SEven Days

Mary Roberts Rinehart

Title: Seven Days
Date of first publication: 1908
Author: Mary Roberts Rinehart (1876-1958)
Date first posted: Nov. 14, 2021
Date last updated: Nov. 14, 2021
Faded Page eBook #20211129

This eBook was produced by: Mardi Desjardins, Jen Haines & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at https://www.pgdpcanada.net

SEVEN DAYS

BY MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

Author of "The Circular Staircase," etc.

I.

WHEN the dreadful thing occurred that night, every one turned on me. The injustice of it hurt me most. They said *I* got up the dinner, that *I* asked them all to give up other engagements and come, that *I* promised all kinds of jollification, if they would come; and then when they did come and got in the papers, and every one—but ourselves—laughed himself black in the face, they turned on *me*! *I*, who suffered ten times to their one! I shall never forget what Dallas Brown said to me, standing with a coal shovel in one hand and a—well, perhaps it would be better to tell it all in the order it happened.

It began with Jimmy Wilson and a conspiracy, was helped along by a foot-long piece of red paper and a Japanese butler, and it enmeshed and mixed up generally ten respectable members of society and a policeman. Incidentally, it involved a pearl collar and a box of soap, which sounds incongruous, doesn't it?

The trouble was, I think, that no one took Jim seriously. His ambition in life was to be taken seriously, but people steadily refused to. His art was a huge joke—except to himself. If he asked people to dinner, every one expected a frolic. When he married Bella Knowles, people chuckled at the wedding, and considered it the wildest prank of Jimmy's career, although Jim himself seemed to take it awfully hard.

It is a great misfortune to be stout, especially for a man. Jim was rotund and looked shorter than he really was, and as all the lines of his face, or what should have been lines, were really dimples, his face was about as flexible and full of expression as a pillow in a tight cover. The angrier he got the funnier he looked, and when he was raging, and his neck swelled up over his collar and got red, he was entrancing. And everybody liked him, and borrowed money from him, and laughed at his pictures (he has one in the Hargrave gallery in London now, so people buy them instead), and smoked his cigarettes, and tried to steal his Jap. The whole story hinges on the Jap.

Well, on the anniversary of the day Bella left him—— (Yes, Bella left. She was terribly intense, and it got on her nerves finally to have everybody chuckle when they asked for her husband. They would say, "Hello, Bella! How's Bubbles? Still banting?" And Bella would try to laugh and say, "He swears his tailor says his waist is smaller, but if it is he must be growing hollow in the back." But she got tired of it at last.) Well, on the second anniversary of Bella's departure, Jimmy was feeling pretty glum, and I am very fond of Jim. The divorce had just gone through, and Bella had taken her maiden name again and had an operation for appendicitis. We heard afterwards that they didn't find any appendix, and that the one they showed her in a glass jar *was not hers*! But if Bella ever suspected, she didn't say. Whether the appendix was anonymous or not, she got box after box of flowers that were, and of course every one knew it was Jim who sent them.

To go back to the anniversary, I went into Rothberg's to see the collection of antique furniture—mother was looking for a sideboard for father's birthday in March—and I met Jimmy there, boring into a worm-hole in a seventeenth-century bed-post with the end of a match, and looking his nearest approach to sad. When he saw me he came over.

"I'm blue to-day, Kit," he said, after we had shaken hands. "Come and help me dig bait, and then let's go fishing. If there's a worm in every hole in that bed-post, we could go into the fish business. It's a good business."

"Better than painting?" I asked. But he ignored my gibe and swelled up alarmingly in order to sigh.

"This is the worst day of the year for me," he affirmed, staring straight ahead, "and the longest. Look at that crazy clock over there. If you want to see your life passing away, if you want to see the steps by which you are marching to eternity, watch that clock marking time. Look at that infernal hand staying quiet for sixty seconds and then jumping forward to catch up with the procession. Ugh!"

"See here, Jim," I said, leaning forward, "you're not well. You can't go through the rest of the day like this. I know what you'll do: you are going home to play Grieg on the pianola, and you won't eat any dinner." He looked guilty.

"Not Grieg," he protested feebly. "Beethoven."

