayly, and was surprised when she nodded as if resigned to his persistence. With no more words, she set off upon the highway in the direction that led not down toward the harbor but away from it.

Keeping pace with her, he called her “dear” again and once more called her that, as she turned inland at the entrance to Old Road and the forest. “Through the woods, dear?” he asked. “I don’t mind!” And when they had gone a little farther into the woodland darkness, where no greyness of dawn

yet penetrated, he added, “I can’t see my hand before my face, as people say; but at least I can use it to keep tight hold of yours!”

“Can you?” her voice breathed, close to his cheek, and he felt a pressure of her fingers upon his. “No—good-bye!”

“ ‘Good-bye’?” he laughed. “Not that! I’m going to keep tight hold of you.”

“No.” Again he heard her whisper, close to his cheek; then felt the ineffable light touch of her lips upon that cheek. He cried out with happiness, releasing her hand and extending his arms to enfold her; but she was not there. There was a swishing of bushes at the roadside; then her voice called softly from a little distance, “Good-bye!”

“No, you don’t!” he said, and plunged blindly into the thicket, in pursuit of the voice. “Where are you?” he called, pressing forward, scratching himself and tearing his clothes. “Where are you?” Within two minutes he was irretrievably lost until light should come. “Edna, where are you?”

For answer he heard a sound that he thought was laughter; it came to his ears mockingly and from a distance. “I’m lost!” he called. “Where are you?”

Suddenly she seemed to speak from just behind him. “Walk straight ahead!” He obeyed, and in a dozen paces found himself upon Old Road, with the growing light of morning in a sylvan frame before him.

“You’re all right now, aren’t you, Gordon?”

“Where are you?”

There was a light crackling in the thicket not far from him; but the sound diminished rapidly. Helpless to follow her, and knowing himself to be so, he stood, and heard her voice call to him once more; already it seemed to come from far away.

“Good-bye—dear!”

CHAPTER NINETEEN

SINCE her return to Mirthful Haven Edna had discovered that the paths through the woods were the same that she had known in her childhood; then she had often been in the forest after dark, and she found her way as easily now as she had ever found it. She walked quickly and with assurance, while the obscurity about her began to form itself into mass and silhouette, so that leafy interlacings became dimly apparent and narrow baroque vistas opened mistily before her. Imperceptibly the ghostly shapings took color; moss was green upon grey rock, and yet, down a crevice in the foliage high above the path, there came a wisp of starlight. Edna saw it and pressed forward less hastily; her father had gone up the river in his boat to make his delivery to Antoine Charette's motor-truck, she knew, and she could easily reach Pelter's and her own room five or ten minutes before Long Harry set foot upon the pier. He was safe again, for this one more time, at least; and she, for this one more time, too, was safe from his discovery that when he went forth upon his night excursions to sea she slipped out of bed, dressed and watched from the crest of Great Point for his return.

She could not watch for him from there again; she must find another coign of vantage for the vigil, and this night's folly had been enough. She had the memory of it to treasure, for it had been a folly beautiful to her. Gordon had not understood her thought that they could know each other as if they "both were dead"; but that was nevertheless how they must know each other henceforth and how she must continue to care for him. She could do it now, she was sure, and, being young, she thought that the lovely memory, ever alive and bright within her, would enable her to do it almost happily. Youth attempting foreknowledge of itself readily dips a brush in gilding furnished by the still romantically generous imagination, and a girl of nineteen who has been forced into long, long thoughts and dreamy broodings by a bad beginning of life for herself may easily resolve to gild with a little martyrdom her atonement for the bad beginning. But there were reasons within reasons for her to see Gordon Corning no more; beneath what she had defined as the treachery to her father involved in these meetings, and behind all plainer risks and chances, she felt the presence of a vague

impending—something evasive and indefinite that must not be allowed to happen. Whatever it was, it need not happen now, she thought; the nocturne just finished was music enough to suffice her, and, when she stepped forth from the brightening woods with only a short path across a marshy meadow between her and River Road, she was smiling.

She crossed the meadow, climbed the embankment of the road and the old wooden fence above it, and her smile vanished. Opposite her, upon the board sidewalk and just before the gateless gateway of Pelter's, a loutish, big young man in a black jersey, blue overalls and rubber boots had halted, and stood staring at her with a roguish and familiar interest. An old, old dreariness came upon her, and as she went toward him she had the feeling that she was repeating an action that had already been repeated, over and over, in lives she had led before she had been born into this one. He showed no inclination to step out of her way.

"Well, by Godfrey!" he exclaimed. "I'll eat my pants if it ain't Edna! Saw you from back yonder as I was comin' down the road; saw you slickin' it out o' the woods. What I says to myself then, 'I'll eat my pants', I says, 'I'll eat my pants if it ain't Edna Pelter right now!' Been wonderin', too, when I was goin' to get a chance to lay eyes on you; every time I've passed Pelter's lately wondered where you was keepin' yourself. On my way to take out a fishin' party from the hotel—got a boat down at gov'ment wharf—but I never thought I'd get a look at you this early. Guess I wouldn't, either, 'cept it's like what the man says about the leopard. Ever hear that? Leopard never changes his spots, the man says, and it looks like he had the right infamation!" He laughed with a too friendly, heavy insinuation that a bit of unctuous knowledge was shared between them secretly. "How 'bout it, Edna?"

"I can't stay to talk now, Hugo."

"Wait a minute! Wait a minute, Edna!" he said, still laughing. "Guess if a married man like me can take a chance, why, *you* can! Heard Nina Grier and me been married pretty near two years, haven't you? Yes, sir! Only had that one year at high school; didn't pass, and started right in makin' a livin'. Old settled married man, I am now, and raisin' a family; but I guess I could still kind o' cut up some if there wasn't too many lookin' on! Guess you'd 'a' laughed if you'd heard what Nina says when word come through the post-office that you was back in town again. She spoke up right pecky-like: 'Bet she ain't brought my sweater back with her!' Nina says. Never mind, though, I'm only tellin' you fer a joke; Nina was jest buzzin', like all the rest, 'bout your landin' here at Pelter's again and gettin' letters under the

name o' Shellpool and all so on. Woodbury Fogg's wife and old Miss Mary Thomas and the Reverend Beedy's old maid sister and all them church-goin' people, they've been in quite a big stew, some sayin' 'live and let live' and some puttin' in with 'jest watch and see how she conducts herself' and the rest shakin' their heads and gruntin' a good deal. Wait a minute—you haven't heard the best!"

"Please let me by, Hugo."

"Now you wait; you'll laugh when I tell you," he insisted, and gave her shoulder a jocular and lingering push with his big hand. "It's 'bout Henry Ma'sh. Seems Henry found out he'd set right next you in the 'bus when you come from New Yarmouth and never reckanized you—not a mite! Thought you was some swell summer boarder and hardly took more'n a peek at you. Plumb missed his chance to set up close to you! Henry says he never had no business to let Vinnie Munson coax you away from him in school-days, and he's sore on himself now because o' missin' his chance in the 'bus; says he could 'a' give his old sweetheart a pinch on the knee slick 's a whistle and nobody the wiser. Henry swears he's goin' to slip up to Pelter's first chance he gets after dark and fix up a date with you. Henry means it, too, and he's comin'. How 'bout me beatin' him out on that, Edna?"

"Let me go in," she said huskily. "Let me by."

He pushed her again, his hand remaining longer upon her, and once more he uttered the laugh of a confederate sharing with her a sly bit of knowledge. "Little late gettin' home, ain't you, Edna?" Then, as he burst into louder, rallying laughter, Edna heard an ominous undertone to this treble raillery—the bass throbbing of her father's boat coming down the river.

"Let me by!" she gasped, thrust Hugo aside with a fierceness that made him laugh the more, and rushed into the house.

Coming in silently by the opposite door, a few minutes later, Pelter paused to listen while the dog nuzzled his hand in affectionate greeting. "Asleep all right, is she, Prince?" Long Harry whispered; then nodded, satisfied, and added confidentially, with a noiseless laugh, "Give me quite a run fer my money to-night, they did, over off Bareface, Prince! Well, let's git to bed, old boy."

The light sound of the dog's feet upon the worn stairway made no more noise than did the footfalls of his master as the two went up to Pelter's bedroom together; and there, Prince lay down at the foot of the bed, straightway to fall asleep. The morning would be warm, Long Harry thought, and left his door ajar for a better circulation of air, though none at all seemed to be stirring. When he was in bed he heard the single-cylindered

motor of a lobsterman's boat sputtering as it was cranked beside a wharf in the village three-quarters of a mile away; then he could trace the moving boat as it came down the river and down the harbor, uttering explosions significantly irregular, and Long Harry laughed softly to himself. "Finn Peters goin' out to haul up traps," he thought. "If that old put-putter breaks down on him he'll have a long row home!" The jerky explosions fluttered into distance, became inaudible, and the sunrise stillness was complete; but in the dusky interior of Pelter's that silence was disturbed by the sound of a long, quavering sigh—a broken sigh upon a convulsively indrawn breath. It came to Long Harry's ears through the flimsily built corridor, and he thought it the whispered moan of a sleeper unwillingly roused. "Woke her up," he thought drowsily, and then passed into slumber.

Waking at nine, he heard her moving in the room below, and when he came down to breakfast he was prepared with his usual slightly embarrassed apology for oversleeping. "Did it again," he said, keeping his gaze upon his lifted coffee-cup. "Takes a terrible while to sort out all them shorts, and I had to go quite a piece up river, too, because we fixed another place fer the truck to meet me, and I had to wait fer it some little time, besides. Too bad to hold up your breakfast as long as this." He drank his coffee; then gave her a brief sidelong glance. "Looks 's if maybe you didn't git so much sleep, yourself. Look kind o' peakid again. Guess Finn Peters's old one-lunger waked you up and you couldn't git back to sleep?"

"Yes. It's a noisy boat, isn't it?"

"Guess they don't make no noisier. Shouldn't wonder if it maybe wakes up a few o' them high-steppers atop the Point, too. Shouldn't wonder if maybe Corning says a cuss word or two to himself when he can't git back to sleep again after Finn goes out. Well, that wouldn't upset *us* none, I guess—Corning stewin' around 'bout losin' his reg'lar sleep!" Long Harry laughed carelessly; but his daughter was aware that he looked at her averted face furtively again and that his glance lingered. "Things frettin' to the summer people got no call to mean much fret to *us*, I guess!"

"No," she said, and, as his coffee again absorbed his attention, looked at him with as furtive a scrutiny as he had just given her.

Later, when he had lounged out upon the pier while she was washing the dishes, she glanced through the open doorway and saw him standing at ease, smoking, his hands in his pockets, his whole attitude casual; but his eyes were full upon the doorway and within them she perceived a profoundly reflective questioning. Uneasily she went back to her work, conscious that her habit of anxiety for him and her furtive watching of him had its fellow

anxiety and watchfulness on his part. She was almost certain that he had an inkling, some vagrant, vague suspicion of the truth and of her treachery to him.

He would never be reproachful, she knew; he would never speak of it to her, nor could she speak of it to him. She could talk of it to Captain Embury; she could tell Captain Embury anything—but throughout her life matters had so stood between her father and herself that the more she adored him the less she could say to him. Well, there should be no more cause for any unspoken reproach from him, however gentle. Whatever he might have guessed, if he guessed henceforth that she had gone again among his enemies he would be mistaken, and some day perhaps she could tell him so. She did not stir from Pelter's all that week, nor for the dozen days that followed it. When Long Harry went to sea at night she watched from the breakwater and he came home safely, though twice she saw, far off shore, the searchlight that had frightened her as she sat with Gordon Corning upon the crest of Great Point.

Then, one morning, a barefooted village boy brought her a note from Captain Embury:

> Can't find my copy of old Parker's "History of Mirthful Haven". Only other copy I know of is your father's. Could you lend it to me for a day or so as I want to read it over. Touch of rheumatism. No doctor but I don't need one to tell me I can't get out of the house to-day. My best regards to your father and God bless you. If it is not too much trouble will you send the History by the boy. He is dirty but I made him come in and wash his hands.

Edna found the book, but, before delivering it, questioned the messenger. "The Captain isn't sick in bed, is he?"

"He's awful cross," the boy said. "Layin' on a sofy by a window; called out of it to me, made me come in, give me a quarter, made me git all cleaned up at a wash-stand and told me to skedaddle down to Pelter's, bring this note and wait fer an answer. He's terrible cross."

Edna turned to her father. "He's there alone. I think I'd better go and take the book, myself. Perhaps I'd better get lunch for him, too."

Long Harry assented heartily; she went forth upon this errand and thought it safe to be prettily dressed, the better to please the Captain. She found River Road crowded with the flashing, bright-colored cars, for the summer season was at its August topmost, like Carnival dancing its maddest

on the eve of Lent. Along the wooden sidewalk the laughing groups of pedestrians merged into an almost continuous procession, and overhead the sunshine was flurried by the wings of squadrons of yellow butterflies. “He wouldn’t notice me among all these people,” Edna thought. “He’d go by too quickly, and it’s all right. Only two weeks to Labor Day, and then it will be all right—forever.”

“All right”, that phrase of pleasant sound, may sometimes mean no more than desolation when followed by the chilled word “forever”. The reassurance lay like ice upon her heart; but she carried matters off cheerfully at Captain Embury’s. His crossness disappeared into a delighted astonishment at the sight of her; they had even a merry meal together in the noble dining-room, and before she left him he was convinced that she had cured his twinges. “Nothin’ but little bits o’ twinges anyhow!” he said, at the door. “Mighty glad I had ’em, though! I’ll be out to-morrow; but I’ll bring ’em on again pretty soon, now I know what’s liable to happen when I get ’em!”

Edna went down the street, laughing and calling back to him; the contours of gayety to which her features had molded themselves were just subsiding into an expression more melancholy when she reached the juncture of the Captain’s street with River Road, and a voice she knew cried out to her.

One of the gayly colored open automobiles had drawn out of the swift procession and stopped; two bareheaded, blonde girls sat in the rumble, Wallace Corning was at the wheel and beside him a bright-eyed, exquisite little brunette in vivid silk was screaming loudly.

“Edna! Edna Shellpool! Look! No, look *here*! Don’t you see me? It’s Mildred Kerr!”

She leaped to the ground, ran and caught Edna about the waist. “You blind thing!” she cried. “Don’t look so dazed. I’ve got you now and you’re not going to get away, either! You get right in this car with us and begin telling me why on earth you’re behaving the way you do! You’ve got to—”

“Mildred! Let me go! I can’t—”

“Yes, you will!” Already Mildred was dragging her toward the automobile and its laughing occupants. “There’s room between me and Wallace, and that’s Sally and Lena Gordon; I’m staying with ’em. Gordie Corning says you’re off at some old camp; but you’re not going back there now. You’re not going to get away from me, I can tell you! You—”

“I can’t! I can’t, Mildred! I *can’t*!”

“Yes, you will!” They were close beside the car, so determined was the vigor of the smaller girl’s attack upon her friend, and all at once it seemed to Edna that everything was being taken out of her hands. Strickenly, and with a helpless recklessness, she set her foot upon the running-board while Mildred continued to shout, “Get in! You’ll not get away from me very easily, I can tell you, young lady! Don’t stand staring at Wallace as if you never paralysed the whole school ball-room by dancing the tango with him! Act like a person! Get in!”

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE aged Wye, making his way through the throngs of strollers upon the board walk along the river, as he came from the village, late that afternoon, indulged in a habit not infrequent among old people and those who lead solitary lives: he talked to himself, speaking aloud, though in a muffled voice, indistinctly. All these people made him cross; they smiled and stared as the old man went muttering by, and they supposed him to be probably a little insane, harmlessly so no doubt; but they might have had a second thought about his harmlessness if they had understood the purport of his mutterings.

"Pesty dam dogfish—hot dam 'em! Like to drown every hot dam pestified one of 'em! Wouldn't care if I never sold 'em another hot dam codfish! Blunderin' into a man, walkin' all over him, steppin' on his feet, pushin' him sideways, pushin' him behind, shovin' into the front of him, gigglin' and puffin' right in his face—ought to be took out in a moty-boat and fed to the herrin'! Git so used to bangin' into each other in all them hot dam cities where they come from hain't got sense enough to give a man room to walk in! Wisht I smelt wuss o' fish'n what I do; 't's the only way a body can git any room fer himself up to Labuh Day. Up to then they'll take and stick their dressed-up backs and slicked hair right up agin a man's nose! Drown 'em, hot dam 'em, drown 'em!"

As he approached Pelter's, however, he enjoyed a few moments of unexpected high pleasure. The crowd of automobiles was so thick that there were intervals of blockade, and it was during one of these temporary cessations of movement that the venerable fisherman's annoyance reached its climax. In the line of cars nearest the sidewalk there was a blue cabriolet exorbitantly trimmed with polished nickel and guided by a rigid chauffeur in grey livery. Behind him sat a plump middle-aged woman whose large uninterested face was apparently supported upon a bust ornate in varicolored brocade and agleam with pearls; but the most conspicuous garniture of the display was a dog—a dog poignantly to old Wye's distaste. The dog was a Sealyham of parts, a precious winner of bench show ribbons, though of

neither of these facts had the aged pedestrian any information, nor would he have attached a better than negative importance to them had he been aware of them. It was enough for Wye that the animal wore a silver-trimmed collar, looked restlessly about him with pink-rimmed, querulous eyes, and, projecting his head over the side of the cabriolet's collapsed top, had the air of both threatening and despising the commoners of the sidewalk.

"Pink-eyed sculpin!" the old man muttered, addressing the dog. "Nasty pink-eyed, sanctified, long-haired—" But here his discourtesy was forced to extremes, for a bevy of lively hotel-waitresses, frolicking out from the village and chasing one another upon the way, swept regardlessly by the old man; two of them caromed into him, dislodged him from the sidewalk, and for an instant forced him to endure an undesirable familiarity; his face was brushed by the heavy moustache of the Sealyham. The dog, affronted, snapped venomously and Wye saved himself by an activity he did not like to exert. "Hot dam dog!" he shouted, regaining the sidewalk with some difficulty. "Hot dam pink-eyed slobbery dog!"

The blockade came to an end; the cabriolet moved on, with the Sealyham barking in a voice louder and hoarser than his dimensions would have led anyone to expect, and his gaze fixed upon his late assailant. An event of the next moment, however, not only distracted the ribbon winner's attention and set his truculent heart fairly on fire, it was also what brought pleasure to the aged spectator upon the sidewalk.

Life at Pelter's was sometimes monotonous for Prince; he had no interest in swimming, and an environment all water, mud and planking offered him few diversions. Thus, when he felt a pressure for amusement, he fell back upon an immemorial pastime of dogs and went out to pretend to chase something. At such times the fiction he established with himself was that his duty compelled him to keep the neighborhood of Pelter's free from automobiles, and he would dash out from the wooden yard, barking threats that he himself well knew could never be fulfilled. With ardor and confidence perfectly assumed, he would charge a passing automobile, swerve at the last moment and maintain himself vociferating beside it in an amazing burst of speed until it was far down River Road; then he would return slowly and complacently but ready at any instant to be conscientious again in defense of the home. He was playing this game now, though not with much conviction, for the automobiles were moving so slowly that nobody's imagination could have pictured them convincingly as frightened trespassers in flight. Nevertheless, he tried to interest himself and made short dashes here and there, barking mechanically; then all at once his demeanor altered and he abandoned pastime for war; he heard the angry

voice of the Sealyham and knew it for the horrid and detestable production of a lifelong enemy. Exerting his own strong voice in challenge, Prince rushed upon the blue cabriolet.

"Git 'im, Prince!" Wye cackled, delighted. "Git the pink-eyed son of a bilge-water bug! Git 'im, by Orry, git 'im!"

Encouragement was superfluous; the feudists' recognition had been mutual and the Sealyham answered challenge with challenge, as the big mongrel, ravaging, rose in the first of a series of remarkable leaps. There burst upon the air that conglomerate sound of passion at its acme, of fury perfected to a complete expression yet agonized to be incapable of an even fuller eloquence—that vocalizing, ever unbelievably in crescendo, of emotions impossibly increasing beyond their utmost, that profoundly murderous zoölogical uproar only to be heard in the vicinity of an unquestionably sincere dog-fight.

The Sealyham was as desirous of entire contact as was his opponent; and he would have had it except for the plump white-gloved hands that restrained him with great difficulty by clutchings upon his rearward parts. There were moments when the heads of the combatants mingled in spite of this prevention; injuries were accomplished and human screams came from the cabriolet. The chauffeur, leaning out upon one side, beat at Prince with his cap, and, trying to drive at the same time, underwent imminent peril of collision to the natural provocation of louder screaming behind him. Thus this glittering blue cabriolet, lately peaceful, passed down River Road carrying with it a loud turmoil of rage, fear and violence, and, turning into the highway that leads over Great Point, was lost to the sight of the exultant Wye.

"Did give it to him, by Orry—did give it to him, hot dam, Prince did!" He laughed aloud in his pleasure as he walked on, with all his former irritation soothed from his bosom. Prince, returning, joined the old man at the entrance to Pelter's and received the first affectionate greeting he ever had from this source. "*Good* dog! *Good* dog!" Wye said, patting the lowered brown head. "No, no; dun't hold your head down that way and look up at me from the top of your eye 's if you'd done somethin' to be 'shamed of. That's right; give the side o' your face a lick or two. Guess you might have couple o' scratches there you'd ought to be tendin' to; but hold your head up and look proud, like you got a good claim to do. *Good* dog! By Orry, you made that fat woman holler enough to raise up old Jezebel outen o' where they throwed her! Come on; let's me and you go find your master—got a couple

o' facks might 's well be let knowed to him, maybe. Come on, old Princie! *Good* dog! *Good* dog!"

He shuffled round the house to the rear verandah and Prince followed, furtively assuaging the wounds upon his cheek and not feeling confident that he merited the praises so warmly bestowed upon him by his newly won admirer. Pelter, begrimed and in overalls, was upon the pier, returning from his boat; and, as he approached he addressed himself with affected severity to the apologetic dog. "I heard you! Needn't think I didn't! Never heard so much dog swearin' and cussin' in all my life! Ever hear me usin' any such profan'ty? No, sir; you know you didn't. You never had no example from me to take and use all them expressions, did you? Yes, you better hold your head down and stow your tail away like you didn't own none 't all! Bad dog!"

"He ain't!" Wye intervened enthusiastically. "Best dog in Mirthful Haven! *Good* dog! Hain't never fergot the fight he had with them Gordons' dog fust time they come here, have you, Prince? No, suh! See him a-settin' up in that automobile 'longside o' that highty-tighty fat woman, Prince did, while ago, and took and let out a beller fit to raise up old Jezebel, and jest took and went fer him. Then they *had* it and I never see no better! Highty-tighty fat woman squawkin' and screechin' bloody murder and the showfer slashin' at Prince with his cap—guess 'tain't much of a cap no longer, because fer a minute they was fightin' right through it, and the showfer might 'a' got his hand a mite skinned up, too, between the both of 'em—and a truck jest missed 'em by a hair and the Point 'bus must 'a' took some paint off one o' their mud-gads, besides. Last I see of 'em they was makin' round the corner with Prince jumpin' higher'n ever and the showfer yellin' and old highty-tighty Jezebel takin' on wuss'n a whaler's cook on shore leave! No, suh, Prince, you're a *good* dog! *Good* dog!"

Prince still retained a doubt of his own virtue and continued to look dubiously upward from a humbled head until his master relaxed enough to pat him and indulgently tousle one of his ears. Then Long Harry went indoors to remove his overalls and wash his face and hands at the sink; he returned with his pipe in his mouth and comfortably settled himself in his customary seat facing the harbor. "Well, what's the rest o' the news, Cap'?"

"Nothin'. Wind's haulin' round; goin' to hold fair. B'en to the village to git me new hooks fer a trawl-line. Heard Ben Pibuddy say he see the rum-chaser makin' east off New Yarmouth bay."

"Did he? What else'd Ben say?"

“Said looked like his brother Milt’s woman was gittin’ a goituh and they was talkin’ o’ movin’ down to Eeler’s Cove. Said he heard Wimble run into New Yarmouth with up’ard’s o’ three thousand pound’ o’ swordfish; but didn’t know if ’twas so or not. Said looked to him like that rum-chaser might ’a’ b’en doin’ as high as twenty-five knot’ more less; makin’ down east, though, she was. Ben see seven o’ them Portagee boats after mack’rel a good ways out. Freem Wicks and Rem Bailey took and hauled in a four hunderd pound sunfish yestaday; goin’ to take it up to New Yarmouth beach with a tent and a sign that’s got ‘Sea Monster’ painted on it—goin’ to zibbet it fer one dime ’dmission if they can git it and come down to a nickel and nothin’ fer nusses if the crowd holds off like. Said looked to him like that rum-chaser must ’a’ had a new muffler or somethin’ on her because she wun’t hardly makin’ no noise ’t all, fast as she was goin’.”

“Thought so, did he?” Pelter inquired indifferently. “That all?”

“Guess ’twas.” Wye glanced thoughtfully westward where the light was beginning to show a warmer tone. “Well, got to be movin’ along to fry me up somethin’ fer my supper. Edna’s cookin’ as good as ’twas ’fore she went away?”

“Better. Took cookin’ lessons at her school and they certain’y was a benefit.”

“Guess so,” Wye said, coughed, and asked casually, “Upstairs, is she?”

“No, she’s at Cap’n Embury’s; he’s ailin’. Guess she decided to stay the whole day.”

“Oh, that’s where she is, is she? Thought ’twas ’bout time fer her to be startin’ supper if she was here. Up at Cap’n Embury’s, is she?” Wye seemed to muse, then added, “Funny, too.”

“Funny? What’s funny ’bout her bein’ up t’ the Cap’n’s?”

“Nothin’. Nothin’ ’t all. I only mean ’twas kind o’ funny me seein’ her away from there if so be she’s at the Cap’n’s.”

“Where’d you see her?”

“Seemed like ’twas in an automobile,” Wye said reflectively. “On my way to the village ’bout half-past three o’clock this aftanoon, see her in a slick-lookin’ black and yellow colored automobile that sets low to the ground, with shined-up nickel-platin’ all over it and them two fluffy yellow-haired Gordon high-heelers settin’ behind. Whizzin’ out towards the Point, they was, and what causes me to say it seemed funny-like, it’s them two girls settin’ in the same automobile with Edna, and Prince, here, comin’ nigh to drive their mother out o’ the little amount o’ rightful wits she’s got, later

in the day. Had another high-heeler settin' in front with her, Edna did, and one them Corning boys was drivin' and all of 'em laughin' and jokin' together. Might 'a' see me or might not; never let on like she did, and, come to think of it, guess she didn't. They was other moty-cars between, and the sidewalk fairly crawlin' with summer boarders. No, guess she didn't."

There was no visible alteration in Pelter's expression, nor in his absent gaze at the farther shore of the harbor. He drew slowly upon his pipe; then asked, "Sure 'twas Edna? Might 'a' been someone 't looked like her, mightn't it?"

"My eyes hain't failed me yet, to your knowledge, have they?" Wye returned with asperity. "Hain't spiled 'em with no readin' that you can throw up to me, have I? Had on a light green jacket and a light green hat and a white dress 'bout to her knees and natchul-colored stockin's. Couldn't see her feet. What clo'es was she wearin' when she left here fer Cap'n Embury's?"

"Same as you say."

"Guess she was! Dun't tell me I hain't got my faculties! See what I see when I see it, I guess!"

"Yes," Long Harry assented thoughtfully. "I guess you do."

"Glad you 'dmit it!" Wye said, still somewhat nettled; but was mollified as his glance wandered to the good dog sitting by the master's chair. "Guess Prince and me can still tell a sardine from a hay-rick!" He stooped and patted the dog's head tenderly in farewell. "Fine animal! Yes, you *like* a body to make over you, dun't you, Prince? Fine animal! Bid you good-evenin', Prince. Bet that highty-tighty fatty jumps in her sleep to-night when she 'members you. Bid you good-evenin', Prince, and dun't never fergit you're a *good* dog!"

He shuffled away, once more in high spirits, leaving the pair by the verandah rail engaged in an enigmatic communion, the dog looking up gravely at the master, and the master with equal gravity meeting this gaze. " 'Funny'," Long Harry said, after a time, quoting this word of his recent guest's. "Think so, old boy? Guess you do. 'Funny'? Yes—guess 'tis!"

Prince's gaze relaxed; drowsiness came upon him and his head drooped to the planks. Long Harry finished his pipe and another; the water of the harbor slowly shifted its wine-colors from amber to a deep Burgundian red, and dusk began to gather under the clumps of pine trees upon the opposite shore. The dog awoke and jumped up reproachfully as his master's boots

came down with a clump upon the verandah floor. “Guess you and me better begin to fix up some supper ourselves, Prince, if we’re a-goin’ to git any.”

They went indoors; Pelter lighted a lamp, built a fire in the stove, and had taken the coffee-pot to the sink for water, when he heard the sound of hurrying feet outside; they crossed the wooden yard lightly, the front door was thrown open and Edna came in, breathless.

“Oh, dear!” she panted. “I’m so sorry! Don’t bother—I’ll have your supper for you in a few minutes. I did the best I could but I couldn’t get away any earlier. I’m so sorry!”