"You're not going to do either," I said with firmness. "You are going right home to unpack those new draperies that Harry Bayles sent you from

Shanghai, and you are going to order dinner for eight—that will be two tables of bridge. And you are not going to touch the pianola."

That was my entire share in the affair, and to say, as some of them did afterwards, that I brought it on them—well, it was downright malicious.

I really put myself out a lot. I took the Mercer girls myself in the electric cab father gave me for Christmas, because their brougham was in use, and the chauffeur had been gone for twenty-four hours with the touring-car. They had telephoned the hospitals and police stations, and they were afraid there had been an awful smash. (They could easily have replaced Bartlett, but it takes so long to get new parts for those foreign cars.)

The Dallas Browns walked; they lived in the next block. And they brought with them a man named Harbison, that no one knew. Anne said he would be great sport, because he was terribly serious, and had the most exaggerated ideas of society, and loathed extravagance, and built bridges or something. She had put away her cigarettes since he had been with them—he and Dallas had been college friends—and the only chance she had to smoke was when she was getting her hair done. And she had singed quite a lot off—a burnt offering, she said.

Jim had a house well uptown, and it stood just enough apart from the other houses to be entirely maddening, later. It was a three-story affair, with a basement kitchen and servants' dining-room. Then, of course, there were cellars, as we found out afterwards. On the first floor there was a large square hall, a small, formal reception-room, behind it a big living-room, then a den, and back of all a Georgian dining-room, with low windows, high above the ground. On the top floor Jim had a studio, like every other one I ever saw,—perhaps a little mussier. Jim was really a grind at his painting, and there were cigarette ashes and palette knives and buffalo rugs and shields everywhere. It is strange, but when I think of that terrible house, I always see the halls, enormous, covered with heavy rugs, and stairs that would have taken six housemaids to keep in proper condition. I dream about those stairs, stretching above me in a Jacob's ladder of shining wood and Persian carpets, going up, up, clear to the roof.

We all arrived about the same time, and Anne Brown and I went upstairs together to take off our wraps in what had been Bella's dressing-room. It was Anne who noticed the violets.

"Look at that!" she nudged me, when the maid was examining her wrap before she laid it down. "What did I tell you, Kit? He's still quite mad about her."

Jim had painted Bella's portrait while they were going up the Nile on their wedding trip. It looked quite like her, if you stood well off in the middle of the room, and if the light came from the right. And just beneath, in a silver vase, was a bunch of violets. I think it proper to emphasize Jim's fondness for his divorced wife, in view of what was coming. Even Bella herself said afterwards that I had certainly done the best I could under the circumstances, and for Anne Brown to talk the way she did—saying I had always been crazy about Jimmy, and that she believed I had known all along that his Aunt was coming—for Anne to talk like that was sheer idiocy. Oh yes, there was an Aunt. The Jap started the trouble, and Aunt Selina carried it along.

We all met downstairs in the living-room, quite informally, and Dallas Brown was banging away at the pianola, tramping the pedals with the delicacy and feeling of a football centre rush kicking a goal. Somebody shouted the Harbison man's name to me, and then I saw Jimmy beckoning crazily to me from the den. The Harbison man—he was nice looking, in a large, much-shaven way—saw him too, and stepped back. It was easy to see that something had occurred to upset Jim: he looked quite yellow, and he had been running his fingers through his hair.

"For heaven's sake, come in, Kit!" he said. "I need a cool head. Didn't I tell you this is my calamity day?"

"Cook gone?" I asked with interest. I was starving.

He closed the door and took up a tragic attitude in front of the fire. "Did you ever hear of Aunt Selina?" he demanded.

"I knew there *was* one," I ventured, mindful of certain gossip as to whence Jimmy derived the Wilson income. Jim himself was too worried to be cautious. He waved a brazen hand at the snug room, at the Japanese prints on the walls, at the rugs, at the teakwood cabinets and the screen inlaid with pearl and ivory.

"All this," he said comprehensively, "every bite I eat, clothes I wear, drinks I drink—you needn't look like that; I don't drink so darned much—everything comes from Aunt Selina. Buttons," he finished with a groan.

"Selina Buttons," I said reflectively. "I don't remember ever having known any one named Buttons, although I had a cat once——"

"—— the cat!" he said rudely. "Her name isn't Buttons. Her name is Caruthers, my Aunt Selina Caruthers, and the money comes from buttons."

"Oh!"—feebly.

“It’s an old business,” he went on, with something of proprietary pride. “My grandfather founded it in 1775. Made buttons for the Continental Army. Aunt Selina is the owner now; I will be some day.”

“I hope you will make *good* buttons, James,” I said. But again he interrupted.

“It’s like this,” he went on hurriedly. “Aunt Selina believes in me. She likes pictures, and she wanted me to paint, if I could. I’d have given up long ago—oh, I know what you all think of my work—but for Aunt Selina. She has encouraged me, and she’s done more than that: she’s paid the bills.”

“Dear Aunt Selina!” I breathed.

“When I got married,” Jim persisted, “Aunt Selina doubled my allowance. I always expected to sell something, and begin to make money, and in the meantime what she advanced I considered as a loan.” He was eying me defiantly, but I was growing serious. It was evident from the preamble that something was coming.

“To understand, Kit,” he went on dubiously, “you would have to know her. She won’t stand for divorce. She thinks it is a crime.”

“What!” I sat up. I have always regarded divorce as essentially disagreeable, like castor oil, but necessary.

“Oh, you know well enough what I am driving at,” he burst out savagely. “She doesn’t know Bella has gone. She thinks I am living in a little domestic heaven, and—she is coming to-night to hear me flap my wings.”

I don’t think Jimmy had known that Dallas had come in and was listening. I am sure I had not. Hearing his chuckle at the doorway brought us up with a jerk.

“Where has Aunt Selina been for the last two or three years?” he asked easily.

Jim brightened perceptibly.

“Europe. Look here, Dal, you’re a smart chap. She’ll only be here about four hours. Can’t you think of some way to let me out of this? I want to let her down easy, too. I’m mighty fond of her. Can’t we—can’t I say Bella has a headache?”

“Rotten!”—laconically.

“Gone out of town?”—hopefully.

"And you with a houseful of dinner guests! Try again, Jim."

"I have it," Jim said suddenly. "Dallas, ask Anne if she won't play hostess for to-night? Be Mrs. Wilson *pro tem*? Anne would love it. Aunt Selina never saw Bella. Then, afterwards, next year, when I'm hung in the Academy and can stand on my feet"—("Not if you're hung," Dallas interjected)—"I'll break the truth to her."

But Dallas was not enthused.

"Anne wouldn't do at all," he declared. "She'd be talking about the kids before she knew it, and patting me on the head." He said it complacently: Anne flirts, but they are really devoted.

"The Mercer girls?" I suggested, but Jimmy raised a horrified hand.

"You don't know Aunt Selina," he protested. "I couldn't offer Leila in the gown she's got on, unless she wore a shawl, and Betty is too fair. Well, it's up to you, Kit."

I hadn't really known what was coming, and of course I declared at once against it. And then Leila Mercer came and pounded on the door and said they were famishing, and dinner had been announced ages ago, and what with the hurry and stress, and poor Jim's distracted face, I weakened.

"She might stay longer than four hours," I objected. "She might miss her train."

"You're not game, Kit," Dallas scoffed. "You're a four-flusher. Why, it's the biggest prank I ever heard of. It will save the old lady a shock and save Jim's feelings. When you're an elderly person yourself, Kit, you'll appreciate what you are doing to-night."

So in the end they persuaded me. Oh, I am not defending myself: I suppose I deserved everything that happened. But they said Aunt Selina was to be there only between trains, and that she was as deaf as a post; and instead of my getting the blame, the way I did, the real culprits were Dallas Brown and Jim. I can't remember all the arguments they offered—I do remember they stooped to bribes—but when they put it to me that it was in my power to save a fellow being from complete ruin, I capitulated.

When they opened the door into the living-room, Max Reed had arrived and was helping to hide a decanter and glasses, and somebody said a cab was at the door. And that was the way it began.

II.