“Nothin’ to fret ’bout,” he said, not turning toward her as she took the coffee-pot from his hand. “Wun’t really no call fer you to come back jest to git supper, if you had a-mind to stay out. Git my own easy enough.”

“No, no; of course you shouldn’t. Of course I—”

“No call to fret,” he repeated, and went to sit at the table, where he engaged himself in cleaning the bowl of his pipe with a pocket-knife.

Edna continued her apologies uneasily as she began to work. “I’m so sorry—I’m so sorry! I really couldn’t help it. I knew it was getting later and later; but it—they—I mean it was embarrassing. I couldn’t think of—I didn’t know what to say. It seemed to be just impossible to get away. Something happened. I want to tell you—”

“Pipe’s all caked up,” Long Harry remarked musingly, as she paused. “Guess I’m makin’ a mess on your floor; but I’ll clean it up, myself, later.”

“No, you won’t,” she said, busy at the stove. “You’re not supposed to do any housework—and not any cooking, either. I couldn’t help being late this time because—because something happened. You see, when I came out of Captain Embury’s I ran straight into Mildred Kerr. You remember my telling you about her?”

“Yes,” he said, scraping earnestly at his pipe. “Yes, I remember.”

“I simply couldn’t get away from her—I simply couldn’t! She was in a car with—with some other people, and they wouldn’t let me go. I couldn’t get away from them at all! They’d heard somewhere that I was spending the summer at a camp on one of the lakes and I thought maybe—maybe I’d better let ’em go on thinking that. At least—I thought so. I—I—”

“Yes,” Long Harry said, not looking away from his pipe. “Yes; guess ’twas jest as well. Guess ’twould help to avoid compilcations, like we spoke of the night you come home.”

“That’s what I thought,” Edna went on quickly. “I thought I’d better try to do that. It seemed better. I mean I thought probably that would be the best thing to do and that you’d think so, too, so I just let them go on thinking I was at a camp and I told them I had to get back there; but they said they’d take me. Then I said it was too far, and, besides, the people from the camp were going to drive over here for me and I’d have to meet them at Cargo Square. So they—I mean Mildred—Mildred said they’d drive me down to the Square and wait there with me until the people came, and I said they mustn’t do that because one of these people from the camp was a nervous invalid—a woman that I was taking care of and in such a peculiar state that anything upset her and made her ask questions all night—the doctor said she mustn’t be allowed to get started with her questions; but I knew she would if she saw me with other people. It was a terrible story; but I finally convinced them and they let me telephone for one of the summer taxis from the Square, and that’s how I got away at last. I was even afraid they might follow me in another car, at that, so I stopped the taxi as soon as it got away from the Point and jumped out and ran all the rest of the way. I’m so sorry—so sorry—but that’s all—”

“Yes; guess that’s all,” Pelter said slowly, in a gentle voice. Then he moved out of her way as she began to set dishes upon the table. “Wind’s worked round inshore again; another good day to-morrow.”

“Isn’t that splendid!” she exclaimed, and in her voice there was a tremor of excitement that he did not attribute to prospects of fine weather. He understood, too, the cause of the relief expressed in both her voice and look, and, glancing up as if carelessly, saw more. It seemed to him that her eyes were happier and brighter than he had ever seen them—for they were shining with the light that gleams from eyes thrice merry to-night because merriment dies to-morrow.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THERE was in Mirthful Haven at this time, however, a lady for whom merriment seemed never in any danger of perishing, Mrs. Warbeck. From a window of her motor-car she had been a spectator of the blue cabriolet's misadventure, and, returning home, she gave an account of it that became incoherent with laughter. Her husband warned her against publicly taking so cheerful a view of a neighbor's distress. "You'd better be careful," Warbeck said. "George Corning's fond of declaring that we're all 'just one big happy family', and I suppose a big family might still be called 'happy' with some of its members barely speaking to one another; but I'd prefer not to strain our relations with the Gordons and Cornings, myself. Mrs. Gordon hasn't George's mental capacity; but she's altogether his sister in temperament; they're both amiable but nervously excitable and sensitive, and they won't regard this canine episode as in the slightest degree humorous. At the beach to-morrow, I think you'd better constrain your natural disposition with an iron will and appear sympathetic." Mrs. Warbeck wiped her eyes and promised to be tactful, but had no imminent occasion to exercise this restraint upon herself, for the shock to Mrs. Gordon's nerves had been so severe that for several days she remained indoors. When she did again make her appearance upon the beach it was with the air of a distinguished survivor. Still made indignant by her discovery that a supposedly orderly universe could put upon her a grossly disorderly experience, she suffered not more from the shock to her nerves than from that inflicted upon her unconsciously acquired convictions: omnipotence seemed to be capable of a disturbing fallibility.

Her frequently repeated account of the affair between Prince and the Sealyham was sincere and vivid, though naturally both emotional and partisan; the Sealyham had only defended his mistress against an enemy who had once nearly had his life, and the champion was still under the care of a veterinary surgeon. The chauffeur's hand was still bandaged; his cap could be shown to anybody who doubted the ferocity of the attack, and the blue cabriolet was in the paint-shop. Mrs. Gordon smiled wanly as she described how it felt to be borne down upon by the two simultaneous

Juggernauts, a motor-bus and a baggage-truck, and at the same time attacked by a vicious beast without a collar. "Just the sight of a dog without a collar has always made me nervous," she added. "Collarless dogs are always dangerous; I brought the children up never, never to go near one. And then to be attacked by one, myself—" She paused eloquently, leaving this experience to the imaginations of the listeners; then, with a reproachful glance at her brother, shook her head and concluded: "Of course the thing that I simply *can't* understand is that nothing whatever has been done about it or appears to have any prospect of being done!"

Corning sighed, and spoke apologetically. "I'm sorry, but I really don't believe we need go into that again, Virgie, especially as your chauffeur isn't sure which of 'em it was that hurt his hand."

"But I'm sure, haven't I told you? Is *my* testimony supposed to be entirely worthless? Didn't your own chauffeur tell you that the dog is dangerous and that every chauffeur at the Point has almost had an accident because of him? And when he attacks your own sister—"

"My dear Virgie! You needn't think I don't give it weight; but a prosecution's simply out of the question and a law-suit against a native, before a native jury—well, I don't see it! Besides, we've certainly had enough trouble with that fellow, Pelter, and all we ever get out of it is just more and more irritation for ourselves."

"That's because you've gone on tolerating him and letting him do whatever he wants to, year after year, until now he believes he can do any outrageous thing he pleases! You may think it's a fine thing to show the patience of Job; but when his dog attacks your own sister—" Mrs. Gordon continued to amplify the theme while Corning sat, indeed patient, in his beach-chair, and, although his sister's voice became somewhat shrill, forbore to interrupt her. A sister-in-law, however, is not always so indulgent as is a brother, and Mrs. Corning came to his rescue.

"Virgie, for heaven's sake let my poor husband have his summer in peace and don't try to egg him into a controversy with a native! Hasn't he had enough trouble with that terrible old Pelter, as it is? For mercy's sake let him alone and forget it!" Here Mrs. Corning withdrew her brusque gaze from the incensed but temporarily silenced Mrs. Gordon, turned to Mrs. Vandenbrock and began to chatter in a lowered voice. "How in the world do you keep peace between your children, Mrs. Vandenbrock? They always seem so polite to one another, your young people. We have the most violent feuds in our house, and I never know how to settle them. My Agatha, you see, is in the younger young set—worlds apart from Gordie and Wallace and

the Gordon girls and their friends. Wallace and Agatha are always at daggers drawn; they're really funny. Wallace seems to think that it's perfectly outrageous for Agatha and her friends to do the things that he and the other older young people do, and that makes Agatha absolutely wild! You see—"

"I'm sure it's nothing to what goes on in our house," Mrs. Vandenbrock said, pleased to continue the general theme with a reversion to the special subject of her own children. "Of course mine are younger, still in the pre-adolescent stage; but they make things lively sometimes, I can tell you! Only yesterday the most dreadful row broke out between Patsy and Tommy, just at bedtime. You see, Patsy's a very nervous, high-strung—"

"High-strung!" Mrs. Corning echoed, eagerly taking up the word. "That's exactly the expression I was trying to think of to describe Agatha! She's such a tense, passionate little thing that sometimes I just don't know what to do about her—especially when she gets into one of her quarrels with Wallace. I'm always so afraid their father may hear them; it would upset him dreadfully, of course." Mrs. Corning changed the subject; but went on hastily, to prevent Mrs. Vandenbrock from talking any more about Patsy and Tommy. "I hear we've got to do something about the Casino—it seems the young people all insist on running over to New Yarmouth to a speak-easy before they come to the Casino dances, and it makes the dances terribly late. I do hope my poor husband won't get stirred up about it, and I haven't even spoken of it with him—he's terribly strict in such matters."

At the other side of her, Mrs. Gordon was beginning a fresh narration of her troubles for the benefit of Mrs. Warbeck who had just arrived, and the latter's expression was incentive to so much uneasiness on the part of Warbeck that he decided to put himself at a distance. His new friend, Mrs. Arden, consented to accompany him for a stroll; they walked two-thirds of the way to the breakwater, ascended to the sand dunes at the upper edge of the beach and sat down congenially. "One swallow doesn't make a summer," he remarked, "and a single dog-fight oughtn't to make one, either; but I fear it's going to do that for poor Mrs. Gordon. She won't talk about anything else the rest of this summer, at least. Luckily the time is short and already one or two of the cottages are beginning to close, I've noticed, preparing for the Labor Day flight."

"Yes; the hotel dining-room tables begin to show vacancies. Dear me!" Mrs. Arden shivered. "What a desolate place this must be when the people all go!"

"Not for everybody!" Warbeck said, and laughed. "Spend an autumn in Mirthful Haven some time if you want to see a tribe emerging from bondage

and becoming care-free. There aren't many of them; but the burden lifted from their shoulders is enormous. Upon our departure they begin to make festivals of rejoicing, church-suppers and—" He interrupted himself and peered through his nose-glasses as his attention was distracted by a hand-organ playing near the breakwater. "What's going on down there?"

"It's that set of young people—the Corning boys and their cousins and a few others, and the dainty little Miss Kerr who's visiting the Gordon girls and engaged to Wallace Corning, I think I've heard—and yes, there's that daughter of a hundred Earls, Miss Shellpool. They've withdrawn themselves from the populous part of the beach and seem to be having a grand time capering in and out of the surf together. Interesting type, that girl; something piquant about her—piquing to my curiosity at least; I don't know just why."

"Perhaps it's the same thing that made you call our evening at Captain Embury's a strange one," Warbeck suggested. "Yes, she's interesting—a little more so, probably, because of Captain Embury's eulogy of her family tree. One of his most delightful misconceptions is on that subject—the importance of 'old family'. The Captain ought to read Lord Burleigh's advice to his son that there's no use setting up to be 'old family' or of noble blood without enough property to back up the claim. Burleigh said a family's continued hold upon property was all that could give it family importance—a shrewd perception of an obscure fact. Judging from Miss Shellpool's appearance, however, I should say that her three hundred years of recorded ancestry had left her at least enough property to claim the precedence that the Captain accorded to her."

"Why, no," Mrs. Arden said. "I believe not. Someone told me—Mrs. Corning, I think—that Miss Shellpool isn't very well off, though extremely nice and well brought up. I got the impression there'd been a shrinkage in an estate that was to have been left to her, or something of the sort, and that she's lately very pluckily accepted a position as a companion or something to somebody who's had a nervous breakdown and owns a camp on one of the woodland lakes. She can only get away to join the young people here now and then, I believe."

"That certainly doesn't seem to interfere with her gayety when she does get here," Warbeck observed. "I passed by the Gordons' tennis-court yesterday afternoon and she—"

"Look!" Mrs. Arden cried. "They're all out of the water now and dancing to the hand-organ, the light-hearted young things! What a pretty sight!"

“Yes, it is,” Warbeck agreed, half-closing his eyes to see better. “Like figurines at this distance, little Tanagra figures undraped and brightly tinted. Now they’ve stopped.”

“No—one of them hasn’t; they’re making her dance alone, and it’s Miss Shellpool. Oh, how charming!”

Warbeck echoed the word, and for a time they sat without speaking, engaged with the distant spectacle—a semicircle of figurines applauding a green and ivory one that became rhythmically nimble for half a minute, then whirled like a top for a dozen seconds, suddenly lifted its arms in what appeared to the distant two spectators as a derisive gesture of hands kissed in farewell, and, turning, fled into the sea. With a protestive shouting faintly audible to Mrs. Arden and Warbeck, the semicircle broke up to plunge in pursuit; but the green cap, rising every moment upon the crest of a farther wave, was in no danger of being overtaken.

“Good gracious!” Mrs. Arden exclaimed. “She’s going rather riskily far out, it seems to me. Does she think she can swim to Spain? No—she’s turned, and anyhow she must be all right; the others are coming back to the beach and beginning to chase one another again.”

“But I don’t seem to see Miss Shellpool with them.”

“No; she’s still in the water. I can see her green cap—there it goes, but on the other side of the breakwater; evidently she’s swimming into the harbor, probably to meet her invalid somewhere, and her young friends all appear to be trooping back toward the bath-houses. I’m afraid that means it’s time for lunch, Mr. Warbeck.”

Sighing, he followed the example she set him, and rose. “I suppose so,” he said, as they began the mild descent from the dunes. “I’m afraid we may be returning to a sea of troubles if my wife didn’t find it better in her mind to suffer the slings and arrows of her outrageous humor, and I’m sorry that the pretty scene we’ve had before us didn’t last longer. I must admit that I find Miss Shellpool fully as piquant as you do. Lady Clara Vere de Vere, brave in reverses, companioning a neurotic, then in free moments becoming a magically plastic Greek figurine with the instantaneous transformation into an unquestionable mermaid—something of Undine there, something of a watery, crystalline, luring mysteriousness that impels me toward an unreasoning sympathy with young Gordon Corning. Psychically speaking, I have a feeling that such a creature might prove too much for him—he’s not an illuminated person, I take it. For my part I hope to catch further glimpses of Miss Shellpool, swimming or dancing or doing anything whatever, and it’s a pleasure to me to imagine that just at this moment she’s emerging from

the water to sit upon a foam-splashed rock, with her extraordinary hair released from that cap and descending about her in the sunlight."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE elderly gentleman's fancy in this little flight fell not so wide of the actual mark: as Edna scrambled out upon a float at the end of her father's pier, her cap was dislodged, fell into the water, and her hair, descending, came not far from presenting the picture sketched by the Warbeckian imagination. A heavy-shouldered, short young man, rowing up-stream in a small dory, reversed the motion of his oars and admiringly remained in position for a continued view.

"My Godfrey, Edna!" he said covertly. "You're even cuter lookin' than you was before Vinnie Munson coaxed you from bein' my sweetheart. Set next you in the 'bus from New Yarmouth, I did, and you certain'y fooled me! Never let on a mite! Bet you laughed afterwards, didn't you?" He laughed, himself, ingratiatingly, caught a corner of the float with a soiled brown hand, and, speaking in a lowered, urgent voice, went on, "How 'bout you and me fixin' up a little date like old times, Edna? Vinnie Munson's steppin' out 'way up with them top-notchers on the Point and couldn't see you if you was standin' on the lid of a sardine can together, so how 'bout me? It's around town that Hugo Wicks already see you once slippin' in Pelter's along 'bout daylight since you come back to Mirthful Haven, and Hugo swears he's goin' to try to beat my time with you, Edna. How 'bout us bein' too smart fer him, what? How soon—"

But she had retrieved her cap from the water and finished a hurried coiling of her hair about her head; she ran up the incline from the float, sped at top speed over the worn planking of the pier, gasped, "Dinner for you in ten minutes!" to her father, whom she met in the doorway, and disappeared within the house.

Pelter came out upon the verandah, and, observing that Henry Marsh in his dory remained tentatively alongside the float, walked out to the end of the pier and engaged in conversation with him. He was still thus occupied, a quarter of an hour later, when Edna called to him from the house that his dinner was ready. He returned reflectively to take his place at the table but

not to meet directly the eyes of his daughter; days had passed since either had looked at the other with a full and open gaze.

"Henry Ma'sh 'pears to be quite an up-and-doin' young cutter," he remarked. "Told me a week or so ago him and Web Hazzard was tryin' to git the cap'tal together to start up in a fish-shippin' business. Thought if they could git hold of a little cap'tal they could hire the rest of it from the New Yarmouth bank, lease Elligo's wharf, maybe, buy all the fish the boats could bring in, summer and winter, too, and ship to Boston, maybe by rail from New Yarmouth or maybe by good quick motor-boats with 'frigerators in 'em —hadn't worked that part the idea out yet. 'Sides that, goin' to use dock space fer dryin' and saltin' herrin' and smokin' haddock, maybe. Quite a big idea, looks like; and one reason I kind o' take to it, why, it'd give Mirthful Haven an all-year-round business and one that wouldn't depend on the summer people. Henry Ma'sh wanted to know if I didn't want to fish fer 'em, because o' course they'd want to buy fish from anybody, and he thought maybe I'd even want to go in partners with 'em and furnish some o' the cap'tal. Didn't know but maybe I would, along later in the year, after I'd laid hands on a little more cap'tal, myself."

"But couldn't you now?" Edna asked eagerly. "Oh, you could! Oh, please! I haven't touched that money I wanted you to take when I—"

"Never mind 'bout that! I ain't a-goin' to take it and I don't need it. I got to stick the season out anyways with Anton, and I cal'late to clean up on it pretty good. Couldn't leave him high and dry all of a sudden; there's quite a number o' people involved in that business, and it'd take some little time to 'range 'bout my gittin' red of it. Got to give Anton a chance to pick out some man that can handle my end of it right. No, I give him my word I'd finish the season with him, and I'll do it; yet I don't deny but what I been thinkin' some 'bout goin' in with Henry Ma'sh and Web Hazzard, come fall."

"Oh, you'll do it?" Edna cried, and her eyes were hopefully full upon him now, as she clasped her hands upon her breast. "Oh, if you would, I think we could be—I've been so anxious—I've been so—"

"Anxious? What 'bout?"

"About the—the warden."

"The warden!" Long Harry laughed, tilting back his chair, though his care-free glance, in this moment of genuine gayety, was not at her but out at the glimpse of harbor revealed by the open doorway. "Don't you never fret none 'bout that end of it! Them people ain't any hardly better lubbers so far as this stretch o' coast is concerned than if they was summer boarders. What

chance they got against a man that's growed up on these waters pra'tic'ly since the day he was born? Looks to me some nights like the only risk I run is they'll hear me laughin' at 'em! No, on that side o' the business I git so much enjoyment out o' them people lookin' fer me where I ain't I'd 'most dislike to think I had only two three runs yet to make; but, 's I tell you, I'm thinkin' Henry Ma'sh and Web Hazzard's propositions over, and I guess they look good. Anyways, we'll see."

"Ah, say you will!" she cried impulsively. "Please, please—"

"Guess so," he said, and added in a thoughtful tone, "Yes, sir, reg'lar up-and-doin' cutter, that Henry Ma'sh; steady, too, when he settles down to business. Didn't git no schoolin' to speak of—kind o' backward that way, wun't he?"

"Yes."

"Well, schoolin' ain't everything," Pelter said, still apparently thoughtful. "Ma'shes ain't no special family; but then your own mother wun't either, fer that matter. She was a smart, quick-minded woman and when she dressed up you'd 'a' thought she owned the biggest cottage on the Point; but she never claimed to possess any facts 'bout her forefathers back o' jest grandparents. Family entitles you to pride; but it ain't everything. Hard-workin', Henry is, and got a lot o' good, common-sensible, go-ahead push to him—looks to me like Henry Ma'sh might rise pretty high in life before he gits through, Edna."

With a lightened heart, she had risen and was beginning to remove the dishes from the table; but, as she comprehended his suggestion, a rigidity seized her. She stood motionless; then, when a bodily convulsive impulse had passed without having its way with her, she went quietly on with her work. In regard to her father, she was only touched by his thought for her. It was as though, aware that she had involved herself in those complications of which he had gently warned her upon the night of her return to Mirthful Haven, he had sought a solution for her difficulties, and now, without pressure or even an advisory manner, did his best to offer in this hint one possible means of extricating herself. He would not speak of it again, she knew, and wondered painfully for the hundredth time how much he had guessed. He had guessed a great deal, she feared; and her fear was well-founded.

Stooping over some work upon his boat, a little later, he affected a complete engrossment, yet was aware of her flight from the house. Dressed as Wye had seen her on the afternoon of her capture by Mildred Kerr, but with an inconsistent brown veil about her head, she scurried down River

Road toward the village, and within ten minutes Pelter caught a flying glimpse of the brown veil and the green coat shrinking away from the window of a "summer taxi" that passed at speed toward Great Point. He remained in the moored boat all afternoon, abating his work at times to chat laconically with acquaintances who rowed, chugged or sailed by, near him; but he took care to be stooping again at the time of his daughter's hurried return, just before sunset. After dinner he went to the village for a conference with Henry Marsh and Webster Hazzard, and, when he returned, at half-past nine, he found Edna sitting beside the table with an open book in her hand as he had left her. He was a little surprised.

"Gave you a chance to git out among your great friends, if you had a-mind to," he thought. "Guess maybe you're goin' to take a night off and stay home!" Then he noticed that she wore a white silk shawl about her shoulders and covering her to the knees; only a wrist and the hand with which she held the book protruded from the folds of this garment, while the shadow of the table was deep upon the lower part of her.

"Gittin' chilly in the evenin's already," he observed, and, stooping to pick up an imaginary pin from the floor, caught a faint glitter of spangles through the lower fringe of the shawl. "Guess I'll be gittin' to bed," he said, straightening himself. "No run to make to-night and I might as well git back a little lost sleep. Come on, Prince."

Edna murmured "Good-night" in a voice that perceptibly strove to be placid. He clumped up the stairs with the dog, went into his bedroom, moved about as though undressing but did not undress, and then lay down upon the bed with his eyes open. Twenty minutes later he heard a vague, slight rustling downstairs and the barely audible, soft click that he knew meant the closing of the front door. Her feet were so light upon the platform beyond that he could not hear them; but he did hear the quick patter of them upon the board sidewalk as they began to run. He swung his legs down from the bed, stretched himself, went downstairs, lighted the lamp and prepared for an interval of reading. " 'Bout an hour, Prince, and I guess we'll have to leave you to keep house alone again a while," he said, for he had been judiciously untruthful when he informed his daughter that he had no "run" to make. "Guess I can beat her home without much trouble this time."

The hour and place of his appointments at sea were intelligently varied; to-night he would be just off the southern tip of Parador Shoal at midnight, with only eight sea-miles to run after he had received his cargo, and he could easily make his delivery to the truck up the river and reach Pelter's again before one o'clock. At a little after eleven he closed the worn magazine he

had been reading, replaced it upon the shelf, blew out the lamp, and, stepping forth upon the rear verandah, closed the sliding-door almost upon the wistful nose of the dog. Then he unlocked a rough wooden chest that stood against the outer wall of the house under shelter of the verandah roof, took from it a heavy rifle and a belt of cartridges, sauntered out through the darkness to the floats, and, seating himself in a flat-bottomed dinghy, rowed to the moored motor-boat. He stepped on board, hauled the light dinghy into the cockpit at the stern, started his engine, cast off his mooring, and glided down the harbor, careless of the low thunder from his exhaust. Outside he found a placid sea under a favorably darkened sky and all went well. The meeting at the rendezvous was prompt, brisk and brief; within ten minutes his cargo was aboard and his bow lifting from the water again as he sped toward the invisible coast.

Almost immediately a tiny white spark appeared just over that true-pointed bow, the light on Mirthful Haven breakwater; then to the right of this, and higher in the air, many minute glimmerings betokened the cottages upon Great Point; but farther to the right and low down, close to the water, there began to be visible a luminous galaxy that brightened quickly as he swept on toward the shore. At Mile Rock he slackened speed, his bow dropped to a less imperious position, the boat slid through the water not so noisily, and, a quarter of a mile out, encountered upon the breeze off the land a drift of jubilant, faint dance-music. The lilting was borne to Pelter's ears; then he lost it, caught it again and lost it again. He uttered a sound not laughter but like it, abruptly altered his course and set his bow toward the clustered glitterings and darting, jewelled reflections of the Casino lights. A hundred yards off the jut of rock upon which the bright building stood, he dropped an anchor overboard, got his dinghy into the water and rowed to the outer rocks.

He fastened his painter about one of them, stepped out and climbed over others slippery with seaweed, surmounted the drier ledges above, and stood upon a cropped lawn; he flitted across it, ascended a grassy terrace, then moved along the wall of the building until he came to a window. The curtains were drawn aside; but at first he could see only the backs and profiles of black-coated men and white-shouldered women. He wondered why they were not dancing, for a proficient, large orchestra was in full action, pulsating the air with a Spanish rhythm dramatized by castanets and almost tragically romantic. Neither were the people within his view talking, which caused him more wonder, until he realized that they had become spectators, one by one evidently, for some of them stood in arrested attitudes, just relinquishing the dancing posture. The eager attention of all of

them was upon a focus not within his sight, and his eye was caught by the peculiar and intense incredulity of expression worn by a face in profile to him, near the window—a face he recognized as that of Vincent Munson.

An impulsive regrouping left an open space before Pelter through which he could see a third of the ball-room; the central area of the glistening floor was being vacated by dancers who were pausing to watch and applaud something that was taking place in the part of the room not revealed to him, and behind and among these younger people he saw older summer colonists similarly attentive and applausive, and caught a glimpse of the beaming eye-glasses and clipped white moustache of Corning. Then it seemed to Pelter that the clicking of the castanets grew sharper and the music louder and sardonic, for, into the brilliant open space before him, slowly moved the lithe and spangled figure of his daughter—his daughter whose downcast lashes upon pale cheeks seemed haughtily to veil a passionate secret, while every exquisite movement and contour of her expressed a strange, meek stateliness. So, like some Saxon rebel peering within a Norman fastness to behold his daughter dancing before the conquerors, Long Harry Pelter looked in through that radiant window and saw his daughter, Edna Pelter, dancing the tango with young Wallace Corning at Mirthful Haven Casino.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE problem of her identity that confused Edna's mind upon her return to Mirthful Haven had seemed to move near solution on the night when she begged Gordon to know her, for a little while at least, as though they "both were dead". Somewhere within her, she had felt, there existed a self that was neither Edna Pelter nor Edna Shellpool, and this nameless self was the veritable core of her, the only real and imperishable part of her, while both Edna Pelter and Edna Shellpool were transient externals; yet her glimpse of the inner reality had been vague and her hold upon a consciousness of it feeble. In fact, all such consciousness departed out of her within the hour of her capture by Mildred Kerr, and with it went Edna Pelter, too. Thenceforth she had been Edna Shellpool, with only brief reversions to Edna Pelter when she was with her father—reversions that became shadowy to Edna Shellpool in her flashing career at Great Point.

Yet all the while it was this nameless self that did the thinking for her and was aware that when she seemed to be Edna Shellpool she merely acted a part and did the same thing, acting again, during the reversions to Edna Pelter. Moreover, the actress she had thus become was under the almost constant necessity of supporting a framework of lies, a structure that had to be kept neatly joined and required frequent additions. Even so, it was perceptibly temporary and at every moment in danger of collapse, although there were times when her acting so imbued her with faith in her Shellpoolness that the fairy building seemed substantial and permanent. At such times Pelter's became dreamlike; it even remained dreamlike when she returned to it. "How queer this is!" she would say to herself when she woke in her room in the morning. "Am I really here for a little while again? I don't *really* believe it!" Her anxiety for her father, too, lost vividness, helped to unreality by the prospect that soon there would be nothing to fear for him, and she no longer watched from the breakwater.

Never had her rickety magic palace seemed to her of such solidity as when the loud insistence of Mildred Kerr forced her into the tango with Wallace Corning, and the broad floor cleared while all of Great Point stood

to watch them. As she danced it seemed to her that she emanated a radiance softer and brighter than the undulant twinkling of her spangles, and at the same time she seemed to be looking on, an ardent spectator, transported to see herself moving in this effulgence. Upborne by her own acting, she enchanted herself; within her was the rapt excitement that came with the casting of a spell and perceiving how it held an audience bound. Through her lowered lashes she saw the kindled face of Gordon Corning, and she felt that he understood the message her quickened heart was beating out to him: "For you! For you! For you!"

Strangely, another face that she saw meant little to her, though it was Vinnie Munson's and almost aghast with recognition. She had realized that some such encounter must take place, for she knew he was to be met anywhere at Great Point, especially anywhere near Agatha Corning; but Edna had comprehended him of old as timorous—in his climbing he would follow the safer course and not make revelations that might involve himself before he got through with them, she thought. After this shining night of the tango, moreover, she became day by day so absorbed in her Shellpoolness that a creature as feeble as he seemed to have no power to threaten its actuality; she had no fear of him at all.

Her Shellpoolness was nothing abnormal; there was in it no more extraordinary an example of what is called "dual personality" than one furnished by Mrs. Vandenbrock at tea in the Cornings' living-room, the last afternoon of the summer. Mrs. Vandenbrock was known as a beauty; a great part of her life was spent in that capacity, and when she was consciously upon exhibition she forgot all about everything except being the beautiful Mrs. Vandenbrock. Acting this part with profound conviction, she kept her face to contours never anything but serenely gracious, her attitudes and gestures to a picturesque suavity; she so genuinely lived the rôle, indeed, that neither she nor any of her friends doubted its reality, although middle-age was now altering her appearance and an uninformed stranger might pass some little time with her before comprehending that she was a beauty. But at home, with only her family about her, Mrs. Vandenbrock's powerful maternal instinct so swayed her that she became no beauty at all, and her manner of being one—even her consciousness of being one—departed from her; she was never the two things, a mother and a beauty, at the same time. Thus, as she happened to glance out of one of the French windows at the end of the Cornings' long living-room, she saw her youngest son upon her own lawn, next door, outrageously carrying a distressed puppy by the tail, and, within and without, she was instantly a changed person. She became unaware of the rather numerous company in the room and of the fact that as

a beauty she was engaged in mild persiflage with Warbeck, who was almost startled to see what lines were capable of emerging from the delicate artificial coloring she used. “That child needs a spanking for his own good!” she said, and unconsciously made a vigorous but awkward, illustrative gesture; then, recalled to her other self by Warbeck’s surprised inquiry, she fell without effort into her exhibition manner, became beautiful again and wholly forgot that she was a mother.

So, almost simultaneously, Edna glanced from another open window of the same room, looked down through a rift between trees, saw the ramshackle silhouette of Pelter’s against blue water, thought, “That old stovepipe sticking out of the roof needs straightening,” and yet was wholly Edna Shellpool within the same instant. Her eyes had wandered absently to the window during a brief interruption of her vivacious schoolmate’s prattle; the two stood grouped with Gordon Corning and his cousin Lena, while Mildred maintained the constant chatter that was her light-hearted and light-headed habit. But she broke it off momentarily at the behest of a beckoning hand. The hand was Wallace Corning’s; from a discreetly opened door near the window it made its appearance in company with a portion of his face and an eye that winked. Mildred skipped to the doorway, received a teacup in exchange for one she held upon a plate, whispered hurriedly, and, as the discreet door closed, returned to her friends by the window.

“Isn’t he awful!” she said delightedly. “He’s got a whole shakerful in the pantry; but he says I mustn’t tell anybody, though he’ll give me one more—strictly on account of my health—when I finish this one! Says he gave one to Sally and only let me in on it because tea’s ruinous to the kind of constitution he’s noticed I have. Gordon, I suppose your father’d ask him to ‘step into the study’ if he knew what his bad boy is up to!”

“I think he would,” Gordon agreed with some seriousness. “Wallace does a little too much of that anyhow, I’m afraid, and if father knew he was substituting cocktails for tea and reserving all except one or two for himself —”

“Now, now!” Mildred cried. “Don’t you get to scolding him, too! I gave him fits for it, myself, last night; but it really doesn’t amount to anything—it’s just his last little fling before he has to commence being a model business man with you next week. Besides, wouldn’t the poor thing naturally have to prime himself a little so that he won’t break down when he takes me to the station this evening? You mustn’t forget how he suffers, knowing he’s going to be separated from me for the next six or seven days! Think of your mother’s inconsiderateness, too—letting all these people in

here for tea so that he can't hope for a tête-à-tête with me! Don't be critical of my Wallie!"

"It's a good thing for your Wallie that one of his critics isn't here," Lena Gordon said. "Agatha's got so poisonous about your Wallie that she'd be leading Uncle George straight to that doorway, if she were here instead of out in her sheik's sloop. How she can get herself in such a state over that silver screen ideal—Murder!"

"What!" Mildred exclaimed. "Why, look at me and the state I'm in over Wallie! It's possible to be in a state over almost anybody!" She finished the contents of her teacup, gasped, "Whew!" and laughed with the fresh inspiration to a rash mischievousness. "Look at the state almost everybody's in over somebody! For instance, Lena, just look at poor Gordie right here and see the state he's in over—No! I guess it's too soon to say it publicly!" She laughed more loudly and put her disengaged arm about Edna's waist. "Solemn things!" she cried. "I mean you and Gordon! Edna, you've been pretty nearly as solemn these last two or three days as you were when you first came to Miss Branch's. Golly, what a wondering-eyed thing you were, and how I pounced on you and grabbed you up! I always did wonder how I managed to persuade such a deep-natured, still creature to let a little flibbertigibbet like me adopt her for a soul-sister. Don't you dare to forget you've sworn to be decent to me about writing! I suppose your crazy old scarecrow of a Miss Pemberton won't hear of such a thing as your coming to the train to see me off?"

"No, no," Edna said hurriedly. "In fact I've got to be getting back to her in a very little while; she was to meet me—"

"Gracious!" Miss Kerr shouted, interrupting. "Lena, do look at Gordon! For pity's sake let's run and stand by the piano to keep anybody from singing 'Good-bye Summer'! If somebody let out just one yelp of 'The swallows are making them ready to fly' there'd be a scene and a manly young voice bursting into sobs! Come on!" She seized Lena's arm and the two moved away, giggling benevolently, to another part of the room.

Gordon stepped closer to Edna. "Thank heaven they were that decent at last! She's right about the way I look, I've no doubt; but I can't help it. It's almost worse than it was at first—never once being alone with you for a second—"

"But you are now—we're alone—"

"Alone!" he said impatiently. "Do you call this being alone—with twenty or thirty other people in the same room? I haven't been actually alone with you once since Mildred Kerr came—not once, Edna! I suppose I

shouldn't be ungrateful to her—God knows whether or not I'd have seen you again at all if she hadn't come!—but what chance have I had to say anything to you or to hear anything from you, really, since she's been here? She's monopolized you as much as she could and you've constantly helped her to do it; every minute of the time we've been in a crowd, and it's seemed to me that was the way you wanted it to be. What have I had of you except a word with you like this sometimes?—and never without knowing that somebody might break in on it at any minute—just as somebody's sure to now before I've half got through with what I want to say! Don't you realize what is happening—happening to both of us?"

"Yes—I do," she said in a low voice. "I realize."

"I don't think you have a glimmer of it!" he exclaimed. "Otherwise you'd have let me make a chance for us to be alone together."

"We're that now—really. We're alone together, Gordon."

"Mystically we are, I suppose you mean!" he said bitterly. "Like whatever you meant that night about the sailors who drowned out there by Old Bareface! I tell you I'm tired of being 'alone together' in a crowd! I'm rather practical, myself, and I'd like things to be a little more tangible. I suppose it doesn't mean anything to you at all that I've got to leave here in less than a week, and so far I haven't the slightest definite information as to when or where I'm to see you again. More than that, now that Mildred's leaving, I haven't any strong conviction that you're going to let me see you again before I leave Mirthful Haven."

"Oh, yes—yes, I will."

"But when—"

"I can't be sure. I've explained how difficult it is for me to be definite; Miss Pemberton's movements are so uncertain that I never know—"

"So you're going back to that for an excuse!" he said with increasing bitterness. "You imply that you realize we're close upon the moment of parting—"

"Ah, yes!"

"And yet you're letting me go away not knowing anything whatever about you! One thing you don't realize is that since I've been seeing you every day I know just a little less about you than I did before Mildred came."

"Why, no! Surely you—"

“Surely I don’t!” he said. “I don’t even know there is a ‘Miss Pemberton’.”

“But, Gordon, I’ve told you—”

“Yes, more than once,” he returned grimly, “ ‘Miss Pemberton’ seemed to fit pretty well into the story I made up, myself, to tell my mother, about your being at a camp. If there’d been a ‘Miss Pemberton’ you could have told me about her long before Mildred came—you aren’t a snob and you didn’t take me for one; you wouldn’t have minded telling me you’d taken on a job as companion to a ‘nervous invalid’. You wouldn’t—”

“No, no!” she interposed hastily. “I might easily have been afraid to tell you about—about some such thing.”

“Why?”

“Why, I might.” She looked at him with an uneasy, deep earnestness. “I might have been afraid.”

“Afraid of what?”

“Afraid that—that you mightn’t think so well of me. Even that—” She faltered and her voice became almost inaudible; but she made herself say it. “Even that—you mightn’t want to see me again.”

He leaned closer to her, and they looked deeply and gently into each other’s eyes. “You couldn’t be that stupid, Edna. You couldn’t believe that anything on earth could keep me from wanting to see you again!”

“Nothing—on earth?”

“You know it couldn’t—absolutely!”

“ ‘Absolutely’?” she murmured, and her gaze fell from his; but he could see that she was trembling. “That’s such a tremendous word it’s hard to trust to, Gordon. If I thought you knew entirely what it meant—”

“It means absolutely!” he said in a low voice but with passionate conviction. “That’s why I want you to tell me the real truth about yourself now. I simply can’t credit that you thought your having had to take a job like that would make any difference to me. It isn’t plausible. Don’t you see you’ve only made yourself more mysterious to me than ever? You frighten me, Edna!”

“Oh, no!”

“You do! Haven’t you any of that fear, yourself—fear that we may lose each other?”

“Fear!” She uttered a faint outcry. “Ah, yes!”

“Then why don’t you help us?”

“I—just can’t.”

“Look here!” he said desperately. “I’ve been having the wildest imaginings about you, dear. You could tell me; you could settle them. You haven’t contracted some queer tie, have you? You aren’t married, are you, Edna?”

“Married?” In amazement she looked at him and laughed helplessly. “Good heavens! No!”

At that, he laughed, too, as helplessly. “Perhaps you can’t imagine it’s a relief to me to hear you say it! It’s one horrible possibility gone, at least. Can’t the others go with it?”

“When they do—” she began impulsively; but came to a full stop.

“ ‘When they do’?” He took the words up eagerly. “You mean you are going to tell me!”

“Well—I mean I think you’ll know. When you do know, Gordon, I’ll wait to see if you understood what you meant when you said ‘absolutely’. That’s all I can do—”

“Edna! Edna!” he murmured despairingly. “You tell me nothing and promise to tell me nothing; but you say I’ll know and that you’ll wait for me to come to you after I know—”

“Yes,” she said in a whisper. “But—you may not come.”

“Edna! When I don’t even know where to come! What good’ll it do for you to be waiting if I don’t know where!”

“You’ll know.”

“Edna!” He rubbed a clenched hand over his distorted forehead. “It’s like trying to find you in a fog! You don’t let me get hold of you or of anything else. You’ve promised one thing, though: that you won’t disappear now that Mildred’s gone.”

“No—I won’t.”

“Then will you—”

“Wait.” She stood for a moment in thought. “I’ve been at the Point nearly all the time lately; it can’t go on. Isn’t the last of the Casino dances to be on Saturday night?”

“That means you’ll come? You’ll meet me there? You promise?”

“No, no; I can’t be sure or definite. I only thought possibly I might—”

“You aren’t even sure of that!” At once he began to protest. “You don’t even promise to see me then and you know I’m leaving three days after that, on Tuesday night? Dearest, dearest, you surely won’t put me off so—”

But here the interruption he had predicted cut him short; his brother, coming from the adjacent doorway, put a hand upon his shoulder. “When’d I ever give you any permission to call Mildred’s best friend ‘dearest’ twice?” Wallace inquired with jocular severity. “Miss Shellpool, consider yourself under my protection if this person continues his unwelcome addresses. Where’s little Mildred?”

“Somewhere else!” Gordon answered in great annoyance. “She’s with Lena, and you’ll find them—”

“Where we’re wanted!” Mildred said, coming with Lena suddenly from behind Wallace. “You can’t say I haven’t been generous a long time, Gordon; but I’m not going to stay away from Edna all of my last afternoon, and you’ll have to stand its being a family party from now on.”

The interview of the two by the window was ended without hope of a present renewal, and the three girls and Wallace began to chatter noisily. Edna did her share with a gayety that made the troubled Gordon stare at her plaintively; he had the discontented amazement a young lover feels whenever his lady proves how readily she can to all appearances rebound from an emotional interview, upon interruption, and produce the commonplace tokens of mirth and eagerness requisite for the demonstration that nothing of consequence has been happening. Such demonstrations, if too excellently spirited, can engender this peril: the lover, being of the less perceptive sex, may be convinced that the late interview has been emotional on his part alone, and young Gordon had already been given too much to imagine, too much to suspect. Strange, vague hintings and suggestions moved in his mind like dim signal-lights shifting in a mist: Was she only pretending to feel so much, then? And the other times, too? “It’s all a fraud about ‘Miss Pemberton’—lied even to her best friend about that—so, how much else is untrue? Been trying to fool us all about a good deal, hasn’t she? What for? What’s she up to? Is this girl only fooling me?”

Edna’s gayety was convincing because her sudden high spirits were genuine. She had just been nearer the truth with him than she had ever been before. For a moment she had been near telling it all; his “absolutely” had almost persuaded her. Part of the truth, indeed, she had virtually admitted to him—that there was no “Miss Pemberton”, and she felt that the admission had only brought her closer to him. Couldn’t it be, then, that the whole truth, when it came to be known to him, might only bring her closer to him? He

would understand then all that she had meant, all that she had implied; he would understand the stress and the coincidence that left her no escape from the false position she had accepted to be near him—ah, he would understand everything! But most of all she was happy because she had at last delivered to him the great message, succeeded in saying outright to him what she had for days eagerly sought the means and opportunity to convey: that when he did come to know the truth about her, as some time and probably soon he must surely know it, she would be waiting and he would know where to find her. If "absolutely" meant to him what it meant to her, he would come to Pelter's for her.

In her breast there was an almost breathless reassurance; life abruptly changed its part in the masque, cleared the threatening make-up from its face and was seen to be a smiling friend. The bright long room, lively with the chatter of pleasant voices and the tinkling of china and silver, seemed to glow with good feeling; the many flowers on the tables were beautiful and so were all these friendly people, too, as they moved about, laughing and talking gayly, in the cool sweet air and broad shafts of afternoon sunshine that came in caressingly through the open windows. At the other end of the room Edna saw Corning, obviously philanthropic, thoughtful and high-minded; she caught a glimpse of Mrs. Corning's laughing face over the shoulder of the flushed and merry Wallace, saw lovely Mrs. Arden smiling to the grey Warbeck—everywhere she looked there was nothing but reassurance. Once she had called these people a "cold-hearted crew"; but she had not known them, and we easily malign what we do not know—only ignorance could have thought such visibly kind souls cold-hearted. Cold-hearted? No! They were friendly and kind—lovely, kind-hearted people.

Without effort, her laughter became almost continuous and her lips rippled out the patter she had long ago caught from the other girls at Stony Brook. "Perfectly furious!" she said merrily a dozen times. She was perfectly furious that Mildred was going away so soon, perfectly furious with Miss Pemberton for having absorbed so much time during the visit, perfectly furious not to be able to come to the station, perfectly furious that on Miss Pemberton's account she couldn't join a party of consolation Wallace proposed for that evening, perfectly furious about everything. Incessant excited gestures accompanied these insistences upon her fury; the three girls conversed in screams, with Edna's laughing voice the loudest, while little darts of distrust fell more and more numerously and sharply upon the heart of the gloomy lover. Edna's exhilaration was genuine, he perceived; then the inference was plain that either she hadn't the deep nature he'd been attributing to her or that the profound feeling shown to him only a

few minutes earlier was pretended. “But what for?” he thought. “Actually had some idea of fooling me as she did the rest of us about ‘Miss Pemberton’, so she must think I’m pretty gullible, or at least must hope that I am! What else wouldn’t she try to fool me about? How much acting has she been doing with me from the first—and what for?”

Mrs. Gordon interrupted the vociferations of the girlish trio. “For heaven’s sake, Lena, be quiet long enough for me to make myself heard! How do you do, Miss Shellpool. Mildred, I’m afraid you’ll have to run over to our cottage if you want to be sure of finding more than half your own things in your trunk when you get home. I won’t take the responsibility for a maid’s packing, and when I looked into your room a few minutes ago it was a sight! If you care anything about your own belongings you’d better trot over and see what’s been left out.”

“Gracious!” Mildred threw herself upon Edna. “Swear you won’t leave until I get back!”

“Depends on how long—”

“You’ve got to wait! There’s a thousand things I want to tell you how to do to keep Wallace excited about me after I’ve gone. I won’t be five minutes!”

She departed upon a zigzag course through the groups of tea-drinkers, and Mrs. Gordon looked disapprovingly at Wallace. “Nephew, you appear rather flushed for this time in the afternoon and it seems to me I detect an aroma. Have you been keeping strictly to tea?”

“Why, Aunt Virgie!” he exclaimed. “You’re getting to be a shockingly suspicious woman, and always in the wrong direction. Gordon, stand a little farther away from Aunt Virgie or she’ll see what I mean. Aunt Virgie, I can’t tell you how pained—”

He was interrupted by Vandenbrock. This trim elderly gentleman, just arrived, pressed forward to speak to Mrs. Gordon. “Mrs. Gordon, I have some news that may be a relief to you. About two hours ago in my car I had a little accident, and I’m afraid I’ve avenged you.”

“Afraid you’ve avenged me? Is it a riddle, Mr. Vandenbrock? I don’t see just in what manner—”

“I mean avenged you for the shock to your nerves that occurred some little time ago,” he explained. “I certainly don’t like to run over dogs; but of course this one has been making a pest of himself for years, and a very special one to you. The chauffeurs all hate him, and I had a slight suspicion that my man swerved the car a little on purpose, though he denies it; also he

pretended not to hear me when I called to him to stop." Vandenbrock laughed with some ruefulness. "I admit that our going on our way may have been the wiser course under the circumstances!"

Mrs. Gordon stared at him. "You mean the dog that attacked me? Your car ran over him?"

"Yes. Of course it's a riddance and the dog was only a mongrel and I'm glad to feel that it may relieve you of some nervousness about a repetition of what occurred; but I do dislike to kill dogs when I'm motoring."

Wallace laughed consolingly. "Wait till you've had that misfortune as often as I have, Mr. Vandenbrock; you'll be hardened. Only last week Gordon and I—" He interrupted himself, checked by the startled expression of his brother's face. "What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing," Gordon said, and, as Lena went away, at her mother's suggestion, to bring Mr. Vandenbrock a cup of tea, the younger brother beckoned the older to come closer to the window. "Where did Edna go?"

"Edna?" Wallace asked blankly and looked about him. "Why, where *did* she go? She was standing right here by you and—"

"Yes, she was—almost this very moment. I just barely turned away to hear what old Vandenbrock was saying about that dog, and when I turned back she wasn't here. There's only one thing she could have done; she must have jumped out of the window." Then he added, as both brothers looked forth from the opening, "Not in sight, so if she did it she must have left on the run; but why in the world—"

"Precisely," the flushed Wallace agreed. "Privately, there've been several times when it's seemed to me to be proper to inquire 'Why in the world?' about her. Of course I wouldn't say so to Mildred; but sometimes it strikes me that her friend Edna is acting just the least bit damn peculiarly!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

EDNA ran all the way to Pelter's; but when she reached the wooden front yard she stopped and stood still, listening. The surf was gentle, no more than whispering outside the breakwater; automobile signals buzzed at one another upon the road; from the harbor she could hear the cheerful hailing of boatmen passing one another, and she heard her own loud and rapid breathing; but from the flimsy old house before her there came not a sound. She went forward on tiptoe, stopped to listen again, heard nothing; then softly opened the door and stepped within.

Pelter was sitting upon a stool, with his back toward her and his body bent forward. His elbows were upon his knees, his hands hanging listlessly; and his posture gave the impression that it had not changed for a long time. Before him, upon the floor and upon a tattered square of burlap, lay the body of Prince—already flattening, it seemed to Edna. She closed the door and leaned back against it, silent except for the intermittent sound her breathing still made. Her father gave no token that he was aware of her entrance but continued to sit, motionless; and so, for the first time in her life, she saw him seemingly bereft of all resourcefulness and in an attitude stonily forlorn.

For minutes she stood by the door; then with creeping steps she went toward him, knelt behind him, lifted her hand to his shoulder, placed it there and softly set her cheek against his back. He did not move or seem aware of her; she rose, and, perceiving that her tears had moistened the back of his grey woolen shirt, she tried to dry the spot by rubbing it with her handkerchief—then she withdrew from him and, as noiselessly as she could, went out to the verandah. There she stood waiting, out of his sight, for half an hour or more; then heard him moving about within the big room, and finally his steps approached the verandah. He came out slowly, carrying the body of the dog, wrapped in burlap, in his arms, and, walking stiffly, with his shoulders held straight, he went by Edna as if unconscious of her presence. Then, at a few paces from her, he halted suddenly and turned to face her.

"Well—" he said in a hard voice, and looked at her inscrutably with widely opened eyes.

That was all. He turned away and marched down the pier to the floats, carrying his old friend with him; but what he had said to Edna, in that inscrutable stare, was, "*They* did this."

He rowed out to the motor-boat, gently placed the dog's body within it, cast off his moorings and went to the wheel. The engine began to thunder; but Edna, watching from the verandah, saw that the boat moved down the harbor slowly, with the late sunshine thinly gilding the figure at the wheel and the inconsequent, small pile of burlap upon the deck. Outside the harbor mouth there was a haze; the boat, small with distance, passed into it and became indistinct; but Edna saw that her father was steering toward the "Goat Yard", where a convulsed reef projected multitudes of rocks that looked like herds grazing upon a dozen acres of water. Then for a time she could not see the boat; it disappeared into the "Goat Yard", and twilight had come before it emerged.

It returned as slowly as it had gone, a small grey shape indefinite in the greyness of the harbor mouth but gaining size and definition as it came. When it was once more at its mooring and the gaunt figure of its owner in the dinghy rowing ashore, Edna went indoors; but Pelter remained upon the pier and did not approach the house until she called to him from the doorway that his supper was ready. He came in; they sat at the table for a time, not speaking and not eating, though he slowly drank two cups of black coffee. Then he pushed back his chair, lighted his pipe, and, looking at it contemplatively as he held it in his right hand, absently let his left arm hang over the arm of the chair, while the fingers of that hand seemed to grope for something a few inches from the floor. He started slightly, lifted his hand and looked at it. "Godfrey!" he said. "Seemed like he must be there."

Edna began to clear the dishes away, while he continued to stare at his hand as if wondering to have found it vacant. "Goat Yard always did look more like a graveyard to me," he said finally, in a meditative voice, and thrust the vacant hand into a pocket, as if he feared it might absently grope near the floor again. "Like a sea-graveyard with all them old brown headstones like. Some of 'em make good, sizable monuments at low water. Give him the best of 'em—the tallest. It goes straight down six fathom'. Never did like the water much, he didn't; but he wun't mind now. Seemed kind o' 'propriate, too—raised right in sight of it ever since he was a puppy. Well—"

His voice dwindled to a renewed silence; she finished her work and came to sit as of old across the table from him but brought no book with her. At the other side of the room were the two new chairs and the new table he had bought just before her return to Mirthful Haven; no one ever sat more than a moment in either of the chairs, or used the table, and both father and daughter were habitually aware of them only as vaguely intrusive presences. But old Wye, shuffling in presently, without offering or receiving any greeting, absent-mindedly seated himself in the plush-covered chair nearer the door; then immediately got up with an air of apology.

"Never noticed what I was doin', so excuse me," he said, apparently addressing the chair, and substituted a wooden one. Then he sighed and added, "Ain't no thickenin' up sou'west. Along come sundown thought maybe goin' to git a one day Sou'wester; but looks more like not. She'll hold fair with jest only a haze."

"Guess so," Pelter said.

Wye sighed again, rubbed the stiff rime upon his chin with a shaking hand, mumbled to himself a while, then spoke as if something inconsequential had just been recalled to mind. "Lin Seabury told me 'bout it. Said he see it take place."

"Yes—he told me."

"Yes—said he was right out in front yonder. How I come to know 'bout it, Lin told me." The old man turned toward Edna. "Wun't home, was you?"

"No," she said, put a hand to her cheek and looked quickly at her father; for all at once it seemed to her significant that he had not asked her where or how she had heard of the dog's death. Had he guessed that, too?

He was unconscious of her troubled gaze and also, apparently, of the renewed senile mumblings of the caller. "By Orry!" Wye exclaimed, unexpectedly breaking off his mutterings to speak out sharply. "Puts me a-mind o' them little animals I see in the woods in Africky. Apes, they was, I guess. Looked a mite more like little people than what a monkey mostly does. You 'member if I ever told you 'bout 'em, Long Harry? Did I?"

"No."

"Never b'en no special distance off shore but once," Wye said. "That was when I was eighteen year' old, on the brig 'New Moon'—laid off Africky west coast, and the Old Man sent some of us with the second mate 'way fur up deep into them African woods, tradin' fer ivory 'cause there wun't none to be had on the coast. Had a camp in them woods, we did, and night-times them apes kep' up a palaverin' fit to waken the dead—

mimickin' the palaverin' they hear us doin' with the black people all day, seemed like. Mate says, 'Less see jest how smart them little animals be!' So we hid back in the bushes and watched them apes come creepin' out and set around our camp-fire to git warm, 'cause that place was on high land and cold, nights. Animals is 'fraid o' fire; but them apes had see us settin' round ourn and they wanted to mimic everythin' we done, so, after they got up somewuz nigh, they learned they felt nice and warm and come a little nigher; had jest that much sense. They'd set there, and when the fire burned low they'd jest hunch up a mite closer and closer to the embers. Funny thing was we'd left a big pile o' sticks right there by the fire, handy to put on, and them apes had see us puttin' wood on the fire hunderds o' times; but they didn't never put not one single stick on that fire theirselves. There we was, watchin' 'em and knowin' all they had to do to keep warm was to jest reach out a hand and pull over a few o' them sticks onto the fire; but all them apes could think how to do was to set there, movin' closer in till the fire went out, and then set there some more, shiverin' in the cold." The old man chuckled musingly, and, with his tongue against his sunken lips, made sibilances that suggested a series of slight lamentations. "Jest the way we human bein's behave our own selves, ain't it? You git the drift o' what I'm tellin' to you, dun't you, Long Harry?"

"No."

"Why, it's plain—a thing I think of over and over, and a thing a body could keep thinkin' of a thousand year' at a time!" Wye exclaimed. "Look yonder!" His green eyes twinkled wetly in the lamplight and he pointed to the open doorway, where, in the framed blue darkness, a few hazy stars poised above the black harbor. "Up there in the sky, come night when we can't see 'em, there must be hunderds and hunderds o' people smarter 'n what we are lookin' on and watchin' us human bein's, jest the way we watched them little apes in Africky—laughin' at us sometimes, maybe, and wonderin' why in the name o' Crikey we can't see what's plain as all git out to *them*. *They* know what we ought to do; but we jest go on settin' here, edgin' up a mite closer to keep as warm 's we can but lettin' the fire go out and the dark git darker and the cold git colder." The old man laughed suddenly aloud, then subdued the laugh to a chuckle. "Darker and colder till we're so stiff and cold ourselves that somebody we never laid eyes on comes and puts us away in the ground. Looks sometimes like we dun't know nothin' much 'bout nothin', dun't it?"

"Guess so."

“Yes, suh!” Wye chuckled, getting slowly to his feet and beginning to move toward the outer door. “Puts us away in the ground—else maybe drops us over the side with a weight onto our feet. See you over in the Goat Yard, come sundown, Long Harry.”

“Did you?”

“I was thinkin’—” The old man paused with his hand upon the latch of the door, and coughed so loudly and persistently that Long Harry turned his head to look at him. Wye pointed to Edna, who sat with her back toward him, then placed his forefinger upon his lips, then pointed to the door. Long Harry rose and followed him outside, closing the door behind him.

“What is it?”

“Nothin’. Chanced to see that rum-chaser come in after dark. Layin’ up’t a wharf at the village. You ain’t goin’ out?”

“No. Not till Saturday. That all?”

“Yes, ’cept only—only I was thinkin’—” Wye put a tremulous hand upon Pelter’s arm. “Only it looks this way to me: you ain’t in no position to do nothin’, Long Harry. Lin Seabury tell you he see how the showfer done it?”

“Yes—he told me.”

“Knowed he would. Lin Seabury never yet had sense enough not to tell what he’d jest as well might ’a’ kep’ to hisself. Biddybody, Lin Seabury is. But that ain’t what I was thinkin’ of, though, Long Harry.”

“What was it?”

“Well, I was thinkin’ o’ that time, some back, when all them little rocks in Cornings’ grass spiled their fancy lawn-mower. You ain’t in no position now where you could make even that much headway agin the Point. It ain’t safe fer you to move the least mite to git even with them people. Dun’t you try it, dun’t you try it, Long Harry!”

“No,” Pelter said slowly, in a husky voice. “There’s some things nothin’ you could do would be much use, that way. I stopped tryin’ to git even with them people long ago, Cap’. They can do what they want to. I wun’t touch ’em!”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

WITHOUT doubt George Corning had often seen decorative representations of the classic masks—the use of the tragic mask in conjunction with that of comedy is so common in ornamentation that the design could hardly have escaped his eye—but it is probable that he was too busy a man of affairs ever to have caught from the coupled masks a suggestion of comment upon some aspects of his own life. Probably, too, he had never observed that although the mask of tragedy betokens hollow-eyed and chopfallen gloom, the comic mask wears incomparably more acutely the expression of real pain and is actually the more tragic of the two. As a betokening of any ordinary life, in fact, only the mask of comedy is needed, for it carries both meanings: such a mask might appropriately have found place in the decoration of Corning's study, in his cottage, and, particularly upon the morning after his older son's fiancée had left Mirthful Haven, it is easily imagined as present and inaudibly contorted with a hollow mirth. Some such frozen grimace, rollicking and terrible, is indeed almost necessary to fancy behind him upon one of the walnut panels of the handsome room, as he came to his desk and amplified his greeting to his secretary, Mr. Tholineau, by adding, "So we arrive at a pleasant morning's work as the finish of a delightful summer!"