THE minute I had consented, I regretted it. After all, what were Jimmy's troubles to me? Why should I help him to impose on an unsuspecting elderly lady? And it was only putting off discovery anyhow. Sooner or later, she would learn of the divorce, and—— Just at that instant my eyes fell on Mr. Harbison—Tom Harbison, as Anne called him. He was looking on with an amused, half puzzled smile while people were rushing around hiding the roulette wheel and things of which Miss Caruthers might disapprove, and Betty Mercer was on her knees winding up a toy bear that Max had brought her. What would he think? It was evident that he thought badly of us already—that he was contemptuously amused, and to have to ask him to lend himself to the deception!

With a gasp I hurled myself after Jimmy, only to hear a strange voice in the hall and to know that I was too late. I was in for it, whatever was coming. It was Aunt Selina who was coming—along the hall, followed by Jim, who was mopping his face and trying not to notice the paralyzed silence in the library.

Aunt Selina met me in the doorway. To my frantic eyes she seemed to tower above us by at least a foot, and beside her Jimmy was a red, perspiring cherub.

"Here she is," Jimmy said, from behind a temporary eclipse of black cloak and travelling bag. He was on top of the situation now, and he was mendaciously cheerful. He had *not* said, "Here is my wife." That would have been a lie. No, Jimmy merely said, "Here she is." If Aunt Selina chose to think me Bella, was it not her responsibility? And if I chose to accept the situation, was it not mine? Dallas Brown came forward gravely as Aunt Selina folded over and kissed me, and surreptitiously patted me with one hand while he held out the other to Miss Caruthers. I loathed him!

"We always expect something unusual from James, Miss Caruthers," he said, with his best manner, "but *this*—this is beyond our wildest dreams."

Well, it's too awful to linger over. We got Aunt Selina upstairs, and gave her to Hannah, one of the maids, and then Jimmy went into the den and closed the door, and we heard him unlock the cellarette. Mr. Harbison, who had been standing alone by the fireplace, came over to me, where I had collapsed into a chair.

“Do you know,” he said, looking down at me with his clear, disconcerting gaze—“do you know that I have just grasped the situation? The piano was making such a noise that I did not hear your name, and I have only just realized that you are my hostess! I don’t know why I got the impression that this was a bachelor establishment, but I did. Odd, wasn’t it?”

I positively couldn’t look away from him. My features seemed frozen, and my eyes were glued to his. As for telling him the truth—well, my tongue refused to move. And upstairs that awful old woman would be coming down soon, and asking me how much I paid the cook, and what had become of the vase Cousin Jane sent us as a wedding gift!

Dinner was a half hour late when we finally went out, Jimmy leading off with Aunt Selina, and I, as hostess, trailing behind the procession with Mr. Harbison. Dallas took in the two Mercer girls, for we were one man short, and Max took Anne. Leila Mercer was so excited that she wriggled, and as for me, the candles and the orchids—everything—danced around in a circle, and I just seemed to catch the back of my chair as it flew past. Jim had ordered away the wines and brought out some weak and cheap Chianti. Dallas looked gloomy at the change, but Jim explained in an undertone that Aunt Selina didn’t approve of expensive vintages. Naturally, the meal was glum enough.

Aunt Selina had had her dinner on the train, and so she spent her time asking me questions the length of the table, and getting acquainted with me. She brought a bottle of some sort of medicine downstairs with her, and she took a claret-glassful, while she talked. The stuff was called Pomona: shall I ever forget it?

It was Mr. Harbison who first noticed Takahiro. Jimmy’s Jap had been the only thing in the *ménage* which Bella declared she hated to leave. But he was doing the strangest things: his little black eyes shifted nervously, and he looked queer.

“What’s wrong with him?” Mr. Harbison asked me finally, when he saw that I noticed. “Is he ill?”

Then Aunt Selina’s voice from the other end of the table.

“Bella,” she called, in a high clear voice, “do you let James eat cucumbers?”

“I think he must be,” I said hurriedly aside to Mr. Harbison. “See how his hands shake!” But Aunt Selina would not be ignored.

“Cucumbers and strawberries,” she repeated impressively. “I was saying, Bella, that cucumbers have always given James the most fearful indigestion. And yet I see you serve them at your table. Do you remember what I wrote you to give him when he has his dreadful spells?”