He had arranged the second story of the addition to his cottage as a suite for himself, his sleeping-quarters, the study and a breakfast-room. Mr. Tholineau, a lame man of thirty-five who had been with him for six years, came from a hotel every morning at ten and they worked together until the bathing-hour. Sometimes, though not often, they worked after dinner, too, and this they had done upon the previous evening. Corning had seen none of his family since the afternoon of the day before, having dined alone while his wife acted as a plenipotentiary bearing his excuses to the Gaskells, a family not high in his favor. Although only in their third season at Mirthful Haven, the Gaskells had bought all the remaining land of the speculative Munsons, had built upon it an unnecessarily overpowering cottage and were presenting other challenging shows of splendor, naturally not designed to render themselves less impressive. They were becoming a little

objectionably self-important, Corning thought, and he had readily chosen an evening's work in preference to the addition of himself as a tributary embellishment to the last and most gilded of Mrs. Gaskell's shows for this season. The rest of his family might appear in such a capacity, as testimony that there was nothing like actual ill-feeling between the Gaskells and Cornings, he felt; but his own absence from the festival was significant of a point of view he owed it to himself to express, and he spoke of this feeling to Mr. Tholineau when they had finished the business routine of the morning.

"Please make a note upon a matter I wish to bring up to my fellow-directors of the Casino," he said. "Mr. Vandenbrock and Mr. Warbeck are to be here this morning, aren't they?"

"Yes, sir. Eleven-thirty; but you thought there'd be no special business to bring up about the Casino, so the meeting would be very short and you could all three get to the beach as usual, Mr. Corning. How shall I note the matter you mention?"

"Just write, 'Private use of Casino.' That'll be enough to remind me. What I wish to say to those gentlemen is apropos of Mrs. Gaskell's having been allowed to rent the whole building last night. I only consented to it because I was afraid that if I objected somebody'd be ridiculous enough to think that I had a personal reason, whereas of course my feeling is merely that I believe the building should be open to every member at all times and that the Casino should be used only for its own social celebrations. I believe that we three directors should make such a rule. As a matter of fact, the preservation of the present delightful character of Mirthful Haven points to a policy discouraging to such displays as Mrs. Gaskell's. Our enjoyment of the life here depends upon its being kept simple, and I very much dislike to see its simplicity threatened by—well, by parvenue magnificence. As if it weren't out of place enough to build a dancing pavilion for a dinner-dance at a house that looks like a Florida hotel, there must also needs be the absurd addition of the Casino for a supper-dance!"

Mr. Tholineau laughed. "From what I heard of the prospects beforehand from Wallace, the Casino was to serve rather for a breakfast-dance."

"From Wallace?" Corning inquired, smiling. "He wasn't exactly prostrated, then, by Miss Kerr's departure?"

"He was kind enough to invite me to a special 'consolation party'," Mr. Tholineau explained. "In spite of Mrs. Gaskell's providing her house and the pavilion and the Casino, Wallace and some others of the young people seemed to feel that the festivities were to be confined too much to one place,

and they don't like to remain in one place more than a few minutes at a time nowadays. They were making it a Gaskell evening but with by-excursions of some sort and a final rendezvous at the Casino, hoping there would be eggs and sausage, I believe."

"I don't like to see that sort of thing coming to Mirthful Haven," Corning said. "It's out of character—out of character. We'll take up a pleasanter subject. Have you sounded the village in regard to that idea of mine of a Community Centre?"

"Yes. That is, I've spoken of it to most of the village people whom I happen to know best. I'm afraid I shouldn't represent them as being enthusiastic about it, sir."

"No, I suppose not." Corning sighed, and the expression of his handsome, sunburned face became melancholy. "The trouble is, I'm afraid, that they're rather cliquey; some of them feel themselves to be considerably above the rest, and of course that's natural enough and I understand it. But it's undemocratic. They really ought to be glad when we propose to help them by contributing something substantial toward their erecting a building where they could all get together and enjoy themselves, with lectures and simple, wholesome entertainments during their long winters here." He sighed again. "Well, well, it's hard to help people who won't help themselves." Then, at the sound of a bell in the short corridor of the suite, he brightened. "Vandenbrock and Warbeck, I imagine, Mr. Tholineau—and they may like a cigar."

"Yes, sir." Mr. Tholineau hobbled briskly to the door and opened it to admit the two expected gentlemen, who were already in the corridor; then, as they sat down, he brought from a cabinet a large mahogany humidor ornamented with chased silver and made the suggested offering.

"No—no, thank you," Vandenbrock said absently, and appeared to be affected by some embarrassment. He glanced appealingly at Warbeck, who seemed preoccupied. "I thought perhaps I'd suggest—"

"Yes?" Corning said, a little surprised by Vandenbrock's manner. "You wish to suggest?"

But Vandenbrock only coughed, whereupon Warbeck relieved him by taking the matter into his own hands. "Unfortunately Vandenbrock and I have something rather private to bring up this morning, and we've agreed that it may be better for Mr. Tholineau to omit taking his customary notes of our meeting. So if he—"

"Of course," the secretary interrupted amiably. "I'll wait in the breakfast-room, Mr. Corning."

"Dear me!" Corning said cheerfully, as the door closed upon this tactful withdrawal. "You two look distressingly solemn for a bright morning! I have a matter or two that I want to bring up, myself; but I'll wait till you've got rid of what's on your shoulders. Well, let's have it—what's your conspiracy?"

Neither of his guests appeared to be set at ease by the rallying gayety of his tone; again Vandenbrock coughed and again Warbeck, with gravity, became the spokesman. "The end of the season seems a little late in the day for us to be forced to deal with a rather ticklish matter concerning the Casino; but the thing's been so thrust upon us this morning that we don't seem to be able to escape it. One phase of the subject has been worrying chaperones and parents for some little time, I believe—the fact that most of the young people don't arrive at the Casino for the dances until an hour that's gradually been growing later and later."

Corning frowned and nodded. "Yes. I've caught an undercurrent of that complaint, here and there, and feared we'd be compelled to deal with it. Go on."

"I'm afraid I'll have to," Warbeck said. "It appears that a number of the young people have formed the habit of priming themselves for the dances we offer them—their favorite source of supply for the priming, we hear, is a speak-easy cabaret operated by one Charette at New Yarmouth—and our rule that no liquor whatever shall be kept at the Casino or even brought upon the premises—"

"A rule I'll never consent to abrogate!" Corning interrupted warmly. "Never! I realize that the young people of to-day are not those of yesterday; but I have very strong convictions upon the subject you mention, gentlemen. I believe that a quiet cocktail and a glass of wine at dinner at home, or when people dine out, are as pleasant and respectable amenities of life as they ever were; but I detest excess and I deplore flagrant violations of the law of the land. I consider it the duty of every good citizen to prevent any flagrant violation, and I would consider it a flagrant violation if the Casino, or any other general community club for both sexes and all ages, should permit liquor to be served or even brought upon its premises. When our children become parties to flagrant violations I think it is largely our own fault. My own children know my principles and they respect them. I fail to see why other children are not made to respect their parents' principles. If other parents have been unable to control their children in this matter because

those parents have lost their authority over them, then it was the duty of those parents at least to find some means of preventing their children from becoming parties to a flagrant violation; they should have seen to it, for instance, that such a speak-easy as you mention should have been closed by the authorities. We don't want dens of vice operating as a temptation anywhere within a short radius of Mirthful Haven, I take it, gentlemen, and, for one, I don't propose to tolerate them! I speak forcibly because that's how I feel, and if someone has been suggesting to you that we should change our rules as an inducement to the young people—"

"No, no," Vandenbrock interrupted uneasily. "It has been suggested that we should take up the matter; but, as Warbeck said, the end of the season's too late in the day. I think he mentioned it only as a means of leading up to another phase—another phase of the subject. Wasn't that—ah—your idea, Warbeck?"

"Yes. I was leading up to it in order to avoid being too abruptly outspoken, I'm afraid." Warbeck laughed uncomfortably. "I meant to indicate that as the young people know that they can't have anything to drink at the Casino, except by way of a flask that has to be used with extreme caution to avoid permanent expulsion, some of them seem to have done their New Yarmouth priming a little too thoroughly at times—for better assurance that their exhilaration would outlast the party, I suppose. It's a case of that sort we're compelled to deal with, I'm afraid."

"What do you mean? You're beating about the bush before telling me that someone's been making an exhibition of himself at a Casino dance?"

"Well—yes; that seems to be it. Last night—both at the Casino and at the Gaskell cottage."

"That part isn't our affair at all," Vandenbrock intervened hastily, with an air of briskness. "We don't have to touch upon that—not as directors of the Casino certainly—we needn't go into it at all, George. What happened at the Gaskell cottage is a purely personal matter, George, and we needn't go into it here. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Gaskell had a big punch-bowl out in the pavilion; I tried it myself and it was merely laced with a little gin, I should think—very moderate. Still, as she did offer it, and also the usual amount of cocktails before the dinner—banquet, I should call it, a tremendous affair—what I mean to say is that as she herself included a certain amount to drink as a part of her own hospitality I don't think she's entitled, morally speaking, to make such a terrific fuss over what happened as she seems to intend. Most of the older people had gone home, anyhow—I know that Mrs. Corning had, and so had Warbeck and I and our wives. As a

matter of fact, my wife and I left when Mrs. Corning did, very early in the evening, and weren't aware of anything out of the way at all. I don't suppose over a fifth of the older people stayed late enough to go to the Casino for what was called the supper-dance, and so only that number of older people could have seen the occurrence—or either of the occurrences, perhaps I should say—perhaps I should say—"

"Perhaps you should say what?" Corning asked impatiently, beginning to be annoyed. "Will you be kind enough to tell me what you mean by 'occurrences'?"

Faced with this direct and severe question, Vandenbrock seemed to become merely helpless. "I—I really don't see how we can—go into it," he stammered. "That woman hasn't any right to demand such a thing of us!"

"No," Warbeck agreed. "She hasn't, and we don't do it upon her demand. We do it only in the hope of finding the simplest way out of painful difficulty." He drew a deep breath, looked at Corning compassionately and went on: "It's true that the directors of the Casino haven't anything to do with what happened at the Gaskells' cottage, George; but there is a connection. We ought to explain to you first that Mrs. Gaskell's in an incensed condition this morning. She's a rather shallow woman and has ambitions that would be more in place in burlesque opera than in Mirthful Haven; she wants to be our Lorenzo the Magnificent, I'm afraid, and her vanity about the shows she puts on might be defined as a ruling passion. Anyhow, she's in a fearful state this morning; her hospitality's been misused and her dignity as a woman and a hostess insulted. Something's got to be done about it or she'll go on the rampage all over the place; she's had Vandenbrock and me on the telephone half the morning and sent that dried bit of leather, Gaskell, around to both of us with terrible threats and demands. You see, she thinks the uproar spoiled her whole show."

By this time Corning was frowning darkly. "Well—what uproar?"

"Wait, George," Warbeck pleaded, with a placative gesture of the hand. "If we seem to be shilly-shallying, it's in the hope of placing the matter before you in its proper proportions, so that you won't take some features of it too much to heart. You must remember that Mrs. Gaskell's vanity was piqued at the outset of this season by your not putting Gaskell on our board. She's made it clear to us this morning that she thinks you and your family, feeling yourselves to be old colonists here, have consistently overlooked the importance of the Gaskells. Now, the simple facts about last night are these: a number of her younger guests were thoughtless enough to arrive almost at the end of her huge dinner, and she took that as an affront, to begin with.

Two of these tardy guests, a young man and his sister, had an altercation after the dinner—she says it was a noisy one, with language used that constituted a disrespect for the hostess. On that point what she said to Vandenbrock and me was this, 'They thought themselves so important that they could do anything they pleased in my house and at my party. I'll show them that they can't treat my hospitality as if they were buying it at Antoine Charette's speak-easy!' Well, at the Casino, later, the altercation I've mentioned was renewed and the young man knocked his sister's escort down, with results to a drum in the orchestra, I believe. Mrs. Gaskell insists upon an elaborate apology from both the young man and his sister—they are to call upon her and virtually plead for mercy, she seemed to make clear to us—or else she'll demand their expulsion from membership, and if we three don't act upon her demand Gaskell is to bring it before the open meeting of all the members on Monday. It's extremely painful to come to you with this, George, and of course you understand that Vandenbrock and I are here only as your collaborators in the interests of peace. We couldn't have kept it from you because there's no question but that the woman'll make a terrific fuss if she isn't placated."

"Kept it—from me?" Corning said in slow and perplexed inquiry. His burned complexion had reddened deeply, and, below the trimmed white moustache, his lips were parted as he stared at his two callers. Even yet he did not fully comprehend, though if that imagined mask of comedy had been a real one, over the mantelpiece behind him, its open mouth and his own would have worn the same expression. "Well—but—" he faltered. "Well—who—"

Vandenbrock got up, put his hands in his trousers pockets and went to a window, leaving to Warbeck the task of completing the information. "Your son, Wallace, and your daughter."

"You aren't telling me—"

"Yes, I'm afraid so. It's they of whom she complains—of course with a stress upon the knocking-down and the drum. It was the Munson boy who was knocked down by Wallace; but I believe she considers him an aggrieved party, like herself, and exonerates him from blame."

"This—this woman—she charges that my daughter, Agatha, and my son, Wallace, were—were—"

"Oh, look here!" Vandenbrock intervened, turning from the window. "There's nothing uncommon about young people getting a little too illuminated nowadays—girls or boys either. We all know it happens sometimes and that they get into scraps now and then; that sort of thing can't

be helped wherever there's a little too much imbibing. The only trouble about the affair is that there were too many witnesses and that this woman's vanity is so upset that it's going to take a lot of diplomacy to smooth her down. If it weren't for those circumstances there wouldn't be anything serious about it at all, George, and it could be practically overlooked. If it just hadn't happened that there were so many—"

"Never mind," Corning said, and he sat, breathing heavily, while the redness of his complexion still deepened. "I think," he said finally, rising, "I think perhaps I'd better speak to—to Wallace. Will you gentlemen do me the favor to wait here for me until I have seen him?"

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

AS HE descended the main stairway of the cottage he saw his younger son reflectively pacing the floor of the broad hall below. “Wallace is not in his room. Do you know where he is, Gordon?”

“Sir?” Gordon halted near the foot of the stairs and looked up, apparently a little startled. “You want Wallace? Well, I—I believe he’s having breakfast in the dining-room, sir.”

“Where’s your mother?”

“She’s not here; she went out quite early this morning, I believe.”

“Is Agatha in the house?”

“I—I think so, sir. Is there anything I can do—anything you’d like me to __”

“No; I want to speak to Wallace.” Corning had reached the foot of the stairs and turned in the direction of the dining-room; but Gordon put a hand detainingly upon his arm.

“Let me go and bring him,” the son said uneasily. “Let me—”

“Why, no; I’ll speak to him in the dining-room,” Corning interrupted, moving on; but again Gordon sought to detain him.

“If you’ll just wait a minute, sir, I—ah—”

“Why should I wait?” Corning asked gruffly, and went on with Gordon keeping pace beside him. “Why should I?”

“Ah—Agatha’s in there with him and—ah—” Gordon suddenly became more urgent. “I wouldn’t go in there just now, father—I really wouldn’t. If you’ll just let me—”

But he was interrupted by sounds that too clearly explained the motive for his attempted intervention, the voices of Agatha and Wallace wrangling clamorously. Corning strode to the closed dining-room doors and threw them open. “Do you want the servants to hear you?”

Agatha, pale, her eyes tragic above arcs of violet, stood facing Wallace, who sat at the table, lowering at her over the remains of a fragile breakfast. He had not yet dressed for the day but wore a figured green velvet dressing-gown, pyjamas and slippers; in his flushed face and moist uncertainty of gaze there was hint enough that he had felt the need of successive stimulants in order to sustain the shock of waking to a world painfully unlike the one indefinitely but cheerfully about him when he fell asleep. Upon his father's entrance, he got clumsily to his feet. "Sorry, sir. I'm late this morning. I'll go and dress."

"No, you won't! Gordon, shut those doors and come in. I think you'd better be the first to give me an account of last night. Speak up!"

"I, sir?" Gordon unhappily made an effort to appear surprised. "Last night, sir? Why, I was at Mrs. Gaskell's big show last night and just got terribly bored. I saw mother leaving rather early; but I stayed on and danced most of the time with Sally and Lena. Ah—it was pretty tedious and I was glad to get home finally and flop into bed."

"So that's all you know? You haven't any idea why Mrs. Gaskell has been to two directors of the Casino this morning with threats to demand the expulsion of your sister and brother from membership?"

"What!" Agatha cried loudly, while Gordon stood aghast and Wallace dropped back slowly into his chair. "You mean she dares to include *me* in this—"

"Be quiet, Agatha!" her father said. "I'll let you speak in your turn; but —"

"No, you won't!" she interrupted shrewishly. "You'll let me speak now!" She pointed a shaking, small forefinger at the chopfallen Wallace. "So that's something more you've got me into, is it, you sop? I'll show you what I'll do to you for it, you big bullying, lumbering, interfering—"

"Agatha!" Corning said harshly. "I tell you to be quiet!"

"I tell you I won't! He's worse than anything I can call him; but I guess I've got something up my sleeve that'll teach him to attend to his own business after this! He's been interfering with mine since the very first of the summer—butting in and acting as if somebody had given him charge of the whole earth and he was going to run it! He butts in enough when he's sober; but every time he gets himself pickled he thinks he's the king butter-in of the world and goes crazy for a fight with somebody. He's one of these 'four drinks and I love you, four more and I can lick the world' bugs! Last night he had about forty more, and he put up a dirty performance. He ought to get

the works for it, and I hope he will; but if that Gaskell woman tries to drag *me* into it—"

Wallace's temper, artificially brittle, gave way. "You'd better shut up!" he shouted, and projected a velvet-swathed arm across the table to shake a forefinger at her. "Just a little more from you and you'll get yours, young lady! I *was* going to keep quiet about your condition last night; but just about one more word from you now and I'll—"

"You be quiet!" his father cried, and struck the table with a powerful fist. "Both of you!" For the time being, he daunted them, though the furious desire of each to wreck the other was visibly unabated. "Wallace, I'll hear your statement," Corning said, and added bitterly, "If you're able to make one!"

Wallace tried to collect himself. "Very well, sir. I guess you know a good deal of the truth already—somebody seems to have been pretty busy this morning with information, and I don't suppose there'd be much use in trying to hold anything out on you."

"No, there wouldn't. You'd better tell the whole truth—or as much of it as you recollect."

"Why, I recollect all of it, sir," Wallace protested, aggrieved. "I doubt if I did anything much that you wouldn't have done in my place, sir—except—well, I suppose you already know that Gordon and I looked in on a cabaret that maybe you wouldn't have—"

"Yes, I know. 'Cabaret' is your euphemism for Charette's speak-easy at New Yarmouth. After the shocking things I've heard this morning, I'm not surprised to hear that you're an habitué; but that Gordon should have—"

"No, no," Wallace interposed hurriedly. "Gordon's out of this; he never went there except just to go along—and, I suppose I've got to say, probably with the idea of looking after me if I got foolish. What I'm trying to keep my mind on, it's just that going there last night is probably the only thing you wouldn't have done in my place, sir. I'd told Agatha a dozen times to keep out o' there and I'd told that Munson pup what I'd do to him if he took her there again. Well, I did it and—"

"Yes, you did!" Agatha broke in shrilly. "You big coward! You big bum! Hit him with his hands down and—"

"I told him to put 'em up!" Wallace shouted, turning upon her. "Yes, and I told you what I'd do if you said just one more word and now you've said it! I'll tell the truth about you and I'll prove it by Gordon." He swung round in his chair toward his brother. "Gordon, isn't it true that we caught her in

that speak-easy again last night with that pup and I made 'em get out o' there? Isn't that true? Isn't it true that when we got to the Gaskells' party we both saw that she'd had too much and was still hitting it up with him out of his flask? Isn't that true? Isn't it true that when I told them to cut it out damn quick she swore at me as loud as she could yell? When Mrs. Gaskell tried to hush her up didn't you hear Agatha tell her to mind her own damn business? Isn't that every word the truth? You tell father whether it's the truth or not, Gordon!"

Agatha went to Gordon, looking at him with an odd, cold inquiry in her eye. "All right, tell him," she said. "You tell father you know that although I might have spoken sharply to stop that big buttinsky's boorish persecutions I was absolutely self-possessed and did nothing that any perfectly sober lady wouldn't have done. Aren't you going to tell him that, Gordon?"

"But I can't!" the distressed young man groaned. "Father's got to have the truth now, Agatha. Don't you see this has gone so far that he's got to know the whole thing?"

"All right," Agatha said, and, as she turned away, she added enigmatically, "Now I won't be sorry that you're going to get yours, too, Gordon!"

"I suppose I will," he assented unhappily, by no means comprehending the implication of her threat. "You've involved the whole Corning family in mortification and naturally I can't escape that!"

"*I* have?" she cried, whirling upon him furiously. "*I've* involved the—"

"Yes, you have!" Gordon turned to his father. "I don't palliate what Wallace did, sir—it was my fault for not watching him so closely after we went over to the Casino. Lena and I were trying to reason with Agatha and I let Wallace get away from me—well, it was inexcusable of him; but I'll say this much, sir: I had the impulse to do just what he did, myself. It would be a great provocation to any girl's brothers to see her continually behaving as Agatha has with such a fellow as that Munson. The plain truth is, sir, she oughtn't to have been allowed to have anything to do with him from the first."

"Why?" Agatha asked, in a tone ominously quiet. "You mean because he's a 'native', don't you, Gordon?"

"No, I don't. I mean because—"

"Oh, yes; I think you do. I think you mean that."

"I do not!" Gordon protested. "I don't draw the line at this Munson merely because he's a 'native', sir; I understand that his family are perfectly

all right. I could say a few things about his general reputation if that were necessary; but I don't think you'll need any better reason for my drawing the line at him than that he's repeatedly taken my sister to a speak-easy."

"No," Corning assented grimly. "That's enough to insure our all drawing the line at him. I'm including you, Agatha."

"Are you?" she asked. "Just how are you going to enforce that?"

"I'll enforce it," her father promised. "He'll receive instructions this morning that he's never to set foot on these premises again. As for you, you'll remain indoors until we leave Mirthful Haven, except for a call of apology upon Mrs. Gaskell that you'll make with Wallace, and your mother will accompany you. Next summer I think it will be beneficial to you to take a trip in Europe under careful chaperonage. I think—"

"Oh, you think!" Agatha cried, and in her anguish became openly and ruthlessly vixenish. "You think and you think and you think! Do you suppose I didn't know how it would be? Do you suppose I didn't know beforehand that you three big kind men would stand together against me and I'd have to face you, alone? Do you suppose I didn't know you'd combine against me to keep Vinnie away from me and destroy all the happiness I've ever had in this life? You think you've got it all working out just perfectly to crush me, don't you? You won't get away with it so smoothly, I can tell you!" She turned fiercely upon Wallace. "You feel grand now, don't you, because you think you've ruined Vinnie Munson and me! Just let me ask you a question or two about your sweetie! What's the Corning family going to think of Mildred Kerr when I tell what I know about her?"

"What!" Wallace bellowed, jumping up. "Don't you dare even to mention her name! What's she got to do with—"

"You ask mother!" Agatha screamed at him. "You just ask mother what she knows about Mildred Kerr!"

"Why, you idiot—"

"Idiot, am I? Oh, no, not so big a one that I didn't see what was coming to me this morning from you three. I got up pretty early to tell mother what I happened to know about Mildred Kerr, and that's why she's out now. You wait till she comes home and you'll find out where your sweetie stands in this family from now on!"

"Why, you're crazy!" Wallace babbled. "Trying to drag Mildred into this —why, you're stark, staring—"

"Am I? Oh, no, I was only intelligent enough to break a promise I made to Vinnie that I'd never tell a secret he told me the night you got so stuck on

yourself for dancing the tango! He knew you and Gordon were always giving him the dirty high-hat for being a 'native', and he told me this secret because he thought it was a joke. He told me plenty, I guess you'll find when mother comes home this morning!" She laughed tauntingly. "I guess you'll find that if Vinnie's a 'native' he has at least the advantage of knowing what goes on in the village—even where Charette's liquor comes from and how it gets to him! Doesn't that seem to interest you any?"

"You're crazy!" Wallace said again. "You're absolutely—"

"Am I?" she cried, and exultantly continued to utter a taunting laughter as she spoke. "Stark, staring crazy, am I? You don't think there's any connection between Mildred Kerr and father's old friend, Pelter, who runs the liquor in from off shore for Charette? You don't think—"

"What did you say?" Corning interrupted sharply. "You said—"

"Want to make an investigation?" she asked scornfully. "The whole village has known for months that Pelter does the rum-running for Charette. Vinnie says they've all been laughing in their sleeves over the way that boob rum-chaser boat goes groping up and down the coast, with Pelter running whatever he pleases right into Mirthful Haven, night after night. No, I don't think you'll easily get away from the fact that father's old friend, Pelter, has taken a step up in the world and become a professional bootlegger! What's more, when mother gets home I think you'll be able to perceive a pretty direct connection between his business and dear little Miss Mildred Kerr."

"Look here!" Wallace said. "I'm making allowances for your having gone off your head; but if you mention Mildred's name again I'll—"

"You'll what? Hit me?" Agatha asked. "The way father and Gordon look, I guess they'd let you! Well, I'll try it! I'll see if they will." She came round the table and stood close to Wallace, facing him. "Now hit me if you want to; they probably won't interfere. Your little sweetie, Mildred Kerr, has a bootlegger's daughter for her best friend! Sounds crazy, does it? All right; I'll go on with some more craziness. Your sweetie's most intimate friend, the bootlegger's daughter, is known all over this village as a 'bad girl'—on the loose all her life, if you understand what I mean! That's what mother's gone out to inquire about, this morning; she's gone to Mrs. Munson first, then she was going to other reputable women in the village to get the whole story, and when she comes back I think she'll have it!" Agatha turned from Wallace. "Do you want me to go on, Gordon, or would you rather I'd wait?"

"I?" he said blankly. "I don't know what on earth you're talking about; I think Wallace is right—you've gone off your head."

"All right; I'll straighten you out about that. You've been so nice to me and so helpful about my friendship with Vinnie it'll do you good to hear more about Mildred's friend! It's the bootlegger's daughter I'm speaking of—besides the other thing wrong with her, she had a habit of being a little too light-fingered for Mirthful Haven, so she got taken away to be reformed; but it didn't happen. The reformation didn't, I mean. Want some more? All right! She came back here with a changed name—a changed name part of the time, anyhow—and Wallace's dear little Mildred sponsored her socially, made a big fuss over her, had her at Aunt Virgie's—oh, yes, here, too! Brought her right into this house—oh, dear, yes! Right at mother's tea-table! Why *shouldn't* she be here—precious Wallace's Mildred's darling best friend—"

But Wallace caught the enraged girl by the shoulders and shook her. "Why, you little liar!" he shouted. "What the devil do you—"

Agatha outshouted him. "Edna Shellpool!" she screamed. "Edna Pelter! That's who your Mildred's darling girl-friend is, Edna Pelter! Father's friend Pelter's daughter! Rum-runner Pelter's daughter! Edna Pelter!"

"You little liar! You terrible little—"

"Let me go!" Agatha screamed. "You talk about my Vinnie's being a 'native' and beat him up for it, what about Mildred's Edna? Yes, what about Gordon's Edna? Our own dear Gordon's Edna Pelter! You let me go, I say! Let me go or I'll—"

Her voice had risen excruciatingly, and her father, desperate and aghast, stepped forward to check her; but Mrs. Corning threw open the doors, rushed into the room and caught her sobbing daughter in her arms. "Let her alone!" the mother said; but her eyes went to Gordon, who stood across the room, his face white and stricken, his whole body shaking. For all that had so long been mysterious to him now fatally was mysterious no longer. "Gordon! Gordon!" his mother wailed. "I'm so sorry! It's all true—horribly, horribly true!"

Corning had seen an abashed figure hobbling away from the open doors as hastily as possible; he followed and overtook the secretary in the hall. "Tholineau, I utterly forgot that those gentlemen are waiting for me. I'll have to ask you—"

"They've gone, sir. They left almost immediately after you came down from your rooms. They asked me to tell you that they thought it better to leave matters entirely to you; they thought that since they'd made their position clear as entirely in agreement with anything you might decide upon they'd better withdraw. I happened to see Mrs. Corning entering the house

and thought I might come down to deliver their message. I'm very sorry if I seem to have intruded upon a—"

"Never mind," Corning said curtly, and stood for some moments in profound and frowning thought; but, in his silence, did more than thinking. Suffering and humiliation were within him, and, over them, almost submerging them, surged a bitterness. He had been proud of his children. Strict with them, he had nevertheless a tender and anxious affection for them. He was bitter but could not be bitter toward them; naturally, his bitterness had to find an object upon which to culminate. Such an object was at hand, one that had troubled him of old but never as it troubled him now, and he had borne with it overlong. Corning was a conscientious man and could not have brought himself to do anything whatever that he did not with firm conviction perceive to be right and good. Thus, as he stood in his hall for those few moments, his duty became clear and definite before him—his duty both as a wounded father and as a good citizen. He put his hand on the secretary's shoulder.

"Tholineau, we'll go up to my study for a little private talk. Do you happen to know anything about the coast guard patrol boat that we sometimes see alongside a wharf in the village?"

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

ALL that day Edna intermittently answered her urgent heart with the word, "To-morrow!" When she woke upon the morrow she whispered, "To-day!" As she set breakfast upon the table she said to herself, "Fifteen hours—ah, already a little less than fifteen hours!" She had dared only to hint to Gordon, in their hurried interview by the window, that she might meet him at the last of the Casino dances; she had dared only to hint as much to herself, for the departure of the compelling, protective hand of the impetuous Mildred renewed old tremors—yet all the time, of course, Edna meant to fulfill the hinted promise. "Fifteen hours!" and she would see him again—for the last time, maybe? No, there was no need to think beyond the meeting at the end of these fifteen hours. Tuesday—he would be leaving Mirthful Haven; but there was no need now to think of Tuesday, for this was only Saturday! She would think of nothing except to-night—of ten o'clock to-night. He would be there by that time, watching for her coming, counting upon the tentative pledge she had given him. "Fifteen hours—and now, ah, surely quite a little less than fifteen!"

At noon, in her overalls, she was patching a rotted board in the verandah flooring with a strip of new plank when she heard a pleasant pealing of church bells from the village and became breathless. "Twelve o'clock!" she thought, and the hammer trembled in her hand. "Ten hours—only ten hours to wait!"

Out upon the floats, at the end of the pier, Pelter had seated himself on an empty box, crossed his long legs and was engaged in a desultory conversation with Henry Marsh who sat in a rowboat and slowly backed water with his oars to maintain his position. The murmur of their voices came to Edna's ears but ceased during the almost silent passing of a craft from up-stream, a big dark grey boat that looked both seaworthy and swift; the two men turned to watch it casually yet with the estimating glance that seafarers give to any vessel. Leaving a bubbling lane of white water behind it, the patrol boat swept quietly down the harbor and stood out to sea. Henry Marsh bobbed placidly upon the curled edge of the wake, and resumed his

talk with Pelter; but Edna, rising, continued to watch the formidable grey shape.

It dwindled quickly, becoming no more than a black arrow-head upon the bright ocean; then it was not there at all and even the white fan that followed it disappeared. So did the anxiety in Edna's eyes; she was no longer much afraid of that boat, yet she was relieved. "Ugly thing!" she thought, light-hearted to see it setting forth upon some apparently distant mission. "Just a little while now and you'll never scare me again at all!" Then, as she turned into the house to put away the hammer and box of nails, her lips parted and her breath stopped for an instant with the thought of what another little while would bring her. "Ten hours—less than ten hours now! Already it's less than ten hours!"

So, through the long, sunlit afternoon, she marked the shortening of the time to elapse before the brilliant, reckless, happy moment when her lover would rush to her as she appeared in the high-arched doorway of a great room resonant with jubilating music. At last the hours were so few that she could subdivide them. "Three hours—a hundred and eighty minutes!" she thought, beginning to put away the dishes after supper. "A hundred and eighty minutes—and half of one of them must be gone already!"

Pelter had lighted his pipe and turned his chair about to face the open wide doorway, where were framed the harbor, its farther shore, distance and faraway coast twinklings, all washed over with pale green by the harmonizing twilight. Edna came as usual to sit at the other side of the table, bringing a book with her, though she failed to open it. "Got it fixed up pra'tic'ly complete," he said, after a time, not turning. "Henry Ma'sh and Web Hazzard and me. Come October, guess we'll be under way."

"I'm so glad!"

"Yes; guessed you'd like it. Guessed you'd like it—better."

"Oh, I do—I do!"

"Guess so," he said, and was silent, becoming contemplative. Presently he let his left arm droop over the arm of his chair and his fingers groped absently in emptiness at a little distance from the floor. "Godfrey!" he muttered. He thrust that hand decisively into his pocket lest it betray him again, then got up and lounged out to the pier, where he stood looking up reflectively at the darkening sky.

He would not go to sea to-night, Edna thought, and this was her thought because it was her hope; her heart could not be so light as she meant it to be to-night if she knew, while she danced, that he was somewhere out upon the

lonely dark water. How many of those one hundred and eighty minutes were left? “Less than a hundred and sixty! Half a minute less than a hundred and sixty!” She jumped up, went on tiptoe to the stairs, ran up them noiselessly, went to her room and lighted the lamp. She had put on grey silk stockings before supper; now she removed her apron and the brown gingham skirt and blouse she had worn during the afternoon, then took from her row of suspended garments a weightless ghost of grey chiffon that Gordon had not seen. She drew the lovely misty thing down over her head, smoothed it, patted it, fastened the filmy girdle with a big, old brooch of garnets her step-grandmother had given her, rearranged her hair at her mirror, slid her feet into dull red satin slippers that were near the color of her hair and sent forth tiny wine-colored sparklings from the small garnet buckles she had bought for them. Then, with reason, she smiled excitedly to the mirror, though it was a niggardly bit of glass and gave only her head and shoulders to view.

When she came downstairs, wrapped in her long white shawl, she found her father and old Wye seated at the table and beginning a game of checkers. “I’m going to run up to Captain Embury’s for a little while,” she said. “I’ll be back long before you go to bed, probably.” Neither of them looked up; her father only said, “Guess so,” and continued to study the checker-board.

Part of the time of waiting could be employed, she thought, in this errand. It was a belated one, too, for she had not seen Captain Embury since the day when she had let Mildred Kerr sweep her into dazzling adventure, and earlier upon that day Edna had pressed the Captain to make a fundamental change in his long-settled manner of living. Such a change was not only against his principles, he had protested; it involved peril both to his peace and to his collections; nevertheless, he had consented to it, since it was she who urged it upon him, and she should have gone before now to ascertain how well the experiment was succeeding.

It had been begun, she observed, as she turned from River Road and the Captain’s house was revealed to her in vague profile. Not only the dining-room windows but those of the kitchen as well were bright oblongs against the dark architectural mass, and previously she had never seen a light in the kitchen so late. She was pleased, and touched, too, by this visible proof of the weight her suggestions had with him, and, when she had gone round the corner of the house and rung the bell of the side door, she waited in the darkness, smiling, knowing securely that here was a place where she was welcome and held dear. Captain Embury opened the door, frowned incredulously, became radiant with recognition and began to chide her delightedly in his tempest-conquering voice.

“You! Thought you’d left me to swamp! Thought you were never comin’ back even to take a look at what you’d done to me! Thought you’d just let the old hulk go adrift! Well, well, so you didn’t have the heart to do it? Did come around at last, did you, to see if there was anything that could be salvaged!” He led her into the dining-room, where his evening fire added a fluctuating rosiness to the light of the lamps; then, stepping back from her to look at her, “Glory!” he exclaimed. “Fit to have your portrait taken, right this minute! Fit to sit for a picture with the finest artist in the world to take it of you!”

She laughed excitedly, thinking that perhaps younger eyes might find her pleasing—at ten o’clock! “Do you like this dress, Captain?” she asked, and, with an air of affectionate, bold coquetry, swung the shawl from her, dropped it upon a chair and stood before him.

“My soul and glory!” he shouted. “There couldn’t be any artist fine enough to take you—not to get anything a body’d be willin’ to call a likeness, no matter how handsome he could make his picture look. Been sittin’ here evenin’s, I have, workin’ out in my mind what terrible names I’d call you and all the dreadful things I was goin’ to say to you, next time I’d see you—if I ever did see you again!—and now you’ve come, why, my heart’s just turned to water! How’s a body goin’ to scold anyone who looks like that?”

The Captain’s exorbitant, genuine admiration enraptured Edna. “I must look—almost lovely!” she thought, and, upon a sudden impulse, so grateful she was, she put her hands upon his shoulders, bent forward and kissed him heartily. “I do love you!” she cried.

“My soul and glory!” the Captain gasped, and, suffused with happiness, shrewdly perceived the truth and made a wise generalization. “When the young say and do such beautiful things to the old, it’s because their hearts get to overflowin’—they want so much to say and do those things to some other young one! Do you think you could sit down without gettin’ too much mussed up?”

She took one of the two arm-chairs by the hearth; he sat in the other and made a rueful gesture toward a closed door behind him, whereupon Edna became aware of an intermittent clatter of dishes and pans from that direction. She nodded and said, “I know; but first tell me if you’ve had any more twinges. My father said he’d seen you at the post-office; but you hadn’t mentioned them.”

“Didn’t mention ’em because I didn’t have any. Only lasted a day or two. Never in better health in my whole life and never better fit to take care

o' my own house without any woman stampin' all over the place and singin' off key. Not singin' now because she's worn out with it, likely, and Charlie Boy's there with his stockin'-feet in the oven. Name o' Sillery, she is. Guess you don't know her—comes from 'way up at the other end o' town. Tried to make me a curry, she did. There's only one place in the world where they know how to make a curry, Bombay, and there's twenty-eight articles goes in a Bombay curry. Think anybody the name o' Sillery from the other end o' Mirthful Haven would ever have the least conception in the world of a curry? Only stand her because you—"

"But she is useful, isn't she?" Edna interrupted. "She does have your breakfast for you when you come down and—"

"What if she does?" he said argumentatively. "Always got it for myself in ten minutes, and other meals in fifteen or maybe twenty. When she isn't singin', she's talkin'. Begins talkin' to me the minute she sights me anywhere in the house. Then she's got Charlie Boy attached to her same as if he was something she's wearin'. Never heard any other name for him except Charlie Boy; his grandfather was a Portagee or something came here in ship-buildin' times; think his name was Boya, maybe. Anyhow, Charlie Boy's her boarder—been boardin' with her for eleven years, so of course he has to come here and have his meals, because she said no matter what, she couldn't turn Charlie Boy off. Mows lawns and rakes drives for the summer people; sits with his feet in the oven all winter. Great talker, too—worse than Lin Seabury. After dinner, sits with his stockin'-feet in my oven, where I don't like to have 'em, no matter if it's the warmest evenin' o' summer. Hark to 'em, will you? She's hard o' hearin' and he's got his voice pitched up that way permanently!"

He paused so that his caller might hear the vocal clatter now predominant in the kitchen; the two voices were speaking at once, and, if there were a distinction between them, the man's was the higher, twangier and more monotonous. "Broke out again," the Captain explained. "Shut up some when you first came in, hopin' to hear what we said, likely. Come in here pretty soon, they will, to say they're leavin' for the night, and they'll go on like that for as much as fifteen minutes. I'll say this for her: she hasn't broken anything yet, except a picture on glass of the Island of Capri where the Blue-de-Grot' is; but it's like livin' in the same house with a newspaper. If there's anybody's hen in the whole o' Mirthful Haven that's laid an extra egg any day this week, why, if Mrs. Sillery doesn't know it, Charlie Boy does, and I'm sure to hear about it!" Captain Embury paused again, glanced thoughtfully at his visitor, then turned his gaze to the fire. "For instance, I

don't suppose you've been a place since Mrs. Sillery came here that I haven't heard about."

"What!" Edna cried, her eyes opening widely. "But I don't know either of them; so how could they—"

"Oh, yes," the Captain said, nodding. "They know you when they see you. Besides that, Mrs. Sillery has a niece-by-marriage who helps do the laundry work at the Cornings'; and Charlie Boy does assistant gardener's work three days a week at the Vandenbrocks', next door to the Cornings'. Said the whole Point was talkin' about what a handsome fancy dance you did at the Casino, and Charlie Boy said one day you jumped out of a window at the Cornings' and ran home—the day your father's dog got killed. Said you played tennis at the Gordons' 'most every afternoon and—"

"What! Then how many people do you suppose know—"

"Wouldn't bother about that point," the Captain said. "Pretty close-mouthed, we are, except among ourselves, you know. I just mentioned these facts because I thought maybe you mightn't understand how much your father might know about 'em, and perhaps you'd like to tell him more than you have told him—especially in case he knows already—and it wouldn't do any good for him to think you were keepin' something back from him."

"Ah, yes!" Edna sighed. "You're right. I understand—and thank you. I've known all along that it was hurting him, because he either knew or guessed what I've been doing, and he thinks of those people as his enemies of course—"

"Now, now," the Captain said soothingly. "No call for you to look troubled about it; just thought I'd hint maybe you'd like to have it out with him before long. It's only a few days until all those people at the Point will be gone. You have your good time all you want—just thought maybe when they're gone you'd like to tell him about it!"

"Oh, I must! I will! I won't wait till then. I'll tell him—I'll try to—to-morrow. I'll tell him to-morrow, Captain." Edna rose and picked up her shawl. "I—I—really all I want is just this—this last night."

"You have your good time," he said, rising, too. "Don't let me spoil it with this idea of mine about your father—you can make it all right with him; he'll understand. The only thing I meant was that it might hurt him not to have you tell him. Well, now you're goin' to, just put it out of your mind until you do it. You can do that, can't you?"

"Yes," she returned, smiling and brightening. "Yes—just over to-night. I just want—"

“Of course you do! You have it, too! Dance at the Casino, isn’t it? You go up there and outdance the best of ’em! Everything’s all right and there won’t be anybody there that can dance—or look, either—within a mile of you!” He went to the side entrance with her, and, in the hallway, she took his arm affectionately as she walked beside him. He continued to express encouragement even after she had gone out of the house. “Fit to have your portrait taken by the finest artist in the world, right now!” he called after her, as she went toward the gate. “Finest artist in the world couldn’t take a portrait of you that would be anywhere near a good likeness. You have your good time and outdance the very last of ’em all!”

From the street she looked back and saw his sturdy figure still standing in the light of the doorway. He waved his hand to her, calling out a series of good-nights in a jovial voice; but his expression changed and became serious when there was no longer a possibility of her seeing it. He returned with slow steps to the dining-room, and there, not greatly to his pleasure, found his new housekeeper and her boarder waiting to bid him good-night. He would have liked to keep the room for a little while freshly reminiscent of the graceful presence just withdrawn from it. “Couple o’ weeds in a vase where there’s been a branch o’ lilac,” he thought, both gallantly and ungallantly. “Big gawky biddybody!” he went on, addressing the housekeeper mentally; and black-jowled, fat Mr. Boy, who looked like a well-tonsured Spanish monk in borrowed, shabby clothes, found no higher favor with the Captain. “Porpoise!”

“Come to bid you good-night, Cap’n,” Mrs. Sillery said. “Kitchen’s locked up, lights out and Challie Boy’s carryin’ the key fer me. Guess she’s goin’ up t’ the Casino. All I got to say, wish her joy of her evenin’. Guess maybe she’ll git it; guess maybe she wun’t. Ee-ah!”

“She means ‘yes’, Cap’n,” Mr. Boy explained affably. “When Mrs. Sillery says ‘Ee-ah’ like that, she always means ‘Yes’. It’s her way o’ speakin’ the word, you might say. Dun’t mean nothin’ p’tic’lar ’cept jest ‘Yes’.”

“I know what she means by it,” the Captain returned testily. “Heard her say it often enough! Well, good-night.”

“Good-night, Cap’n,” Mrs. Sillery said, not moving. “Guess you heard Freem Wicks and Matt Beale’s goin’ to lobster fer the new fish firm this winter. Leastways, they says they be. Ole Mrs. Dalley got took low agin last night; her man says he was s’prised to see her still in the land o’ the livin’ when he come downstairs, where her bed is, to git his breakfast.”

"Told me he never was more s'prised in his life," Charlie Boy added. "Had his breakfast, went out to feed the hins, come back, and she took and told him she had a mind to ast him to warm over what he left of his breakfast. Took and eat right hearty."

"Ee-ah." Mrs. Sillery confirmed this account. "Didn't do her no good; she never retained it. My marriage-niece come t' the kitchen door bit ago on her way home from workin' at Cornings'. Took her and their laundry-woman all week to git the clo'es done up, 'count o' gittin' ready to shet up the cottage. What she says 'bout the carryin'-on up there yestiddy puts me a-mind o' Long Harry's Edny goin' up t' the Casino to-night, if so she be. Ruckus goin' on all day 'mong them Cornings. Mrs. Corning come down t' the village early—"

"Wait a minute!" Charlie Boy interrupted. "I heard 'bout that 'fore you did. It was me that told you. George Thomas was in his wife's kitchen, and he told his brother, Will, and Will told Lin Seabury. I see Lin 'long 'bout noon yestiddy. Way it come about, I was in Pibuddy's buyin' me a whetstone and I kind o' noticed somebody walked up behind me, so I took and turnt round right quick and 'twas Lin Seabury. So I says, 'Why, howdy-do, Lin,' I says. 'What's the time o' day?' I says. So he says this here Mrs. Corning went to Munsons' fust; then went to some o' that ole Mrs. Shellpool's friends, like Clara Fogg and Mary Thomas. Inquirin', she was; wanted all the infamation she could git. Guess she got some."

"What about?" the Captain asked sharply. "What was she—"

"This here Edny Pelter," Charlie Boy informed him. "Put in the whole mornin' workin' on the facks, that there Mrs. Corning did. Started in up at Munsons' and kind o' made the rounds like after that."

"Ee-ah," Mrs. Sillery said. "Clara Fogg told her she was on the live-and-let-live side; maybe the girl might be brought to do right if they wun't no pushacution of her, maybe. Clara Fogg told her she didn't hold with them that thought there wun't no good 't all in the girl. Clara held—"

"That's the side I hold with, myself," Charlie Boy interrupted in a judicial tone. "It's what I says to more'n one of 'em. 'Less wait and see what kind o' conduck she's a-goin' to show us,' I says. 'Maybe we got to condemn her; but on the other hand maybe we hain't got to do no sech a thing,' I says. 'Jest watch her a while,' I told 'em. 'Maybe she's a-goin' to turn over a new leaf.' "

"Ee-ah?" Mrs. Sillery said, with an air of skeptical inquiry. "Maybe she be. Used to be a sayin' up't our end o' town: 'Turn over a new leaf and

maybe the side that comes up is wuss'n the one that's turnt down!' The way I look at the question—"

"Listen here!" Mr. Boy interrupted loudly, and explained apologetically to the Captain, in a lowered voice. "Got to stop her someways or she'd never quit!" Then, for the benefit of Mrs. Sillery, he resumed his high-pitched monotone. "What I was sayin', 'Give her a chanst,' I says, ' 'cause she might start in any time and turn over a new leaf.' Them's the very words I used to-day talkin' to Jeff Miller's mother, Ida, that married agin after she was sixty-eight; but he took and left her, so she's back. I see her down on River Road 'cross from Lodger's wharf no later'n nine o'clock this mornin'. Way, it come about, I see that cripple-man 't works fer Cornings down on the end o' the dock talkin' to the cap'n o' the rum-chaser that lays there sometimes, and I kind o' lolled around tryin' to make out what the cripple-man and the cap'n might be puttin' their heads together over; but I couldn't git no p'tic'lars 'cause they was so quiet it was kind o' 'barrassin' to go stand right nigh 'em. So 's I come away I see Ida 'cross the street, and I says, 'Hello, Ida!' I says. So I ast her what's the time o' day and all, and her and me had this convasation I'm tellin' you 'bout, Cap'n. Ida, she says they's a good many wun't listen to nothin' a body could say in her favor; wun't hear to a word! But I says, 'Give her a chanst,' I says. 'It may not look like it now,' I says;—'but watch and see what she does,' I told Ida. 'She might start in any time and turn over a new leaf,' I told her. 'She might __' "

"Who might?" the Captain asked sternly. "Who are you talkin' about?"

"Why, this here daughter o' Long Harry's—Edny Pelter. I told Ida, I says, 'Maybe she's awful corrupt now,' I told her. 'But if she turnt over a new leaf, why, then she wouldn't be,' I told her. I told Ida—"

"*What*!" the Captain roared suddenly and terrifyingly. "Told your grandmother, you porpoise! It's time I laid my cane over a few people's shoulders, and I'll do it if they don't learn how to speak o' their betters! Hell and damnation! Get out o' here! Both of you!"

He seemed about to advance upon the stricken pair; they went precipitately, scurrying across the room and into the hallway in order to leave by the side door, as was their custom, though Mr. Boy made an effort to cast about this flight the air of a routine departure, hurried merely as a casual incident. "Well—good-night, as I was sayin', Cap'n," he called in a polite, tremulous voice from the outer door. "See you to-morrow. Good-night and—"

A volcanic roaring, incoherent but suggestive of blasphemy, cut short the farewell. Mrs. Sillery and Charlie Boy went hastily upon their way; Captain Embury bolted and locked the door and returned to his fireside but did not sit down. For a time profane rumblings and mutterings came from him; gradually they ceased and he began to pace up and down the spacious room, while an ever darker and darker frown upon his brow betokened increasing disturbance within. About a quarter of an hour after the departure of the housekeeper and Charlie Boy, he struck the palms of his hands together with sharp decision; immediately he put on his soft hat and a light overcoat, tucked his Malakka cane under his arm, went out of the house and down the street to River Road. There he turned in the direction of Pelter's, walking briskly and keeping his uneasy eyes upon a row of faintly visible patches of light, the lower windows of that ramshackle shape in the dark distance.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

At Pelter's, Edna had come in softly. The wick of the lamp had been turned down a little but still burned; the checkers and the board were put away and the sliding-doors closed. Her father was upstairs in his room, she supposed, and probably asleep, though he might have gone to the village for another conference with his prospective partners, and of course it was possible that at any time before morning he would go upon a sea-errand, even that he had already set forth upon one. But at noon she had seen the patrol boat steer into a main-travelled course that would take it far down the coast—even if Pelter should go to sea, she insisted to herself that she need not be anxious about him to-night. She went first to look at the fly-specked, little nickel-plated clock upon a shelf behind the stovepipe and was so disappointed by the information it conveyed that she stood still to listen to its ticking. "No; you're going all right!" she thought. "Disgusting, poky thing! Ten minutes of nine. Fifty-five minutes before I even dare to start. How long that is!" Then, for the hundredth time, she began to tremble because of the very shortness of the waiting that seemed so long. Could he be counting the time as she did, sighing over the tedious length of it, trembling and growing breathless at the thought of its brevity? Ah, maybe he could; maybe he, too, had marked off the hours of the day and the dragging, flying minutes of the evening! At this very moment he might be looking at his watch and trembling as she trembled before the shabby little clock at Pelter's! He might!

She went upstairs, passed on tiptoe by her father's closed door, and, in her own room, after anxiously altering the arrangement of her hair, obtained a fresh reassurance from her small mirror. Then she descended, went out to the pier and began to pace back and forth upon its old planks under a clouded sky; but presently stood still, peering out at the water beyond the floats, where there was a vacancy, for the long slim motor-boat was not at its mooring. Her father had gone to sea, then; but he would be safe, and this must be the last, or surely almost the last, of his night ventures. To-morrow she would tell him the truth, and, as Captain Embury had said, "make it all right with him", for he would understand and forgive her. To-night how

much of the truth could she tell Gordon, and, if she could tell him all of it, how well would he understand? To-night—perhaps it would be better to let the truth stay where it was, veiled and remote. Like a toper, hesitating and then abruptly ordering another bottle, she suddenly made the decision to protect her happiness for at least this one last glittering night. "He'll know—soon enough!" she thought, and resumed her light and hurried pacing of the pier.

She resolved to remain outdoors and not to look at the ugly little clock again until she was sure that it would be ready, or at least almost ready, to show upon its face the signal that she might go; but presently there came to her ears a loud knocking upon the door toward the road. She entered the house, calling, "Come in!" and Captain Embury, opening the door, made his appearance with an air of apology. "Just happened to be walkin' by," he explained. "Often take the air of an evenin' like this, and saw the house was all lighted up downstairs, so I thought I'd just come in, though I knew of course you didn't expect to see me again so soon. I just happened along and thought I might as well—"

"Of course, Captain! You'll sit down, won't you?"

"Well, don't know but I might," he said, acting upon the suggestion. "Clouded over since nightfall; breeze from due no'th freshenin' up some—makes quite a little chop a bit off shore, this breeze does. Dark, too; but the moon's up and if the clouds break some—they show signs of it, here and there—might make it brighter. Hard to tell. Well, I just happened by and thought I might step in a minute, though I was afraid perhaps you'd already started for that dance you had in mind to go to."

"No; it isn't quite time yet, not for a little while."

"I see." The Captain glanced thoughtfully about the room. "You wouldn't mind if I lit one o' these old Manila cigars o' mine, would you? Suppose not, rememberin' the kind o' tobacco your father uses in his pipe. Often see him buyin' it down at Pibuddy's, and I guess he gets tired o' my always askin' him the same question, what he's goin' to fumigate." Captain Embury lighted his cigar and chuckled as he went on: "Always laughs, though, like a good friend. There's hardly any better way to tell friendship than if a man keeps on all his life bein' ready to laugh at your old jokes. By the way, I suppose he's gone to bed, hasn't he? Upstairs asleep, most likely?"

"No; his boat was gone when I came back. But to-night I'm sure there isn't any danger for him—I'm sure there wouldn't—"

"No, no," the Captain said hurriedly. "No danger. No danger at all. I just happened to wonder if he might be at home; that was all."

"Something you wanted to see him about?" Edna asked.

"No, no; nothin' special—nothin' at all, in fact." He paused, his attention seemingly caught by the altering blue shapes the smoke of his cigar was forming. "Well—I suppose these dances up at their new Casino are right pleasant? Pretty place, is it?"

"Yes—beautiful, I think."

"I suppose so. Lots o' nice, gay young people, all lively—and friendly—I suppose?"

"Yes, Captain."

"And the young man?" Captain Embury laughed placatively, still watching the smoke of his cigar. "I mean the one that has what the ladies used to call 'burnin' eyes'—young Corning. Since you and he have been seein' so much more of each other I suppose there might be something like a pretty good understandin' between you, by this time?"

"I—I'm afraid not. I'm afraid it can't be called that. He's said that he—that he cares for me—"

"Yes. And you told me that you—"

"Oh, yes!" she murmured. "Yes, I do! I do!"

"I see. But you wouldn't like to call it an understandin' between you because he hasn't heard yet that your real name isn't Miss Shellpool. I see. What kind o' puzzles me a little bit—I just happened to be thinkin' of it—I was wonderin' if he did come to hear about that—some time, maybe—and his family, too, all o' those Cornings, say, and suppose maybe they'd found out about it—some time, say—and you didn't know they had: well, it struck me it might be kind of a danger, in a way, as you might put it, and maybe you ought to be a little careful about gettin' into it without takin' some measures beforehand to avoid it, possibly. You see what I mean, don't you, Edna?"

"Yes, of course. I've thought of it all the time; but it's a danger that doesn't exist more at any one time than at any other."

"No; of course that's so. As you say, it exists all the time and—and that naturally includes this time right now, for instance. I mean, for instance, this evenin'—"

"To-night?" Edna had not sat down; she had been leaning back against the new table; but at this she started, stood straight suddenly and spoke in a

sharp, tremulous voice. “No, not to-night! I—I couldn’t let anything interfere with to-night, Captain!”

“Well, of course I hope not. I didn’t want to say anything to spoil your __”

“No!” she repeated. “I couldn’t—I *couldn’t* let anything interfere with to-night!”

Captain Embury sighed a long sigh, and his expression became profoundly compassionate. “It’d be a shame to interfere with it,” he said. “It’d be a terrible shame to interfere with it. I know—I can remember—what a few hours’ happiness sometimes means to the young. They set everything upon it. They say, ‘Give me this one night—and after that, let come what may!’ ”

“Yes! That’s what I’ve been saying all day! It’s what I’m saying now!”

“Of course it is. Well—” He paused, glancing about him. “Haven’t an ash-tray anywhere handy, have you?” She brought him an earthen saucer; he tapped his cigar against its edge, thanked her and seemed thus to have found a proper prelude for a change of subject. “I was just wonderin’, since you’ve been up at the Point among those people, you haven’t happened, just by chance, maybe, to hear ’em mention your father, I suppose? Didn’t happen to hear any of those Cornings or Gordons or any of ’em say something that would seem to show they had some idea what business he’s been engaged in with this Charette? Didn’t hear anything like that, did you, by chance, maybe?”

“No. Why?”

“Well, it’s most likely a coincidence and nothin’ worse,” the Captain said musingly. “Don’t suppose it amounts to anything at all, only—only there’s just one chance in a thousand that it might. You happen to meet that lame man, Corning’s secretary?”

“Mr. Tholineau? I’ve just met him. At their house day before yesterday, I think, at tea.”

“Seemed friendly, did he?”

“Why, yes,” she answered, staring. “Everybody did.”

Captain Embury nodded, and his expression showed a slight relief. “Then it’s most likely nothin’ more than a coincidence. I just happened to hear that the lame man had a quiet talk this mornin’ with the young fellow that’s in command o’ that patrol boat. Of course such a thing doesn’t necessarily mean anything at all—might be an old friend of his. Might be his brother, for all I know.”

“Why, yes,” Edna said quickly. “I don’t see any significance at all in that, Captain. I don’t even see a coincidence. Everybody goes to look at that boat when it’s at the wharf—people get to talking to those men.”