I was quite speechless; every one was looking, and no one could help. It was clear Jim was racking his brain, and we sat staring desperately at each other across the candles. Everything I had ever known faded from me; eight pairs of eyes bored into me, Mr. Harbison’s politely amused.

“I don’t remember,” I said at last. “Really, I don’t believe——”

Aunt Selina smiled in a superior way.

“Now, don’t you recall it?” she insisted. “I said: ‘Baking soda in water taken internally for cucumbers; baking soda in water externally, rubbed on, when he gets that dreadful, itching strawberry rash’!”

“I am going to write that down,” Max said earnestly. “You have no idea, Miss Caruthers, how I suffer from strawberry rash.”

I believe the dinner went on. Somebody asked Aunt Selina how much over-charge she had paid in foreign hotels, and after that she was as harmless as a dove.

Then half way through the dinner we heard a crash in Takahiro’s pantry, and when he did not appear again, Jim got up and went out to investigate. He was gone quite a little while, and when he came back he looked worried.

“Sick,” he replied to our inquiring glances. “One of the maids will come in. They have sent for a doctor.”

Aunt Selina was for going out at once and “fixing him up,” as she put it, but Dallas interfered.

“I wouldn’t, Miss Caruthers,” he said, in the deferential manner he had adopted toward her. “You don’t know what it may be. He’s been looking spotty all evening.”

“It might be scarlet fever,” Max broke in cheerfully. “I say, scarlet fever on a Mongolian—what color would he be, Jimmy? What do yellow and red make? Green?”

“Orange,” Jim said shortly. “I wish you people would remember that we are trying to eat.”

The fact was, however, that no one was really eating, except Mr. Harbison, who had given up trying to understand us, considering, no doubt,

our subdued excitement as our normal condition. Ages afterwards I learned that he thought my face almost tragic that night, and he supposed, from the way I glared across the table, that I had quarrelled with my husband!

Well, that's the picture as nearly as I can draw it: a round table with a low centrepiece of orchids in lavenders and pink, old silver candlesticks with filigree shades against the sombre wainscoting: nine people, two of them unhappy—Jim and I; one of them complacent—Aunt Selina; one puzzled—Mr. Harbison; and the rest hysterically mirthful. Add one sick Japanese butler and grind in the mill of the gods.

Every one promptly forgot Takahiro in the excitement of the game they were playing. Finally, however, Aunt Selina, who seemed to have Takahiro on her mind, looked up from her plate.

"That Jap was speckled," she asserted. "I wouldn't be surprised it's measles. Has he been sniffling, James?"

"Has he been sniffling?" Jim threw across at me.

"I hadn't noticed it," I said meekly, while the others choked.

"The difference is this," Max said distinctly and with dignity, apropos of nothing. "Kit is a pessimist—just now. The true optimist sees the doughnut; the pessimist sees the hole."

As every one wanted to laugh, they did it then, and under cover of the noise I caught Anne's eye, and we left the dining-room. The men stayed, and by the very firmness with which the door closed behind us, I knew that Dallas and Max were bringing out the bottles that Takahiro had hidden. I was seething. When Aunt Selina indicated a desire to go over the house (it was natural that she should want to: it was her house, in a way) I excused myself for a minute and flew back to the dining-room.

It was as I had expected. Jim hadn't cheered perceptibly, but the rest were patting him on the back, and pouring things out for him, and saying, "Poor old Jim!" in the most maddening way. And the Harbison man was looking more and more puzzled, and not at all hilarious.

I descended on them like a thunderbolt.

"That's it!" I cried shrewishly, with my back against the door. "Leave her to me, all of you, and pat each other on the back, and say it's gone splendidly! Oh, I know you, every one!" (Mr. Harbison got up and pulled out a chair, but I couldn't sit: I folded my arms over the back.) "After a while, I suppose, you'll slip upstairs, the four of you, and have your game."

They looked guilty. “But I will block that right now. I am going to stay—here. If Aunt Selina wants me, she can find me—here!”

The first indication those men had that Mr. Harbison didn’t know the state of affairs was when he pushed back his own chair and got up.