“Yes, of course they do, and there’s no good reason to think that Corning’s secretary had anything special to say to that young fellow. It only occurred to me that there might be something in it on account of some other gabble I happened to hear. Biddybody’s gabble, it was.”

“Gabble about me?”

“Not to your discredit,” Captain Embury said quickly. “In the first place, there isn’t any such thing to be gabbled about, and, in the second, you don’t suppose I’d let anybody do that kind o’ gabblin’ before me, if I understood what they were tryin’ to say, do you? No, no; this was just gabble that came through the help up at Cornings’ and only concerned the doin’s o’ some o’ that family.”

“Something you heard since I left your house this evening, Captain?”

“Yes; so it happened. It just occurred to me that as you mightn’t have started to go up to the Casino I might maybe just as well walk down this way and—”

She interrupted him sharply. “You mean you came on purpose to tell me something? You mean you want to say something to me that would stop my going there now?”

“Well—maybe. Well—yes. Edna, I’m afraid—”

“Don’t do it!” she said loudly. “Please don’t do it, Captain Embury! Don’t tell me anything that would keep me—”

“You poor child!” he said, rising. “Edna, I’m afraid—”

“No, no! Please don’t! Captain, you mustn’t—”

“You poor child! Edna—”

“No, Captain, no! Please—”

They were speaking at the same time, she entreating and the Captain sorrowfully persistent, when they were interrupted. There was a rapid clumping of rubber boots upon the wooden platform outside, the door was flung open and Hugo Wicks strode into the room, panting after a hard run. “Edna—” he began; then, seeing the Captain, took off his rough cap. “Excuse me, Cap’n; didn’t see you at first. What I want—” He paused to get his breath. “What I come fer: Edna, do you know if your father keeps any rockets in the house? Got any rockets at all? Or even Roman candles? They

won't do no good; but we want to use 'em jest to keep tryin'. Got any fireworks 't all in the house?"

"No; there aren't any. Why?"

"Sure your father never kep' any rockets?"

"There aren't any, I tell you! Why?"

"Then there ain't any anywheres!" Hugo groaned, wiping his forehead with his sleeve. "None of us got any. There ain't any in the village and none nearer'n New Yarmouth. Wouldn't have time to get none from there, anyhow."

"What's in distress?" the Captain asked quickly. "Who do you want to signal? Speak up!"

"It's 'count o' that rum-chaser," Hugo said. "She went out this noon like she was headin' fer Wenmouth like; but she'd put one of her men ashore. Nobody thought nothin' o' that because he went right off with a suitcase in a summer taxi towards New Yarmouth, like he had shore leave; but he must 'a' sneaked back. He was up on the Point, come night, on them rocks front o' Cornings', where it's highest. Lin Seabury and Web Hazzard see him there and watched to find out what he'd do. Right about then, Long Harry come out o' the river; 'twas jest a quarter before nine o'clock; they couldn't see him but knowed by the sound of his engine, and that fellow up on them rocks, he knowed it, too. *He* had rockets, dang him! Because by the time Long Harry'd got three four mile' out he sent up three of 'em. Long Harry wouldn't notice 'em, steerin' with his back to shore, anyhow, and if he did happen to see 'em he'd think it was jest some summer people foolin' around. That'd be the trouble with our sendin' up some of 'em now, if we had 'em; but my father thought 'twas anyways wuth tryin'. Might give Long Harry the idea somethin' was wrong somewheres."

"How do you know there's anything wrong?" the Captain asked impatiently. "Just because that man sent up—"

"How'd we know there was anything wrong?" Hugo echoed. "My Godfrey! After he sent up them rockets, didn't that rum-chaser come slidin' back out o' nowheres and lay right off the mouth o' the habbuh? Layin' there now, right in Long Harry's track where he's got to come to get in. She's a-layin' half-way between Mile Rock and the breakwater, and he hasn't got a chance 'less we can find some way to stop him before he gets in range of her, and God knows *I* can't think o' none!"

Edna, who had become deathly pale, uttered a sound; but it was only that, an incoherent monosyllable. The Captain put a firm hand upon her arm

and said harshly to Hugo, “Aren’t there any boats in Mirthful Haven? A man’s got a right to get into his boat and go where he pleases, hasn’t he?”

“Already done that, Cap’n—all there’s been time fer. Lin Seabury and Web Hazzard only stopped to tell my father; then they run down to Finn Peters’s and got him out with his old one-lunger. Lin Seabury went with him to lay out beyond Mile Rock, if they could get there in time, and Web Hazzard’s boat, it’s a mite faster than Finn’s, he was goin’ to try to lay farther out; but you can see yourself, Cap’n, how much chance they got tryin’ to hail a man in the whole Atlantic Ocean when they don’t know what his course is and him runnin’ at the speed he does. Anton don’t know the course fer to-night himself; said so on the telephone. My father’s boat’s got a cracked cylinder, so we couldn’t go, and there ain’t another layin’ up t’ the village that would get out the habbuh in time to do any good, now. All the rest of us could think of was to try to give him an idea there was somethin’ wrong—built a big fire; but he’ll most likely think it’s jest a clam-bake.” He turned to Edna again. “Dang it! You *sure* there ain’t no rockets in the house anywheres?”

She stood staring at him, her hands pressed tightly upon her breast, and she tried to speak, but, being unable, shook her head; then turned, ran out through the open doorway, across the wooden yard and down River Road toward the sea. Hugo ran after her, though he could not overtake her, and Captain Embury followed, beginning to swear continuously under his breath.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

AGAINST the black sky the big bonfire flamed from the highest of the dunes, and an old, old dramatic fragment of inconsequent history was repeated upon the borders of an ocean that must have forgotten how many centuries ago its surface first broke out a red lane of leaping reflections from a smuggler's warning beacon. Captain Embury, making his way through the dunes, saw scurrying silhouettes between him and the flaring brightness, figures laden with ragged shapes of driftwood; old Wye's hut, near by, within its irregular paling fence, seemed not actual but the rosy nightmare of a habitation. One of the figures, a burly one, moved away from the fire upon the Captain's approach and came to meet him.

"Guess you better take command here, if you're willin', Cap'n," Freeman Wicks said. "Trouble is, Long Harry's b'en so cluss-mouthed he hain't never taken nobody into his confidence, not even old man Wye. If he'd ever jest only 'a' said to Wye to build a bonfire, case the rum-chaser showed up—but they never had no sech understandin', so we don't know whether we're doin' right or wrong. Henry Ma'sh and Hink and Ed, they're here now, but too late to git their boat out 'cause it's cumbersome and hauled out o' water fer caulkin'. Finn Peters's one-lunger hain't got much out beyond that rum-chaser yet—stopped on him a couple o' times and he had hard work gittin' her started up ag'in. You can hear him yet out there, if you face that way and hold your hands behind your ears. Web Hazzard seemed to be workin' off to westud, like 's if he thought Long Harry might be comin' from over Old Bareface way. Trouble is, he's jest as likely as not to shoot right in half-way between 'em or from anywheres t' the east, and if he does they'd be 'bout one chanst in a million of his seein' 'em swing a lantern 'fore he got too cluss on t' the rum-chaser. Course, if either of 'em does git nigh him, all he's got to do is to heave his cases overboard and come right into the habbuh slick 's a whistle; let 'em ask him all the questions they're a-mind to! Trouble is, he'll either think this bonfire's a house afire, or summer folks rollickin', likely; but buildin' it and gittin' them two boats out, it's all we've had time to manage. Done the best we could. Can you think of anythin' else you'd like to tell us to do, Cap'n?

"No," Captain Embury said, and looked up at the sky. The darkened sea and all the earth seemed to lie within a vast enclosure of low clouds, yet the solidity or their great mass was impaired by vague grey paths of muffled brightness. Here and there, vaporish outlines were discernible and to the eastward a thin hint of light stealthily increased—almost a silvery rim appeared. "Except pray," the Captain said. "Pray for a break in the clouds that'll let the moon through long enough for him to sight that boat, himself. If he sees her before he's too close onto her, you can trust Long Harry Pelter to take care of himself."

"Couldn't sight her now, by Godfrey, Cap'n! Pretty black out there and we can't see her ourselves, though we know where she's a-layin'. We thought some o' shootin' off rifles or shotguns maybe; but it didn't look like any chanst he'd take note of it, with the chop agin him and his engine roarin' like it does. Do you think it'd be any use, Cap'n?"

"No. Just pray for that moon!"

They had reached the crest of the dune, near the fire; Henry Marsh and Hugo came to join them, while Marsh's two brothers and Wye and Edna continued to bring fuel and throw it upon the flames. Bareheaded, his wisps of white hair flying, Wye showed a startling activity as he ran back and forth with Edna, between the fire and a diminishing pile of driftwood behind his shack. He was always beside her, talking incessantly: "Git wood! More wood! More wood! Lugged it home all summer long fer the winter. No matter! No matter! Pile it on! Pile it on! Pile it sky high, girl! Pile it sky high, 'cause your father ain't no man ever to let no other man take aholt of his arm and lead him away. He'll turn hell upside down 'fore they tech him or his boat! More wood! Pile it on, girl! Pile it on!"

"Pile it on! Pile it on!" she gasped, running beside him and repeating almost everything he said, though she did not know that she was doing so.

Upon the other side of the fire all five of the fishermen gathered about the Captain. "Don't see no use heapin' her up any higher, do you, Cap'n?" one of the older Marshes inquired. "Can't be no doubt but he'll be able to see her as fur out as you please. Only question is, would it maybe give him the notion somethin' might be amiss. Think so, maybe, Cap'n?"

The Captain glanced toward Edna; but she was running back again to Wye's yard and could not see him. He shook his head, and, at that, a complete silence fell upon the group about him; but after a time Freeman Wicks said in a low voice, "Who's yonder?"

A square-shouldered, short young man, in neat blue clothes and a flat-topped blue cap, had emerged from the cluster of sandy hillocks behind

them, and Hugo Wicks recognized him as the member of the patrol boat's crew who had been left ashore. "Him that sent up the rockets," he whispered.

The stranger approached the group and addressed himself composedly to Henry Marsh. "Think you're goin' to do a lot of good with that bonfire? Big idea, what?"

Henry looked at him for several slow moments, then turned to Hugo and said casually, "Hear mack'rel's up a couple o' cents over at New Yarmouth sence yestaday."

The young man from the patrol boat laughed and turned toward the Captain, whom he supposed to be a chance spectator wandered down from one of the cottages. "Beat hell, don't they, these birds! Probably if you've been here long you've had some experience yourself, sir, tryin' to get a word out of 'em unless your grandfather was one of their great-aunt's pall-bearers! They know the water, though, and how to handle a boat—and some of 'em may hate each other; but let one of 'em get in a pinch out yonder, and, my God, you'd think he was twin brother to all of 'em! I'll certainly have to say that for 'em!" He turned again to the fishermen. "No occasion for hard feelin's, boys; we're just doin' our duty, which is to keep contraband out o' the country. We knew there was a leak along about here somewhere and noticed this bird's boat once or twice, saw it was pretty good; but we took it for probably just a party-boat. Sized her up; don't believe she can do better than twenty-eight. We turn up better than that, ourselves, so it's all right." He laughed again, amiably. "Perhaps you boys wonder why we didn't lay inside the harbor and make it easy for one of you to just stand out on the breakwater and tell him about it when he came up. You'll have to hand it to us for being at least that wise to the kind of birds you are, won't you?" Then, amused, he once more addressed Captain Embury. "If I keep on talkin' to 'em they'll begin to tell each other some more about the price of mackerel at New Yarmouth! Well, this here Mirthful Haven is a fine, lovely, go-ahead small city! We'd never have got this bird, Pelter, if some of you people up at the Point hadn't shown a little friendliness."

"I understand so," Captain Embury said slowly, turning for the first time to look at the young man. "I understand that your commander had a hint from someone of considerable importance."

"Certainly did! Biggest man in the place, I hear he is. Sent up my rockets from right in front of his cottage; his secretary picked the spot for me—that high rock over on the cliff yonder. No harm in lettin' it out now; we certainly got a good break." His eye wandered, to widen with astonishment

as it became cognizant of Edna; she was running toward the fire, bringing more driftwood in her arms, with the brilliant rosy light of the flames full upon her. The young man edged closer to the Captain. “For heaven’s sake! Who’s that? Who’s the summer dame in the party dress and what in hell is she doin’ here?”

Captain Embury made no reply. Instead, he turned away and began to walk toward Edna, but stopped, with half the distance traversed, and looked at her. She had thrown her armful of wood upon the fire and was in the act of turning back toward Wye’s yard, when suddenly her lips parted with the half-stifled cry that came from them; she lifted her hands to her cheeks, held them there, and her whole figure became rigid. Freeman Wicks said, “Godfrey!” in a loud whisper; then all of the five fishermen, standing together, seemed to lean a little forward, like a sculptured group upon a pedestal that tilted slightly. From far away—from the unseen horizon, it seemed—there came a faint, ceaseless humming like the sound of a distant airplane.

The surf was so small that it made only a watery whispering against the rocks and along the beach. The distant humming became clear and distinguishable to all ears, and from nearer by, just then, other sounds were borne fitfully upon the air: drums in a tom-tom cadence, tiny clashings of brass cymbals, a thin stream of fiddling and the cackled laughter of a saxophone. An accompanying vocal murmur signified that many of the dancers were singing the air played by the orchestra, and the square-shouldered young member of the coast guard, recognizing the fox-trot, began to sing also, enunciating the words with a clarity that proved how much they pleased him.

> “*Sweetheart, I never did see eyes so blue!*
> *Sweetheart, tell me: Do you love me true?*
> *Sweetheart, honest, I do love only you.*
> *Sweetheart, I am right*
> *Where you’ll find me in the night—*”

He broke off abruptly, made serious by the rapidity with which that distant humming was growing louder. “Look here!” he exclaimed. “I don’t know about this. That bird may have a little more speed than what we thought!” To his right, as he looked out to sea, the dune sloped down to buttress itself upon the landward end of the great stone pier at the harbor mouth. He descended the sandy declivity, and, with an air that had become somewhat restless and uneasy, walked out upon the narrow row of granite blocks that crowned the breakwater.

The incessant hum in the air was much louder now. It had become a deep and powerful throbbing; but, beneath it, quieter and yet deeper and more powerful, there was another throbbing, a subterranean low thunder that came from the engines of the dark boat lying athwart Pelter's path to the harbor mouth. "Look!" Hugo said suddenly, and seized his father by the arm. "The rum-chaser's movin' closer in! You can see her—I see the light o' the fire twinklin' on a port window! She ain't an eighth of a mile off the end o' the breakwater. She's a-swingin' around to be head on to him when he comes! Don't you see her?"

"Yes, by Godfrey, I do!" Freeman Wicks groaned. "And by Godfrey Mighty, sounds to me like Long Harry's headin' straight in! Web Hazzard got 'way too fur off t' the westud, and Peters and Seabury never got nowheres; drifted off east. They can swing their lanterns till Judgment Day, he'll never see 'em! Listen how his engine's a-roarin'! He's cluss onto Mile Rock; the way he's a-roarin', he can't help but be. He's cluss on—No, he ain't; he's wuss'n that! By Godfrey Mighty, he's this side o' Mile Rock, and now it's all up to the feet o' the Lord!"

The air seemed to be filled with the deep, unbroken throbbings of the two boats, and old Wye, close by the fire, lifted his ragged arms over his head and beat the air with gestures of warning. "Hot dam you, Long Harry!" he cried. "Look at me! Can't you see me? You could see me if you tried, hot dam you! *Look* at me a-motionin' you to swing that wheel o' yourn! Put her over, hot dam you! *Hard* over!" He began to leap up and down in the firelight, flinging up his arms, so that the tatters of his torn sleeves seemed to imitate the leap of the flames, and the contortions of his macabre, bent body, repeated in black upon the convolutions of sand behind him, were like the death dance of some grotesque and monstrous insect. "Put her hard over, I tell you! Put about, you hot dam fool! Turn back with the wind, dun't come into it! Turn back, you hot dam fool, Long Harry! Turn back!" His utterance had become a screeching, shrill and falsetto, broken by mere momentary fragments of the deeper voice that had been his in his prime. "Turn back straight on your course while you still got the chanst, I tell you! Hain't you got no ears, you hot dam fool, Long Harry! Hain't you got no ears—hain't you got no *ears*—"

Freeman Wicks shouted suddenly and loudly, "Look out!" yet was unaware that he made this futile sound.

The darkness over the water had just been cleft by the patrol boat's searchlight pointed straight out to sea, and, precisely at the centre of its startling circle of brilliance, there was revealed a lifted bow between two

white wings of sprayed foam—Long Harry riding at top speed directly into the searchlight and not two hundred yards from his enemy. The dazzling flare full in his face, and the knowledge of what was there, close before him, must have leaped upon him with an equal suddenness; but his action was almost as instantaneous. From the shore they saw the swift wide movement of his arms upon the wheel; his boat, head on, swung instantly into profile, heeling far over upon an abrupt curve to his left, careening through the white water so that it almost showed its keel. Then, straightened, it shot thundering upon its new course; the patrol boat heaved forward, rushing in pursuit—there was the sound of a voice bellowing through a megaphone—and the searchlight, never swerving from Long Harry, seemed to grow brighter upon him as the two boats tore the water of the channel, swept across it and bore toward the coast beyond the harbor mouth. Straining eyes from the sand dune saw Long Harry turn from his wheel for one instant to wave a beckoning, mocking hand. "Come and see!" it seemed to say.

Old Wye understood that gesture; he had not abated for a second the excruciated activity of either his voice or body. "Follow him, hot dam you!" he yelled. "Follow Long Harry straight into the Goat Yard, you sculpins! He'll show you! He knowed you was faster'n him—knowed too much to let you run him to sea! Follow him into the Goat Yard and tear your bottom out on them jaggy rocks, hot dam you! Can't neither of you cross that reef; but you draw more water'n what he does and he can go fur beyond what you can 'fore he strikes! There you go! Doin' what he meant you to! Fair into the Goat Yard, ain't you! Long Harry's showin' the whites of his eyes at you now, I bet, same 's he used to do! Followed a bad horse this time, you sculpins, and now he's got you! Watch what happens to you—watch what happens to you—" Then Wye leaped higher, flinging the tatters of his sleeves wildly overhead, as a splintering crash was heard from that water Long Harry had called a sea-graveyard. "*Struck*, by Orry!" Wye's voice broke into a vindictive cackling of laughter. "Struck, you sculpins! Follow Long Harry Pelter into the Goat Yard, would you? Struck, hot dam you! Struck!"

The patrol boat, too impetuous in so sudden and close a pursuit, had been betrayed into entering the sombre maze of the Goat Yard at a furious speed. Its risen bow passed over a submerged flange of the reef; but the keel struck amidships, the bow banged down, propellers beat themselves out of shape, a shaft broke, the crippled boat scraped forward and was fast upon the rock. Yet a cripple may be dangerous; those strained eyes from the dune saw the searchlight vanish, and, in the very instant of its vanishing, they saw Long Harry throw his dinghy overboard and leap into it. More, in that same

last instant's existence of the white, round light, the watchers by the fire heard a sound like the quick regular pattering of a Fourth of July bunch of firecrackers exploding in sequence along a common fuse; then no more was heard from the darkness of the Goat Yard.

"Had to kill him!" Wye screeched. "Had to kill him to git him, hot dam you! Hain't got no more sense than to kill a man 'cause he shows more brains 'n what you got!"

Edna turned from the sea, and, with Wye staggering after her, ran down from the dunes toward the bank of the harbor. "Lookin' fer a boat," Freeman Wicks said in a low voice, explaining her action, as he followed with the Captain and the two older Marshes. Henry Marsh and Hugo were before them, trying to overtake Edna. "Guess she's right. Find a rowboat and git out to him quick 's we can. It's the only thing to do. Cap'n, as I made out, Long Harry see they was goin' to do some o' their hellish shootin' and got over in his dinghy to git out the way of it. He's an awful quick man; but they couldn't 'a' b'en a hunderd ya'ds from him when they done it. They *could* 'a' missed him, though, couldn't they? They's anyways a chanst of it, ain't they, Cap'n?"

"At that—at that range?" the Captain said, and then, looking upward, cursed the moon. "Look at it! Out now—bright and strong—just too late. Ten minutes ago—"

He stopped speaking, for they had come to the edge of the harbor at a little distance behind the breakwater. Edna, with Hugo and Henry following her, could be seen running along the shore in the direction of Pelter's; but suddenly Freeman Wicks called to them loudly: "Come back! Edna Pelter! Come back! Come back, all of you!"

From just beyond the breakwater he had heard leather-wrapped oars moving against oar-locks, and then the light of the tardy moon made hazily definite the figure of a man in a small boat rowing into the harbor mouth; it was Pelter in his dinghy. The strokes of the oars were irregular, seeming labored, and, just as Edna and the two young men returned to the other group, he stopped rowing and bent forward, with his arms folded and resting upon his knees.

"What's he stopped rowin' fer?" Hink Marsh asked in a whisper. "Guess it's natural he's tired like, though, and the tide'll do it fer him. It's bringin' him in—"

Edna called in a sweet, low voice to the silent figure in the rowboat. She used a word she had not spoken, in addressing him, a dozen times since she was a little child. "Father?" She waited a moment and called again.

“Father!” When, at that, he did not speak or alter his attitude, she jumped down from the bank and into the water, splashed forward a few paces, wading, then launched herself toward the boat, swimming, and reached it in twenty strokes, for the tide had now brought it that close. She caught the bow with both hands, drew herself up over it and into the boat. She knelt close behind her father, bent forward, took the oars and began to row toward the shore; but, as they neared it, he made an abrupt movement, leaning back against her. She let the oars go and put her arms about him. “Father—they didn’t—you aren’t—”

But now the fishermen were all in the water. Captain Embury was before them; immersed to his shoulders, he was the first to reach the boat and begin to pull it to the shore. The bow grounded and there was a moment of confusion, of husky, lowered voices at variance. “Let’s git him out on the grass—” “No, we better row the boat up to Pelter’s and take him in there—” “No, better let him stay till we git a doctor, ’cause—” “No, better carry him up to the fire where it’s dry and we can—”

Captain Embury checked them with a word. “Hush.” As he stood looking down in the pale light that fell upon the bedraggled girl, he saw how red had already become the wisps of drenched chiffon that hung upon her, and he saw, too, how Long Harry groped with a hand that sought his daughter’s. She caught the wandering fingers and pressed them to her lips. “Father, I wasn’t at the Casino—I wasn’t dancing—”

“Goin’ to let him lay here?” old Wye whimpered, shivering. “Ain’t you a-goin’ to—”

The murmured suggestions broke out again; but this time it was Long Harry who checked them, and, like the Captain, he said only one word. He said it with difficulty but in a natural, quiet voice. “Wait—” That was all. He moved his head a little forward to speak, then let it recline again, gently, upon his daughter’s breast. But to Captain Embury, seeing the final change that came upon the tilted face, it seemed that Long Harry Pelter had said more than a single word. He had not wished to be moved just then, and Captain Embury, then and afterward, thought that what Long Harry said was, “Give me just a moment to die.”

CHAPTER THIRTY

ONE of those "heat waves" that like to submerge the earliest briskness of September had moved eastward out of the Mississippi Valley and came swelteringly even upon our farthest northeastern coast. Tuesday was the hottest day of all that season, and, as it was the morrow after Labor Day and at once the crowded beginning and climax of summer exodus, the homeward bound multitude of holiday-makers endured unusual hardships both by rail and highroad. So did their helpers in this crowding, hot departure; baggage-men, train-men, chauffeurs, directors of traffic, motor-bus drivers and drivers of trucks overloaded with trunks, mopped themselves, struggled, suffered and cursed the man who first called these shores "Vacation Land". Main-travelled thoroughfares to the mountains and the sea were as steadily noisy, as thronged with cars and as subject to troublesome blockades as if they had been the streets of a populous city; resorts that had seemed at the height of their crowded liveliness, twenty-four hours earlier, took on abruptly the wistful bleakness of a house just vacated. In Mirthful Haven, before noon, Cargo Square already wore an air of depletion.

At the beach, where the bathers suddenly were few and the watchers no more than a handful, people wearing clothes carefully appropriate to cement sidewalks and numbered taxicabs bade one another good-bye and lamented the irony of fixed dates of departure. The merry Mrs. Warbeck alone took a happier view of the matter. "Everything about Mirthful Haven's such a joke," she said, "it seems to me this is one of the funniest of the whole summer: so many of us leaving the only spot where there's a breath of coolness in the country, and all just because we'd set to-day for going! My dear, I wish you'd seen Virgie Gordon sitting out in front of her cottage in her cabriolet, waiting for her two girls in the beating sun and so crowded with bags that she had to hold that hot, squirming dog in her lap! Imagine how many pounds of her must be melted off already on those stifling inland roads when it's this hot even at the beach! Think of the fun the natives are getting out of it! My husband says they're always tickled to death to see us go, and probably they're all giggling themselves to pieces talking about how much money they made out of us this summer and how now we're piling

ourselves into broiling motor-cars and broilinger trains to go home and sizzle on gridirons!"

The natives of Mirthful Haven within sight of her, as she spoke, however, were less hilarious and more taciturn than her cheerful fancy depicted. They were Henry Marsh and his partner, Hazzard, coming in from their nets; neither of them spoke at all until their boat was near the breakwater, and then the subject that engaged them for a moment was indeed the weather but not in its humorous bearing as imagined by the departing summer visitor. "Notice them shafts o' hot air and then them other cooler shafts right within a few feet of 'em?" Hazzard inquired. "Like 's if they got edges up agin each other; layer o' coolish air, then a layer o' blastin' hot air jest like the layers in a layer-cake, only turnt up edgeways. Even 'way outside yonder we'd be fryin' fer ten seconds, maybe, then cooled off a mite fer five or ten, then hot agin fer ten or fifteen, maybe. Westud, over the land kind of a thickenin' hot haze, like; li'ble to git a windbolt out o' that there hot thickenin'. Might hold off some."

"Might," Henry agreed. "Most likely hold off till late afternoon or evenin', maybe. Good day fer a boat to stay inside, I guess." He mopped his forehead with his sleeve as they passed into the harbor. "Whee-yew! Jest like slidin' into a furnace, ain't it? My Godfrey, but this is a hard day to be a bearer!"

"Yes, 'tis," Hazzard assented, and they said nothing more until they reached the village, where Freeman Wicks awaited them, looking down upon them as they made the boat fast to a float alongside their wharf. He was dressed in hot, clumsy, black clothes, wore a stiff white shirt, a wilting white collar, a necktie made of black tape; his shoes were earnestly polished with blacking and he fanned himself with a black soft hat.

"You got plenty time," he said. "It ain't until half-past two; but I thought I'd git dressed fer it so 's to be ready, case they was needin' me to take cha'ge o' some more o' the 'rangements. Reverend Beedy, he consented to 'ficiate 'count o' the Cap'n askin' him, though he complained he didn't see how he could make no address in p'tic'lar—jest some readin' and prayin'. Hugo and Finn's goin' to go fer him and bring him in my seedan. The other bearers besides us is jest Ed and Hink and Lin. Cap' Wye's too old and he's all crippled up, anyways; says he's goin' to go to it, though. Wun't be many there. Finn's woman says she'd be pleased to 'tend; but says she's like a good many o' the others and can't bring herself to it, 'count o Long Harry's havin' left the church in his youth and never bein' a member. Says she talked it over with a number and they all felt the same way; they'd like fust

rate to go to it but jest can't bring theirselves to believe they'd feel right 'bout it if they did. Clara Fogg and Mary Thomas b'en up there all mornin', and everythin's ready. Jest thought I'd stop and tell you 't you got plenty time. They'll be two seedans waitin' in the Square to haul us bearers down to Pelter's cluss onto two o'clock. You'll be all right if you're waitin' in the Square by that time, and now I'll go and let them seedans know where to come fer us."

He went upon this errand, fanning himself and mopping his brow. " 'Nough to melt a man flat, this heat!" he said, as he reached the end of the lane that led from the wharf to Cargo Square; but the fellow-citizen whom he addressed, like Mrs. Warbeck, took a brighter view. Mr. Boy was at liberty for the day and pleased with everything.

"Hot, maybe," he said. "Guess maybe you might say it's dreadful hot; but on the other hand look what a nice good 'pearance the Square's got to it agin. No crowdin', no pushin' agin a man and shovin' of him around. Only a few days now and you can come down here and wun't see nobody 't all 'cept Willie Briggs in the whole Square. Way I like to see it! Too bad, too bad 'bout Mr. Pelter. See you're one the bearers. Well, it's like what I says to Mrs. Sillery. I was talkin' to her this mornin'. Way it come about, I was standin' right outside the door to Cap'n Francis Embury's kitchen somewuz around eight o'clock—might 'a' b'en half-past, maybe—and she come out and I says, 'Well, we all got to go some time,' I says. Yes, suh, that's the way 'tis, Mr. Wicks: we all got to go some time, 'zackly 's I says to Mrs. Sillery." Genially, he had fallen into step with Freeman and walked beside him, turning with him into River Road, so that now, between the village elms, this thoroughfare extended before them in a vista that included the rising Point, the sand dunes, the harbor and the sea. "Nice and empty it looks," Charlie Boy said. "Already you can't see more'n half a dozen automobiles on the whole road. Thought maybe I'd walk down t' the Point; thought I'd take a look at them cottages and see how many's shet up. Gaskells is gone and Cornings and Gordons and Vandenbrocks and quite some others I've heard tell o' leavin'. Well, bein's you're one the bearers, I hope everythin'll go off all right."

With this, the two parted, Freeman Wicks turning into the street that led to Captain Embury's, and Mr. Boy continuing his pleasantly anticipatory walk toward the sea. When he had arrived at Great Point, however, and stood to view the cottages from the highway over the cliffs, he found himself somewhat disappointed by the number of them unshuttered and evidently still occupied. The Corning cottage in particular annoyed him into a perplexity. "Now what's the meanin' o' this?" he inquired of an invisible

companion. “See Corning himself with my own eyes yestiddy aftanoon in his big black limousine, with two automobile trunks on the rack behind and his daughter settin’ ’side of him, and the cripple-man up front with the showfer—certain’y was leavin’ town! Well then, what’s his house doin’ lookin’ like this, all open and seemin’ like they wun’t nobody even so much as thinkin’ ’bout gittin’ it shet up the way it ought to be?”

It was the exterior only of the house that gave this impression, for, indoors, servants were busily covering furniture, padlocking cedar chests and strapping trunks. True, as Mr. Boy had just informed an apparition, Corning and his daughter and his secretary had gone away upon the previous day; but Mrs. Corning and her two sons were still within the cottage, though it was in process of closing and their plans included a late afternoon departure from New Yarmouth by train. More precisely, the plan Corning had made for them included this departure; but, half an hour after the distant ringing of the noon church bells had been heard in his study, the mother and her older son met there for a doubtful and worried consultation.

“What does he say now?” Mrs. Corning asked anxiously, as Wallace came in from the short corridor.

“Nothing different. He’s begun about a dozen more notes to her and torn ’em all up.”

“That’s all right—anything—so long as he actually doesn’t see her! That’s the one thing that’s just got to be prevented, Wallace.”

“Lord! Don’t I know it?” he returned wearily, and let himself sink into a leather chair that was shrouded within a sheet. “He knows it himself, too, I think—I mean that his subconsciousness, or something, knows it, though of course he can’t admit it. One wild thing he’s got on his mind now, he thinks he ought to have warned her not to go to the Casino the other night.”

“But she didn’t. The doorman said—”

“I know, I know,” Wallace sighed. “But Gordon thinks it was his duty to have sent her word, so that there wouldn’t have been any chance of her being mortified by the doorman’s politely turning her away for lack of a membership card, in case she *had* gone. Gordon thinks he was weak to have let father’s idea of the family dignity—you know how father kept harping on what he said was the ‘dignified course and at the same time the most merciful’—”

“But it’s all so crazy!” Mrs. Corning exclaimed. “For Gordon to be reproaching himself for something that never happened at all, since the girl

didn't go there—it's like being conscience-stricken over something purely theoretical."

"Well, you don't expect Gordon to be reasonable, do you? He hasn't been that about anything since his accident."

"No, I suppose not," Mrs. Corning said musingly, and she added, "I was just wondering—wondering if it isn't barely possible that this episode, even though it's of course very painful to him, mightn't turn out after all to be not such a bad thing."

"How?"

"Well, you see, he was brooding his nerves to a frazzle over what he thought was his responsibility for Fred's death, and every specialist we got said that if we could only persuade his mind to dwell upon anything else at all—Don't you see?"

"I suppose it might be," Wallace assented. "Yes, I suppose it's already helped him to snap out of that other thing, and of course this naturally wouldn't be as hard to get over as that—yes, you might be right."

"It's the hopeful view I tried to persuade your father to take," she said sadly. "Your poor father! Wallace, I don't want to add anything to what I know you've been undergoing mentally; but I do think the suffering you and Agatha have caused your father might be a lesson to both of you. Friday night, after we came back from that humiliating scene with the awful Gaskell woman, you didn't know it, but your father paced this room for hours and hours. Mortification's a terrible thing, and he was—oh, he was so terribly mortified, Wallace!"

"Had a little of that to bear, myself, you might remember, mother. Mrs. Gaskell wasn't—"

"I know, I know! But I've never seen your father's poor face look so old and white and drawn. I thought he looked badly when he drove away yesterday, too, and I know it worried him to think the information he'd sent the coast guard had resulted as it did. Of course he knew he had no responsibility for that, and he said the coast guard had only done their duty in firing on an escaping law-breaker, just as he had done his. Any good citizen is bound under the law to turn over to the authorities any information that may come into his hands in regard to a felony, otherwise he makes himself an accessory, he said; so of course he had to do what he did in this case. But he's a very humane man, Wallace, and I could see that although he knew himself in the right, this wretched thing about Pelter added to his other troubles. He's so conscientious—"

“Conscientious!” Wallace groaned. “I wish he hadn’t been so conscientious he thought he had to tell Gordon about it before he left! There wasn’t any reason Gordon couldn’t have been kept in the dark permanently about that detail, and his knowing it makes him just that much harder for us to handle. Father satisfied his own conscience about what Gordon had a right to know, then drove off and left the job up to you and me!”

“No, no, no!” she cried. “You mustn’t criticize him! It does seem so pitiful to me—your father’s such a good man—to think of his summer’s ending in all this turmoil—all this—”

“Now, now!” Wallace said, for she had become tearful. “We’d better keep our minds on how we’re going to manage Gordon, mother; it isn’t going to be easy.”

“Oh, dear, no; I know it!” She laughed dismally. “I’m afraid we’re going to have a sketchy lunch. Do you suppose he can be persuaded to come down to it?”

She spoke with doubt; but Gordon proved unexpectedly amenable and came to the table upon his brother’s summons, though his appearance there was stricken-eyed and pallid. He ate without any diminution of his usual slight appetite, however, and responded quietly with assents to his mother’s complaints of the heat. When the meal was finished he did not return to his desk upstairs; instead, he went into the swathed and dismantled living-room and began to pace the floor. Mrs. Corning made a movement as if to follow him but checked the impulse upon a shake of the head from Wallace. Both of them went to attend to final details of packing; Mrs. Corning saw her own completed, put on a travelling dress, descended the stairs and stopped to listen near the open door of the living-room. No sound of pacing footsteps came to her ears; but she knew Gordon was still there, and, after a moment’s troubled cogitation, went into the room. He was standing by the window from which Edna had leaped to the terrace, and, with a pair of marine binoculars at his eyes, was gazing down through the rift in the trees that gave a view of Pelter’s.

His mother put a hand softly upon his shoulder. “Don’t do that, dear.”

He lowered the glasses and turned to face her. “No? Why not?”

“Dear, you don’t want to make things more painful for Wallace and me than they need be, do you? You’ve never had anything but the most loving affection and kindness from us and from your father, have you? You just couldn’t do anything that would make us break our hearts with pity for you, could you?”

"No—"

"Then you'll be ready to come with Wallace and me when we go, won't you?"

"I don't know."

"My dear! My dear!" she said sorrowfully. "You must try—*try*—to see this wretched business in its proper proportions. I won't say a word in criticism of that poor girl; I'm sure it's true that her unfortunate life has molded her into what she is. Those were good and kind and charitable-minded women I talked to in the village, Gordon; they were very reluctant, and it was only after I'd made plain what Mrs. Munson had told me that they were willing to talk at all. You know that your father and I have never been snobbish about the natives; that we've done every possible friendly thing for them we could think of—but everything in the world has its place, Gordon, people most of all. You know that inherently; you're too much your father's son not to know it, and I don't believe for a moment that you could do anything grotesque in contradiction of it. Wallace says one thing you feel badly about is not having sent word to this girl, warning her not to do something that as a matter of fact she didn't do and—"

"Yes," he interrupted huskily. "The fact that she didn't go to the Casino doesn't make me any the less a coward for not having—"

"Wait!" his mother remonstrated. "You've *got* to see it in proportion, dear! You think she'd have been humiliated by being turned back at the Casino door; but would she? You've got to remember that she's shown herself pretty scheming and pretty pushing, Gordon—I'm afraid that's the only word—pretty brazenly pushing. Don't you think it took a rather hard quality of effrontery for Edna Pelter—Edna *Pelter*—to dance that tango, displaying herself as she did before people she knew wouldn't have allowed her to be there if they'd had the slightest idea who she was? Don't you think it took some effrontery to come into this house as she did—to take advantage of Mildred Kerr's having been misled about her, and to push herself in amongst all of us under an assumed name?"

"But she had a right to it," he protested. "She had a right—"

"No, Gordon. Her step-grandmother—her *step*-grandmother, Gordon—did a very wrong and tricky thing in helping the girl to go to such a school as Miss Branch's, and under a name that was meant merely to cover up her origin and her past. She fooled her best friend, Mildred, from the first, completely, and the only reason she didn't carry out her purpose and keep on fooling all of us was that we were too close to the facts. Are you sure such a

girl would suffer very much over her failure to push in at the Casino door? I doubt it, Gordon."

Gordon made a gesture toward the window. "Do you doubt, too, that she's suffering now, mother?"

"Ah, that's the very thing I've been dreading!" Mrs. Corning cried. "This appeal to your sensitive heart through what's happened to her father! No, of course I don't doubt that she's equipped with the natural affections; I'm not saying for a moment that she wouldn't feel the natural sorrow common to all human beings under such circumstances. But you must remember, Gordon, this was a hard man, a dangerous man and—perhaps it seems a strange thing to say—but a good many of these people up here aren't very affectionate with each other, not in the sense that we are; they've lived a rugged life and they really don't seem to feel things quite as we do. You just mustn't let your imagination run away with you; you mustn't think of her as suffering the same quality of pain you'd feel if you'd lost your own dear father. It isn't like that, Gordon, believe me! And when you think of the girl herself, her hardness, her effrontery—a poor cheap little village Magdalen, Gordon, but not a repentant one—"

"You needn't go on," Gordon said miserably. "I accept all that. I never was with her that I didn't feel something strange about her. She was never straightforward with me. I stood with her here by this window, only a few days ago, and I knew she was deceiving me and all of us about herself. She partly admitted it to me—I suppose she had to. Well, granting it's all true—even what father said, that she was scheming to entangle me before we found her out; maybe she was. But she knew she was going to be found out; she said as much to me and told me she'd wait—at Pelter's, I suppose—she'd wait there, she said, for me to come and tell her if I'd really meant something I'd said to her."

"Oh, did she?" Mrs. Corning cried, and reddened. "What was it you—"

"Just something I said." He turned away.

"Something you said believing her to be Miss Shellpool?"

"Yes," he answered bitterly. "It amounts to that."

"While from the very start," his mother went on sharply, "she naturally enough understood that if you'd known she was Edna Pelter you'd never even have looked at her! Then, knowing you were pretty sure to find her out, she says she'll 'be waiting', hoping you'll feel yourself committed to her by 'something' she's got you to say to her in her masquerade as a nice girl. That

is, she adroitly planned to get you committed to Edna Pelter by something you said to an Edna Shellpool who didn't exist! Gordon!"

"Well, all right," he said. "I admit the truth of everything you say; but you'll have to admit the truth of something I'm going to say, too. No, I'm not going to speak of the feeling I've had for—for Edna Shellpool, I suppose I ought to say, to be accurate. About that, it seems to me I'm just in a condition of shock and not fit to talk. But one thing does seem too clear to me: you'll have to admit the truth about what's going on down there now." He made a gesture toward the window again. "I don't blame father. I don't criticize him; I don't criticize him at all—he's never done anything in his life that wasn't right, I think; but, mother, I don't seem to be able to get the thing straight in my mind any way but this: if father hadn't thought his conscience compelled him to send Tholineau to the coast guard, that hearse wouldn't be drawing up in front of Pelter's down there just now. After that, I think when you ask me not even to see her you ask too much."

Mrs. Corning showed agitation. "You mustn't say such a thing! There's a whole sequence of events that lead to such a happening. You might as well say that wretched Munson boy did it by telling Agatha, or that Agatha did it by getting furious with Wallace, or that Tholineau did it, when all the time the truth is that it happened because officers of the law did their duty in stopping an escaping criminal. The man himself was responsible; he had no business to be engaged in such a traffic, and if he was he had no business not to stop when—"

"Wait!" Gordon said gently but in a manner that checked her. "I want to look now." He had put the binoculars to his eyes again, gazing down through the rift in the trees, with the flimsy, ramshackle old building over the water held at the centre of the circle of vision. Mrs. Corning, silent and caught in a dismaying fascination, stared down at Pelter's, too, in spite of herself. Moreover, the same discomfiting focus drew and fixed the attention of her older son, as he came almost noiselessly into the room a moment later. He approached without speaking, then stood looking over his mother's shoulder; and the scene far below, down in the glare of the hot harborside, was revealed to those two almost as clearly as it was to Gordon through the glasses.

Before the gateless entrance to the wooden front yard of Pelter's two withered and depressed black horses, obviously wearied with other usage, had drawn a black hearse of a kind long unknown to fashion in hearses; for it was high, glass-sided over iron-rimmed wheels, and, at the corners of its roof, supported monstrous black images of mourning plumage. Two rusty,

closed automobiles were before the funeral-car; two others waited behind it, near the wooden sidewalk; half a dozen village children and Willie Briggs stood in the road, observant of this melancholy pageant, and, at a distance along the fence that sagged over the mud flats, a group of shabbily dressed older people seemed to hold an expectant consultation.

The front door of the house opened. Mr. Wining, the undertaker, stepped out, glanced briskly up and down the road, then nodded to the drowsy driver of the hearse, who descended and opened the back doors of the receptacle. Then Mr. Wining made a sign to someone indoors, and, with head bent, walked forward toward the hearse solemnly yet attentively, having the air of being reverent but at the same time watchful of everything. From the open door the long black coffin came forth, borne by six men bulky in their black clothes, and the thin, small figure of the minister followed. The coffin went slowly to the hearse, was slid within it; the six pall-bearers, the minister and two other figures were seen to get into the forward sedans, while Mr. Wining and the driver of the hearse went back into the house. They came out almost at once, carrying two or three wreaths and a few small bunches of flowers, placed them upon the coffin and closed the hearse. The driver mounted to his seat and Mr. Wining returned toward the house but did not go in. Instead, he paused near the open door and nodded deferentially in that direction.

Then two more black figures came forth. One was that of a tall woman whose head and face were invisible within a black veil. She stooped as she walked and leaned heavily upon the arm of her companion, who was Captain Francis Embury. They walked so slowly that once, just as they came to the hearse, they stopped entirely and the stooping figure seemed unable to go farther—but that was only for a moment, and they got into the rusty automobile that waited just behind the hearse. An old man, shaggy with shabbiness, rickety, limping and leaning upon a stick, followed in company with three elderly women who helped him into the remaining car and entered it after him. Mr. Wining observantly closed the door of the house, came out gravely to the nearer of the two cars behind the hearse, installed himself within, at its guiding wheel, and nodded through the glass to the driver of the hearse who was looking back at him inquiringly. Then the short procession began to move slowly toward the village, the automobiles perforce keeping pace with the walk of the tired horses.

At the open window upon Great Point Mrs. Corning lifted a pitying hand and gently took the glasses from her son's eyes. "Don't, dear," she said in a soft voice. "Don't watch them out of sight. Don't keep harrowing yourself __"

“What?” Gordon asked hoarsely, and he sank into one of the shrouded chairs. “For God’s sake, you saw that, and you tell me I mustn’t even go down there to say—”

“Oh, see here!” Wallace interposed, and put a hand roughly upon his brother’s shoulder as if to shake him. “Use your head a little, will you, Gordon! After that, what *could* you say? You’ve been three days trying to write it and you couldn’t find anything; so just what the devil would you do if you went there?”

“What? Why, tell her—My God, at least tell her that we’re *sorry*? At least tell her—”

“Tell her! Tell her!” Wallace interrupted harshly. “You don’t know *what* you’d tell her once you saw her! You don’t—”

“Never mind, Wallace!” Mrs. Corning said quickly, and, over Gordon’s drooping head, sent the older brother a shrewd, warning glance. Then, looking from the window again, she seemed to muse. “I suppose they couldn’t find the older sister,” she said in a thoughtful tone. “Probably they’d lost track of her so that they couldn’t get hold of her at all. At any rate, she wasn’t there.”

“Who wasn’t there?” Wallace asked, puzzled, though a second significant glance from his mother seemed to signal him to make some such inquiry. “What other sister?”

“Miss Pelter’s. Mrs. Munson asked me if I didn’t remember seeing two bold-faced young girls hanging about on the pier sometimes when I drove by that place, and I did vaguely recall there were two. The other one got into trouble and had to leave Mirthful Haven.”

“What happened to her?” Wallace inquired, again as upon a cue.

“I understand she was reformed—for a while at least,” Mrs. Corning said. “At any rate, she had a place—general housework for the family of a druggist in Lynn, I believe—but was discharged, and that’s the last that’s known of her. I suppose some effort was made to find her but failed, or she’d have been here to-day.”

“I see.” Wallace remained thus non-committal; but what he perceived was that his mother had either fortunately just recalled this information or had carefully reserved it for the most critical moment, which had now arrived. During a long hush then, the issue seemed to hang in the balance, while the mother and older brother watched with tense anxiety the hunched figure of the young man in the chair. The intaking of his breath was audible; his hands hung flaccid, shaking, then clenched, but shook all the more

convulsively. “Now, now!” Wallace said, unable to watch this agony any longer in silence. “You see how it is, old fellow. You can’t—you just can’t —”

Mrs. Corning leaned down and took Gordon’s shaking hands in both of hers, holding them still against his breast. “Dearest boy, you mustn’t suffer so! This will pass. Dearest, remember that time makes all things—”

“It’s too indecent! It’s too heartless!” he gasped. “I won’t—I won’t leave here until something’s done about it. She’s got to be told we’re sorry.” Then at last he looked up, and his eyes in haggard, piteous appeal sought his brother’s face. “She’s got to be told—*some*body from this family’s got to go down there and tell her we’re sorry!”

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

AT FOUR o'clock that afternoon Wallace was setting forth upon his uncomfortable errand; but just as he reached the outer door of the hall his mother came hurriedly down the broad stairway and detained him. "I won't stop you more than a moment," she said. "It's all right; he's out of hearing. It just occurred to me I'd forgotten an important thing that you might make an opportunity to say to the girl. Of course you must first say what Gordon wants you to and I don't wish to interfere in any way with your making his position clear to her. Everything's worked out as nicely as we could have hoped it would; but this other thing I've just thought of ought to be said, too, and you'll know how to put it tactfully and of course considerately. You see, we've been concentrating just on the present; but we've got to consider the future, too."

"Have we? It seems to me if we can get out of Mirthful Haven without his seeing her that's about all I'm capable of concentrating on, myself."

"No, no!" Mrs. Corning insisted, keeping her voice low. "The future might cost us all we're gaining now if we don't show a little foresight. Of course when we get home the thing to do with Gordon is to keep him virtually surrounded by the nicest sort of attractive girls, and I trust to that a great deal; but you mustn't forget that your father loves this place and that he likes to have you and Gordon with him, so there's next summer to think of. She really oughtn't to be here then."

"What do you mean?" Wallace inquired, frowning. "You certainly can't expect me to tell her—"

"No, no," his mother interrupted hastily. "But I mean she really oughtn't. Your father's often said that Mirthful Haven really isn't the place for such a family as that, and it isn't. I mean she ought to be able to see it herself. Really, for the girl's own good she ought to understand the situation. The village itself would think much more highly of her if she went away; even those three women who were at the funeral wouldn't feel they could have anything to do with her except under these present circumstances, I know, and I think that if she should be so unwise as to stay here everyone would

feel it was to no good end. Who is there for her to associate with and what is there for her to do? Nobody and nothing! So I thought that after you've given her the message of sympathy, and explained a little, if you could just tactfully intimate—"

"For heaven's sake!" Wallace protested. "You don't expect me to—"

"Wait! It's perfectly simple. I know that your father intends presently to have the subject of the yacht club purchase taken up with her by correspondence—not immediately, of course, but after a time. He'll have a very liberal offer made to her, and if she already had it in mind to go away, why, when she gets the money, it would strike her as just the thing to use in that way. I don't mean for you to mention the purchase this afternoon; I thought if you could just say, in a friendly way, that so many opportunities are open to girls nowadays—I'm sure she could learn to be a professional dancer, or, if she didn't like that idea, she could study stenography or get some kind of clerkship perhaps—and I thought you might possibly intimate that Gordon would feel a great deal better about it if he could know she's going to be leading a useful, happy life somewhere. You could hint that we all felt strongly it would be better for Gordon if she—"

"Oh, look here! I've got a hard enough job before me, as it is, without —"

"But this is the most important part of it, really," Mrs. Corning urged. "You'd just be showing a kindly interest in her future; all you've got to do is to lead up to it in a considerate way, as if you'd heard she'd be leaving before long and naturally assumed that it was true. Wallace, she simply mustn't be here next summer, and you know it as well as I! You've got to promise me you'll—"

"Oh, Lord, I'll try!" he said impatiently, extricated his sleeve from her detaining hand and turned to the door. "I'll promise to try to—if I can!"

Striding gloomily down from the highway and into River Road, he repented of this promise, and, a few minutes later, standing dubiously before Pelter's, he saw upon the outer board of the wooden sidewalk, at his feet, the petals of a blown rose, some of them scuffed by the shoes of passers-by. "Hell of a job to be pushed into!" he muttered, went in and knocked at the door.

Edna opened it and stared at him. She was a jet black figure in the hot light that struck into the doorway, all except her white face, for, though she still wore the funereal veil, she had pulled it back; she still stooped, too, and stood before him, stooping and staring, with her black-gloved hands pressed together upon her breast as though it hurt her.

"Well?" she said in a thin voice. "He hasn't come, then?"

Wallace coughed painfully. "Do you mind if I step in for a moment, Edna?"

"Why, no," she said, moving back to let him enter, and, after he had come in, stood before him in the same attitude and with the same stare fixed upon his face. "He didn't come, then?"

Wallace made a gesture of appeal. "Don't take it that way, Edna. I've got a difficult thing to—"

She interrupted him. "Why, I'm not taking it any way—not any way at all. He isn't coming?"

"Oh, dear me!" Wallace broke out. "Just listen a minute. I want to tell you—"

"Not to tell me that he isn't coming?"

"Edna! Just a minute! *I'm* here, and I've got something to say to you. First, that our whole family feel the deepest possible sympathy with you. My father and mother have both wished me to say that for them, and you know of course how warmly I say it for myself—and—and I'm sure Mildred will write you. It's a most shocking thing that's happened to you, and we all of us, father and—"

"Yes?" Edna said. "Your father?"

Something in her thin and quiet tone as she said "Your father?" went chillingly through Wallace. "I—I'm afraid," he began. "Well, I'm afraid maybe you feel he had something to do with—"

"Yes. He did it. You don't think I'd marry Gordon if he wanted me to, do you—or if you all wanted me to? But he's coming to say he's sorry, isn't he?"

"Edna, *I*'m here to tell you that," Wallace said desperately. "I'm here to tell you anything I can that would keep you from looking at me as you do. It's hard because—because I'm getting all—all choked up." He stammered, drew a deep breath and got control of himself. "Edna, I never was so sorry for anybody in my life. You must just understand that Gordon's all smashed up. I don't know how many letters he's begun to you and torn up because he couldn't say what he wanted to say. Finally he told me to say to you that he *couldn't* say anything except that he was heartbroken for you, miserably and inexpressibly wretched about everything. He told me to say—"

"He told you to say it for him? You mean he isn't coming?"

In despair at this reiteration, Wallace turned from her and pushed a hot hand through his hair. “By George, my family do put some nice things upon me!” he groaned, and, bitterly remembering his promise, made an effort to fulfill it. “Edna, when I see Mildred she’ll ask me what your plans are, and I’d like to be able to tell her. I suppose of course you won’t be staying on here—”

“Here? Why, yes. Where else? Pelters have been here for three hundred years, longer than anybody else except Captain Embury. My father was proud of that. My father wasn’t a man to talk much; but he spoke more of that to me, while I was a child and growing up, than he did of anything else. Pelters were the very first people that ever came to Mirthful Haven, and my father wanted Pelters always to be here. I’m the last, so of course I’d stay. I haven’t anything to do now except what my father would like me to. I’d been doing something he hated, and I didn’t get a chance to tell him how it happened and that it was just for a little time and would never happen again. So all I can do now is to try to think of anything he’d like me to do, and do it. He wouldn’t know about it now; but I’m going to try to pretend to myself that he would. You haven’t said that Gordon isn’t coming?”

“Oh, dear!” Wallace groaned. “Oh, dear!”

“You’re going away to-day—all of you? He said that he was going on Tuesday. This is Tuesday.”

“Yes, we’re going—Gordon, too, Edna.”

“Is he?” she asked quietly. “But he’d be coming here first—just for a moment to tell me he’s sorry, wouldn’t he?”

“Edna, he can’t! You don’t understand—it would be just an agonizing thing for you both, and of no possible good. You’ve just said, yourself, that if he begged you, and we all begged you, you wouldn’t marry him—”

“No, never. You see something’s happened, and the last thing my father would like—”

“Well, then, you *do* understand it. You see, yourself, it would only be a useless pain to—”

“Then he isn’t coming?”

“He *can’t*! No, you poor thing, he isn’t. He isn’t coming, Edna.”

With her eyes still searchingly upon his, her body still stooping and her hands still pressed upon her breast, she stood repeating this to herself. “He isn’t—he isn’t coming.”

“No—no, he isn’t! He can’t! It’s no use.”

“You mean he isn’t coming at all—before he goes away? He isn’t coming to say—”

“Edna!” Wallace stepped nearer her, took one of her hands in both of his own and pressed it tightly. “Forget him! Forget all of us! There isn’t anything else to do. For God’s sake, forgive me for coming to tell you this! Good-bye—I’ve got to get out of here—Good-bye!”

He strode out and across the wooden front yard, but sent a fleeting, unhappy glance back over his shoulder as he reached the sidewalk. The stooping figure stood in the doorway, staring after him and the parted lips were moving. Even that brief, last glimpse of her made him all too certain of the words those lips were forming: “He isn’t coming, then? He isn’t coming at all?”

Wallace walked home slowly, at intervals wiping his face with a blue silk handkerchief and cursing the heat, though more frequently he made himself the subject of his profanity. As he opened the gate that gave access to the gravelled path through the deep lawn before his father’s cottage, however, and saw his mother waiting for him upon the verandah, the dull anger within him found a less direct and more satirical form of expression. “Crazy to hear the good news your sweet boy’s bringing you, are you?” he asked aloud, though at that distance she could not hear him. Then he closed the gate behind him with a metallic crash and walked moodily up the path.

Mrs. Corning came eagerly to meet him at the top of the verandah steps. “He’s pacing the living-room floor again; but he let Joseph pack for him, and everything will stay all right if we can just keep him in the frame of mind we’ve got him into. Wallace, you did what I—”

“Look here!” Wallace said gruffly. “It wouldn’t do anybody any harm if he went down there and told that girl good-bye and said he was sorry. That’s what I—”

“What!” Mrs. Corning cried out in shocked alarm. “Are you crazy?”

“You listen!” he said, and gave her a quick, roughly spoken account of the interview. “So what harm would it do?” he asked, concluding. “What harm would it do if he just saw her for a few moments and told her—”

“You’re crazy!” Mrs. Corning cried. “Absolutely crazy! Do you want to ruin everything just at the last moment, and all just because you’re a man and on that account can’t help being always gullible, emotional and susceptible when any woman seems to be in grief?” She laughed in humorous despair of all masculine good judgment under such circumstances, and then her laughter, continuing, became shriller. “You poor

dear ninny, you actually believed she wouldn't take him if he asked her? And that she wouldn't know how to make him ask her if we were only soft enough to let him see her? What? When *you* come up here after seeing her and propose to send him straight to her? After arguing with him practically for days that he mustn't see her, and then going down there yourself for the very purpose of keeping him away from her and satisfying him with the thought that you went as his substitute! Do you remember imploring him a while ago to use his *head*? Good heavens, Wallace, don't you think you'd better use your own!"

Wallace looked sheepish. "Well—he's waiting for me and I suppose I've got to go in there and tell him—tell him something! I don't know what to—"

"You don't?" Mrs. Corning asked, and now she laughed comfortably, with a pleased assurance that matters would go well. "Nothing's simpler or easier than the mere truth, and that's all you've got to tell him. Except for letting yourself get emotional and coming back in a temporarily wrought-up state, I think you did really rather well, Wallace, and, though she didn't seem to take to it immediately, at least you implanted that idea about her going away, and your father's offer later ought to do the rest. It might even be made a larger one with a hint that it would be conditional—" She broke off this train and went to the point of the present crisis. "Just go in there and tell Gordon the truth. You say she wasn't crying and didn't shed any tears while you were there. Tell him that. She spoke as if she put the blame on your father. Tell Gordon that. She said her father had hated everybody at the Point and she was sorry herself she'd ever had anything to do with us. Tell him that. You see, when you think you ought to feel sorry for a person and hear that he's angry, you don't feel so sorry! Then I think you ought to tell him that she seemed disappointed."

" 'Disappointed'?" Wallace asked, with satire. "Is that the impression I've given you: that she seemed merely 'disappointed' because he didn't come?"

"Oh, dear!" Mrs. Corning smiled and shook her head pityingly. "I didn't say to tell him she was disappointed because he didn't come. I said just to tell him she seemed disappointed, and I don't suppose many things are truer than that she is disappointed! I haven't a doubt she's thought he was almost within her grasp—a Corning!"

"You mean that's what I'm to give him a chance to infer that her 'disappointment' is about?"

"Certainly!" Mrs. Corning spoke impatiently, genuinely irritated by his youthful, masculine blindness. "You poor goose, if you doubt the truth of it,

just take it from me that I understand the situation perfectly, or, if you can't do that, at least you care something for your brother's peace of mind and his restoration to a cheerful and wholesome outlook, don't you? We ought to be leaving here in three-quarters of an hour; we've got just that much time to save him, Wallace. I've told you precisely what to say to him—the real truth of the matter—and it's only the real truth that'll save him. You don't propose to ruin him instead, do you?"

"You take the responsibility?"

"Good heavens, yes!" she exclaimed scornfully, and, at the same time, laughed with affection and put an amiable, urging hand upon his arm. "Go in; be cheerful with him and take your time about it. Keep him away from the windows on the other side of the house and stay with him until it's almost time for us to be leaving. The trunks have already gone; the bags are ready to be brought down and put in the car, and, if you can just keep talking until it's time to start, all the better. Tell him about this matter first and then talk about a whole lot of other things. Be brisk about it! Now then, in you go!"

"All right," Wallace said doggedly, and went into the house.

Mrs. Corning's thoughtful glance followed him through the open doorway until the light upon the back of his grey flannel coat was submerged within the shadows of the hall; then, her expression becoming one of grave content, she descended the steps, went round the cottage to the rear and began to talk with some workmen who were bringing shutters from the garage and placing them handily beneath their proper windows. She made the conversation as loud and as gay as she could, laughing a great deal, herself, and hoping that the cheerful sounds she produced were audible through the open windows of the living-room not far behind her. She protracted her liveliness for some time, then made a silence and listened; she could hear Wallace's voice—it had the businesslike briskness she desired of it—and the contentment of her expression increased. She went into the house, ascended to her own room and did not leave it until a chauffeur came to inform her that it was time to be setting forth.

Wallace and Gordon were already standing beside the waiting open car when she came brightly from the house and joined them. Gordon, swallowing repeatedly, did not look at her, or at anything except the ground; but she took his arm cosily and affectionately. "You sit in the back seat with your poor old Muddie," she said. "Wallace can hop in beside Webber, while you and I have this big roomy tonneau all comfy to ourselves." Gordon followed her into the car meekly, not looking up, and, as the white-sided

tires began to turn upon the driveway, Wallace spoke in a low tone to the chauffeur.

"Beat it, Webber! We've got plenty of time; but from here to the village, hit it up! When we get out on the New Yarmouth road you can take it easy. Right now, step on it!"

Wallace saw Pelter's, closed and bleak, from only the side of his eye, as they fled through the glare over River Road; he controlled a tendency to shiver and knew, without turning, that his brother did not look up. "That'll do, Webber. Take it easy now—it's all right."

At the crowded station in New Yarmouth he joined his mother and Gordon after making an inspection of a bulletin board upon an exterior wall of the building; he came to them ruefully. "An hour late, and we sent Webber back! What'll we do? Try to find a movie open?"

"No—for heaven's sake—no!" Gordon muttered. "No!"

"Of course not!" Mrs. Corning said quickly. "We don't feel like any stupid old movie, Gordie and me. Too stuffy and hot, and that's what it is in this awful place, too!" She took his arm. "We'll just walk around a bit in the open air. You wait here, Wallace; Gordon and his poor old Muddie are going to take a nice little stroll and see all the sights of New Yarmouth from outside! Aren't we, Gordie?"

His deep sigh seemed assent enough to satisfy her, and he let her take him out to the street behind the station. There he paused irresolutely, but only for an instant or two; she kept her arm tightly within his, chattering to him cheerfully and constantly of nothing, and Wallace, looking after them, saw them set forth upon the walk she had proposed. They did not return until the whistle of the approaching train had been heard. Mrs. Corning was still talking indefatigably, Gordon still kept his eyes upon the ground; but, when the train had roared into the station and they had found their car, he looked up for one short glance toward Mirthful Haven, gulped, and ascended the steps after his mother.

"Well—that's done!" Wallace said to himself, and did not follow them immediately; he remained near the steps and stared up inquiringly at the sky. There were no clouds overhead where a pale blue seemed to be changing to dirty yellow, more with the haze than with approaching twilight; but in the west the thickness, remarked by the fishermen at noon and dwelling there all day, had abruptly become darker. A gloomy nucleus seemed to move behind the haze that hung upon the land. "Thunderstorm coming up over yonder," Wallace said to the porter. "It looks like a heavy one."

“It do that! Ain’ goin’ to be no trouble to us, though, inside ow nice dry cah, suh.”

“No,” Wallace laughed, as he mounted the steps. “It looks as if something pretty heavy might be going to drop down yonder, though—over Mirthful Haven way.”

His prognostication was correct. As he and his perturbed brother and their mother looked out from their flying, dry shelter, a few minutes later, and saw trees bending hazardously, cross-roads receding in turmoils of white dust and horses galloping in the fields, something heavy did drop down upon Mirthful Haven. The windbolt Webster Hazzard had predicted came with such suddenness, with such blackness and with such strength that no one in the village could remember its like, and there were not lacking inhabitants imaginative enough to connect it with the funeral of Long Harry Pelter. Huddling indoors, they spoke of this conjunction, as such things have always been spoken of since the ancients first saw strange signs in the sky and felt the earth staggering under foot at the time when some strong figure of a man met death or was buried. First, there had been the portent: Pelter’s dog was killed on the third day before his own violent passing, they said in Mirthful Haven, and now, on the third day after, the day of Pelter’s burial, came this bolt of wind in which the flimsy house where he was born and lived all his life could not easily escape perishing.

The cottagers still left upon the Point saw the sombre nucleus behind the haze grow monstrous and come out from the veil. Immediately all the sky was dark, then black. At sea a white wall seemed to advance from Old Bareface; it moved upon the black water, leaving all white behind it, and then quickly all the visible ocean was white. Thunderbolts crashed in the driven vapors; lightning ringed the village and the Point. But it was the fierce stroke of the wind that made the people cower in their shelters. From old roofs shingles flew up like decks of cards tossed into the air; great branches sped from elms in the village, and old trees crashed down in the deep woods. Then, upon this wind, came a tumult of pounding rain; water-spouts seemed to walk upon the sea—and all at once, in the west, there was a watery yellow light that stupendously became a dingy red. Dumfoundingly, the thunder only rumbled; the sinister nucleus passed out to sea, drawing all the vapors with it, tearing them from the reddened west; it was as if a black tent had been put down over land and sea, and was now torn up and blown away. The squall had lasted no more than twenty minutes; and now a startling, quiet twilight lay over the drenched and strewn earth and the noiselessly tossing sea.

Wires were down, with their poles, profusely; but those leading to the Point came in a conduit underground and were intact. It was Mrs. Sillery's niece-by-marriage, at the Cornings' cottage to assist in its closing, who telephoned to the small "exchange" in the village that there had been a catastrophe at Pelter's. "It ain't there!" she gasped. "It's gone! It's a-layin' over on its side in the mud and water! Somebody better go see what's happened to that girl. Pelter's is gone, I tell you! It's *gone*!"

The stars were out now; but neither their light nor that of the lanterns carried by the searchers discovered any trace of Edna at Pelter's. When old Wye found her, it was upon that high rock at the crest of the cliffs where she had often sat in her childhood to watch the racing white manes of the sea-coursers, where she had watched for her father of nights and where she had sat with Gordon Corning and told him how the "Mirthful Lady" struck upon Old Bareface—asked him to understand and let them care for each other as though they "both were dead". She was lying face downward, shivering, upon the wet rock, with her arms extended toward the house beyond the highway; and this prone attitude of supplication was that of a stricken creature who still begs for mercy after the stroke has fallen.

Old Wye saw the patch of sodden black upon the rock, fumbled his way to her, whimpering, and tried to lift her. "You come along, honey," he panted. "Where I live, it ain't hardly fit fer you. They wouldn't want you 'most any place back yonder in the village; but they's one house where they do. You come along, honey. I can take you to one house in Mirthful Haven where you'll be welcome."

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

THE comic mask that should sometimes have been where it never was, in attendance upon Corning in his imagination, might appropriately have come now to wear an aspect less irresponsibly pagan. By the arrival of spring, indeed, he should have felt that hovering grin as a merely benign mirthfulness, so little derisive that it might have been but a posture of lips to smile blessings upon him. Reassuring orderliness had slowly yet sweetly been restored into his household; the family life ran again into its proper pattern like soft batter into the waffle-iron, and all was admirable, nothing was shocking.

His daughter unresistingly drilled through a "finishing" year at a school, not Miss Branch's, and in June would be taken upon a well-guided foreign excursion; Wallace should have his wedding then, as he deserved for the intelligence and application he had already shown in business, and, most gratifying of all, though the younger son was not the elder's equal in displayed ability, Gordon had gradually emerged from distempers and melancholy; he was becoming sane, busy and willing. Health and nervous placidity seemed to be his reward, and, in private conversations with her husband and Wallace, Mrs. Corning sometimes complacently referred to her prediction that the episode of the previous summer might prove beneficial. When finally, in the early spring, evidence of Gordon's normal condition became decisive and conspicuous she almost openly triumphed in the demonstration of her prophetic sagacity. Thus the time actually came when she spoke of it to Gordon himself.

"You'll have to believe now that your poor old Muddie possessed quite a little commonsense, won't you?" she said to him one day, with laughing tenderness. "You weren't quite sure Muddie was right then; but I think possibly from now on you'll trust her to know!" Mrs. Corning's manner became more serious, though not less cheerful. "Dear, that distress you went through at the end of the summer—providentially it was short and such nonsense after all, when you come to think of it! We all go through those shakings-up when we're young, dear. Life brings them to us because we

need them. But afterward, no matter how much they've hurt us at the time, we can look back and see that they were just blessings in disguise. You'd got yourself into such a morbid, queer state, poor thing—and no wonder!—I think what happened was just what you needed to rouse you from it. Who knows?" She looked at him, here, with a motherly archness. "If it hadn't happened I'm not sure—I'm not *absolutely* sure—that you'd have been wide awake enough by now to look as conscious as you do whenever you hear the pretty little name Peggy just barely mentioned!" She laughed and patted his cheek; became serious again. "There—don't get red and don't mind Muddie's teasing. It's so beautiful, and so right, Gordon, so right! And when one thinks of this exquisite young girl with her fair, fragile, pure face—"

Mrs. Corning ended by becoming gently tearful; but, that night, when she told her husband of the conversation with Gordon, her mood was more philosophic, though not less self-congratulatory. "There's something so sweet about his nature," she said. "It's touching to see him beginning to be happy at last. I knew he would be; his nature's so impressionable, so sensitive that if he's not allowed to become morbid about something that happens to him he's really what we call flexible. Well, being flexible is part of being normal in men, especially in young men, and most especially of all in young men who are falling in love. Take away one girl from them and it's a law of nature that they'll rebound to another, because there's a void in the heart that simply has to be filled—look at widowers! So the very time you're removing an undesirable girl from a really normal young man is exactly when you ought to throw him with a desirable one. I've seen it so often! That's what I've worked for, you see, and I don't think it'll matter so much now whether that girl's still there or not when we go back to Mirthful Haven, though of course I'm sorry you felt you had to decide to give up your old idea. I know you'd had it at heart for years—you're always so bent on doing good things for that ungrateful place—and it does seem too disappointing for you to abandon it at last."

She was indulgently sympathetic in the matter she mentioned, knowing Mirthful Haven ever to be close to her husband's heart. Not only when he was there but at other seasons of the year, his fondness for the place led him frequently to think of it, to project new plans for its improvement and to ponder upon old ones not yet successfully in operation. Among those unfulfilled, there was one long irksome to him, an old nettling from which he had finally thought it better to accept the scar of a partial defeat. At the behest of his colleague, Vandenbrock, a New Yarmouth agent had been instructed to secure the site of Pelter's for anonymous purchasers, but reported that the most persistent efforts to obtain even an interview upon the

subject were failures equally persistent. So much inherited stubbornness depressed the founders of the yacht club; they abandoned their plan to build a clubhouse over the water, bought land for its site behind the old wharf near the harbor mouth, agreed upon the architectural designs, and, by the end of April, were ready to begin construction. Upon the last afternoon of that month Corning and his older son made a final, careful study of the blueprints from the architect's office.

"I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to run up to Mirthful Haven," the father said, as they concluded this examination. "Hodgson is a good architect; but he's never been among those people and he won't know how to talk to Woodbury Fogg and make him understand things at all. What's more, Fogg won't try to make Hodgson understand anything. Well, you know them both and how to talk to them, and you know exactly what the founders want done. Hodgson is going up to stake out the site with Woodbury Fogg next Monday, and somebody ought to be there to interpret them to each other and see that things are right. Since I can't go, myself, I'd rather have you do it than Vandenbrock or any of the others."

Wallace accepted the commission cheerfully, and, having decided that his errand might agreeably be made into a little open-air excursion, he set forth at noon upon the following Saturday, driving an efficient small green automobile. He took his leisure, riding between roadsides gallant with hints of spring, and it was not until the next afternoon that he crossed a broad river and came into a browner country where such hints were missing. Here no slightest green harbingers appeared, for winter was dead with spring not yet born upon the rugged ground; this was a bleak pause between two seasons, and, at the ends of rutted by-roads, to his right, the sea was hurling an icy froth upon the coast. He slept at an inn some sixty miles from his destination and drove into Mirthful Haven at a little before noon on Monday morning.

The village seemed to be sound asleep under the high, bright sun. Not a soul did Wallace Corning see as he glided into Cargo Square, and all about him there was only sunlight and silence. No crowing sounded there from Willie Briggs; he was missing, and River Road lay as vacant as the Square and as still. The harbor water was flat glass, without a boat upon it, and even from the sea, outside, there came no chugging from a fisherman's engine; nor, far or near, was any lonely sail in sight. Oppressed with all this bright vacancy, Wallace drove slowly. Something seemed to be wrong with the landscape before him; suddenly it looked unfamiliar, so altered it was for lack of a high, gaunt outline that had long been part of it. Mirthful Haven was strange in the silence but stranger still without Pelter's.

Pelter's pier still straggled out to the channel; the old wooden front yard was still beyond the gateless gateway, and, upon the platform a cottage of a single story had been built, evidently from the wreckage. Wallace frowned at it in surprised perplexity as he passed; but put his wonderings out of mind only to replace them with others, a few moments later. He found Hodgson, the architect, and the driver of a New Yarmouth taxicab in lonely occupation of the land near the harbor mouth.

"Where's your contractor, this Fogg?" Hodgson asked, coming to the green automobile as Wallace brought it to a stop. "I got here about half an hour ago and haven't seen a human being. Is your village always like this?"

"I don't know; I've never been here out of season before and it gives me a feeling of queerness." As Wallace spoke, a sudden shrieking commotion agitated the air; dozens of sea-gulls rose from the water's edge across the harbor, uttering outrageous cries of passion, then fluttered down, gabbling. "Murder! Those birds almost make one jump; but it's a relief to hear something besides the surf—some sign of life!"

"How about this man, Fogg?" the architect asked, with a little skepticism. "Is he usually about as prompt as this?"

Wallace laughed. "He's likely to do things at his own time; but he does do them. He'll get here—ultimately—and won't explain why he didn't come sooner. We'll get along with him rather better if we don't inquire."

"Indeed? I suppose it wouldn't incommode him at all to have me miss my train from New Yarmouth at three forty-five?"

"I ought to be starting back before that, myself," Wallace said. "Perhaps I'd better run down to his house and look him up."

He turned the car about, drove back to the village and to the house of Woodbury Fogg upon a lane leading out from Old Road. There he knocked repeatedly upon the front door, the side door and the back door without evoking any response. He returned to Cargo Square, and, seeking information, found the grocery locked, the drug store locked and Mouse's Restaurant locked; no other places of business had any appearance of being in operation, even from time to time. He walked down to the small coal-yard upon one of the wharves; only a sorrel cat was there, sitting in the sunshine and looking down attentively at some gulls in the river. She gave him one preoccupied glance, found him of no consequence, returned her gaze to objects of more interest, and Wallace withdrew, not further disturbing her. He got into his car and again drove forth upon River Road, frowning dubiously; but when he reached the corner of the street where Captain Embury lived he heard sounds that reminded him of the sea-gulls' outburst

and saw a few children coming from the schoolhouse. There were some stirrings of life, then, in Mirthful Haven, even out of season, he perceived, and, halting his car at the corner, waited until a schoolboy approached.

"Hello there!" Wallace called. "Look here a minute, will you?"

"Huh?"

"See here! Where *is* everybody?"

"Huh?"

"I'm looking for Woodbury Fogg. Have you any idea where I'd be likely to find him?"

The boy stared at him thoughtfully. "Who?"

"Woodbury Fogg."

The boy continued to stare, but finally inquired, "You mean Woodbury Fogg?"

"Oh, dear me!" Wallace muttered, and drove slowly on; but became aware of another token that there was life in the place. A rattle-trap old open automobile, with its top raised and a torn side-curtain flapping out like a beating wing, came clattering from behind, passed him furiously, dwindled, and stopped before Pelter's. There descended from it a figure bent like the picture of a crone in a child's story-book; it hobbled into the gateless gateway, and the rusty automobile went on toward the sea. Wallace recognized the bent figure, stopped his car when he reached Pelter's and got out. Old Wye was sitting upon a wooden stool beside the door of the cottage that had been built upon the platform.

"How do you do, Mr. Wye," the young man said in a friendly voice. "I'm looking for Woodbury Fogg and so far haven't been able to get any information about him at all. That didn't happen to be his car you were in, did it?"

"What say?" Wye asked, and, as the question was repeated, took from his overcoat pocket a small white pasteboard box from which he removed an oblong bit of iced cake. "What say?" he asked again, and began tremulously to eat the cake.

"Was Woodbury Fogg driving that car?"

The aged man looked interestedly at the fragment of cake remaining between his thumb and shaking, withered fingers. "Did you see him a-drivin' of it?"

"No, it went by too fast and the curtain was in the way. Can you tell me where I'd be likely to find him?"

Wye finished the cake, put the pasteboard box back in his pocket, and, not looking at Wallace, sat blinking out at the road. “One them young Cornings, be you?”

“Yes, I’m Wallace. Don’t you remember me, Mr. Wye?”

“Guess I might.”

“By the way—” Wallace said, bethinking him of information to be secured for Mildred before his departure, that day. “Ah—I was wondering about this cottage here. I don’t suppose Edna—”

“What say?”

“I was just wondering who lives here?”

“I do,” Wye said, found some crumbs of icing upon his lap, and, with relish, thrust them between his puckered lips. “I do.”

“Then Edna—Miss Pelter—”

“Ain’t no Miss Pelter here,” the old man said decisively. “Ain’t no Miss Pelter nowuz around here and ain’t li’ble to be.”

“You mean she’s living in the village?”

“Dun’t mean nothin’ the kind,” Wye returned, with the same decisiveness. “Didn’t hear me say she was, did you?”

“No—but—” Wallace laughed with an indulgent exasperation. “See here, Mr. Wye, I’ve got to find out about her for a friend of hers. This friend wrote to her several times last autumn but only got one short note in answer, and it didn’t explain much. It gave the impression that she was breaking off relations with friends she’d made away from here, so to speak, if you understand what I—”

“Guess maybe I could,” Wye interrupted irritably. “Guess maybe I could understand ’f I was a-mind to.”

“Well, then, would you mind telling me what you know about her? You see, I’ll be expected to answer questions when I see her friend on my return. You say she’s gone away from Mirthful Haven?”

“When’d I say she did?”

“You said—”

“I know what I said! Said you wun’t find no Miss Pelter nowuz around here, and you wun’t!” The old man looked in his lap for other crumbs, found none, and for a moment gave way to an emotional disappointment. “All gone,” he said whimperingly; then, reviving, showed his caller a watery flicker of green from eyes that took on an expression of cunning. “One them

young Cornings, be you? Lookin' fer Woodbury Fogg, too, it seems like you said. That what you ast me?"

"Yes, if you won't tell me about—"

"I'll tell you 'bout Woodbury Fogg," Wye said suddenly; he chuckled and his eyes grew brighter. "Tell you where you can find out all 'bout Woodbury Fogg, and where he is. You turn right round and head right back to Cap'n Embury's and ast 'em there. They'll tell you all 'bout Woodbury Fogg and where he's b'en this mornin'."

"He's doing some work for Captain Embury?" Wallace asked. "You said he's—"

"Said you'd find out 'f you go back there and 'quire. That what I said or ain't it?"

"I think it was," Wallace returned amiably. "All right; I'll try it. So thank you and good-bye, Mr. Wye."

The old man made no response to this farewell, but sat mumbling to himself and chuckling. As the small green car turned and began to retrace its way to the village, he leaned forward to watch it, then sank back and closed his eyes contentedly in the warm sunshine. "Miss Pelter," he mumbled. "One them Cornings. Told him she wun't, and she ain't."

Turning into the street of the aforetime captains and magnates, Wallace saw a group of middle-aged and elderly villagers standing half-way between the corner and Captain Embury's gate. Their backs were toward him; but he had the impression that they were dressed as if for Sunday, and they were looking toward Captain Embury's house with a grave interest. Across the street a dozen children lingered before the schoolhouse, and among them were two or three older people whom he supposed to be teachers; children and teachers, too, all looked in that same direction. Willie Briggs leaned against the fence near the Captain's gate; but no one would look at him with the staring expectancy that was in all these eyes. Wallace felt himself in the presence of an event, one that had been happening or was about to happen, and he remembered the odd expression of cunning that had come upon Wye's face when the old man had told him to seek information at Captain Embury's door. There might have been an irony in that cunning—the aged fisherman had seemed to have an odd malice in his voice when he spoke the words, "One them Cornings", and perhaps he had intended a senile joke at the expense of one of that family. Wallace stopped his car at a little distance behind the group of middle-aged and elderly people. Several of them turned; he recognized an acquaintance, descended and spoke to him.

“Seabury, I’ve been all over the village, up and down and everywhere, looking for Woodbury Fogg. I finally found old Wye and he said to come back here and ask at Captain Embury’s; but it looks as if something were going on there.”

“Well, it does,” Lin Seabury agreed gravely. “Cap’ Wye’s gittin’ awful old. Kind of in his second-childhood like, guess he was, when he told you that. Said you was all over the village, did you?”

“Yes, for the last three-quarters of an hour without seeing a soul until—”

“No; guess you wouldn’t—not anywheres around the Square, nor nowheres else, likely. Didn’t happen to pass up Church Street, though, did you?”

“No.”

“Well, you wouldn’t ’a’ seen nobody there, neither,” Seabury said. “Guess you’d ’a’ seen more automobiles out front the church, though, than you would any time in ten years, ’cept when the summer people’s in Mirthful Haven. That’s where Woodbury Fogg was, and what makes it seem so second-childishness in old Cap’ Wye to tell you to come down here to ask about Woodbury Fogg, why, it’s the very fact ’twas Woodbury Fogg that jest a little while ago, after the ceremonies let out, took and give Cap’ Wye a ride back home.”

“What!”

“Certain’y did. Took and give him a ride to where he lives—where Pelter’s used to be.”

“Curious,” Wallace said. “Why in the world do you suppose that old man wanted to send me—”

“Right to Cap’n Embury’s!” Lin Seabury said, taking up the word. “ ’Speshually as this wouldn’t be no time ’t all to be askin’ the Cap’n ’bout anything p’tic’lar like that. You see—”

He was interrupted by a short and swarthy man who turned away from the group of villagers, and, accompanied by a tall and angular woman, came to join in this conversation. “Wait a minute, Lin,” he said querulously; then addressed Wallace with affability. “Reckanized you right away, Mr. Corning; guess you remember me—I’m Mr. Boy that does consid’able gaddnin right next door to you at Mr. and Mrs. Vandenbrocks’. Hope all your family’s well and enjoyin’ the winter—spring, I sh’d say, likely, ’fore long, though. No, as Lin says, this wouldn’t be no time to be astin’ Cap’n Embury, fer one reason ’cause he ain’t back home yet; but why I took up the question myself, it’s more on account o’ me bein’ able to tell you ’bout matters ’f I was a-mind to

than what Lin Seabury could, on account o' Mrs. Sillery here doin' reg'lar help-work at the Cap'n's and me bein' her boarder. You see—"

Mrs. Sillery interrupted him. "If this young man wants to see the Cap'n," she said, looking at Wallace, and apparently speaking directly to him, "you better tell him where the Cap'n's gone. Tell him they both went out t' the buryin'-ground right from the church. Went out there to put flowers on her father's grave. She said—"

"Wait a minute!" Mr. Boy interposed. "I was the one that heard her sayin' it 'cause the dinin'-room door wun't shet right tight." He addressed Wallace, showing by a gesture that he alluded to Mrs. Sillery. "She's hard o' hearin'; wouldn't nobody know much 'bout this matter if 'twun't fer me. Mrs. Sillery holds 'twas the Cap'n from the fust that wanted a marriage, as you might say, to come of it; but right there's the question. Heard 'em speakin' 'bout it twicet with my own ears. Heard the Cap'n sayin' he thought she'd be makin' a sackafice and she said 'twouldn't be and talked 'bout her father, how she wanted to do only jest the things he'd want her to and nothin' else. Took on some 'bout how that was what she was livin' fer. Then seemed the Cap'n got wind o' her bein' pestered some by men-folks wantin' to make up to her when they wun't nobody to see 'em, and he heard they was talk that all Mirthful Haven kep' right on lookin' down on her, 'speshually the women-folks. Well, suh, now you take Mirthful Haven and —"

"And it certain'y is Mirthful Haven to-day!" Lin Seabury interrupted with unction. "It's like what Ben Pibuddy's Aunt Hez says—heard her jest after the ceremonies let out. 'Funny thing!' Aunt Hez says. 'Funny thing, everybody's livin' here all their lives and never takin' in the significance or in other words the meanin' o' the name o' the town,' she says. 'Not till right up till to-day!' she says, and it looked like she had it! Guess nobody's goin' to laugh where the Cap'n could see 'em or even git wind of it; but certain'y Mirthful's the 'propriate name fer a Haven on the day when the biggest man in it, past eighty, takes and marries a girl nineteen years old!"

"What!" Wallace cried, stepping back as he began to understand. "Captain Embury was married to-day? What girl nineteen years old?"

"Why, Edny Pelter!" Mr. Boy said, astonished. "Didn't you know? Married at noon, and I guess they wun't nobody in Mirthful Haven but 'cepted the Cap'n's invitation! 'We'll invite 'em and we'll see who comes!' he says, and they certain'y all come! I was jest tellin' you; I heard the Cap'n say it, myself, 'By God!' he says; yes, suh, the Cap'n used the word right out. 'By God, she sh'll be married in church!' he says. 'By God!' the Cap'n

says, ‘I got one advantage to give her. I can make her the most respected widow that ever lived in Mirthful Haven!’ ”

Mr. Boy, pleased with the effect he was having upon the staggered young man before him, would have continued; but someone in the group at a little distance from them turned and said, “Hush!” Someone else said, “They’re coming!” and silence fell upon the sunlit street.

At the corner above, where the street from the church leads toward Old Road, there appeared an ancient carriage long mildewed in the Captain’s stable; it was drawn by two rough-coated bay horses under the guidance of a solemn village boy with a white carnation in his buttonhole. It drew up at the mounting-block before the Captain’s gate; Captain Embury and Edna stepped out, walked to the broad granite step before the beautiful white doorway, and paused there for a moment. Neither of them seemed, or was, aware of the little crowd watching them; but as the Captain opened the door Edna turned her head for one long look at the schoolhouse across the way, and Wallace Corning, staring over the shoulders of the villagers, found a strange idea in his mind. Seeing that look of the pale bride, he thought, for just the moment, that things were out of place in his world; it seemed to him, just then, that he came of a dull family, and that his brother had committed a very sin of dullness.

Then the people about him stirred, beginning to move away, for the Captain and Edna had gone into the house and the door was closed. Wallace saw that two of the elderly women in a group near him were weeping quietly, and he was not surprised, for he found it difficult to remember, just then, what it was that had brought him to Mirthful Haven.

He attended capably to the business that had brought him, though, and by mid-afternoon both he and the architect had gone their ways. Nightfall found no strangers in the village or down by the sea; the dark houses upon Great Point were silent above a drowsy surf, and all along the harbor there was only the lonely light of the cottage upon the old wooden platform of Pelter’s. In the village, children and their elders prepared for bed, and, in the street of the ocean overlords, a brightness diffused from the windows of a room where Edna Embury sat reading, as upon other evenings at this hour, to her old husband across the rosy, marble hearth. She read to him from his favorite book.

" '*O happy living things! no tongue*
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gush'd from my heart,
And I bless'd them unaware:
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I bless'd them unaware.
The selfsame moment I could pray—' "

Starlight fell upon the roof of the old house, upon the roofs and the two spires of the village, and all was well with Mirthful Haven.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *Mirthful Haven* by Booth Tarkington]