“Mrs. Wilson is quite right,” he said gravely. “We’re a selfish lot. If Miss Caruthers is a responsibility, let us share her.”

“To arms!” Jim said, with an affectation of lightness, as they all rose, and threw open the door. Dallas’s retort, “Whose?” was lost in the confusion, and we went into the library. On the way Dallas managed to speak to me.

“If Harbison doesn’t know, don’t tell him,” he said in an undertone. “He’s a queer duck, in some ways; he mightn’t think it funny.”

“Funny!” I choked. “It’s the least funny thing I ever experienced. Deceiving that Harbison man isn’t so bad—he thinks me crazy, anyhow. He’s been staring his eyes out at me——”

“I don’t wonder. You’re really lovely to-night, Kit, and you look like a vixen.”

“But to deceive that harmless old lady—well, thank goodness, it’s almost ten, and she leaves in an hour or so.”

But she didn’t. That is the story.

Jimmy and the Mercer girls took Aunt Selina around. Anne Brown, with Dallas and Max, sneaked up to the studio for a cigarette, and Mr. Harbison stayed with me. He said he thought I looked white, and he got me a cushion, and told me not to worry about the butler. Everything had gone off well, and he was probably not seriously ill. And then, when he found I was not talkative, he let me alone and sauntered around the room, and finally disappeared into the den.

It was then that the real complexity of the situation began to develop. Some one had rung the bell and had been admitted to the hall, and a maid came to the door of the library. When she saw me she came over uncertainly. Even then it struck me that she looked odd and that she was not in uniform. However, I knew nothing—then—of bachelor establishments, and the next thing she said knocked her and her clothes clear out of my head. Evidently she knew me.

“Miss McNair,” she said in a low tone, “there is a lady in the hall, a *veiled* person, and she is asking for Mr. Wilson.”

“Then why not get Mr. Wilson?” I asked. My head was bursting. “He is in the studio, probably.”

The girl hesitated. “Excuse me, miss, but Miss Caruthers——”

Then I saw the situation.

“Never mind,” I said, rising. “I’ll find Mr. Wilson.”

But as the girl left by one door, the person in question appeared at the other, and raised her veil. I was perfectly paralyzed. It was Bella! Bella in a fur coat and a veil, with the most tragic eyes I ever saw, and entirely white except for a dab of rouge in the middle of each cheek. She came right over and clutched me by the arm.

“Who was being carried out into that ambulance?” she demanded, glaring at me with the most awful intensity.

“I’m sure I don’t know, Bella,” I said, wriggling away from her fingers. “What in the world are you doing here? I thought you were out at Pemberton.”

“You are hiding something from me!” she accused. “It is Jim! I see it in your face.”

“Well, it isn’t,” I snapped. “It seems to me, really, Bella, that you and Jim ought to be able to manage your own affairs, without dragging me in.” I was not pleasant, but if she was suffering, so was I. “Jim is as well as he ever was. He’s upstairs somewhere. I’ll send for him.”

She gripped me again, and held on while her color came back.

“You’ll do nothing of the kind,” she said, and she had quite got hold of herself again. “I do not want to see him: I hope you don’t think, Kit, that I came back here to see James Wilson. Why, I have forgotten that there is such a person, and you know it.”

Somebody laughed in the next room, and I was growing nervous. What if Aunt Selina should come down, or Mr. Harbison come in?

“Why *did* you come, then, Bella?” I inquired. “He may come in.”

“I was passing in the motor,” she said, and I honestly think she hoped I would believe her, “and I saw that am——” She stopped and began again. “I thought Jim was out of town, and I came to see Takahiro,” she said brazenly. “He was devoted to me, and Evans is going to leave. I’ll tell you what to do, Kit. I’ll go back to the dining-room, and you send Taka there. If any one comes, I can slip into the pantry.”

"It's immoral," I protested. "To steal——"

"My own butler!" she broke in impatiently. "You're not usually so scrupulous, Kit. Hurry! I hear that hateful Anne Brown."

So we slid back along the hall, and I rang for Takahiro. But no one came.

"I think I ought to tell you, Bella," I said, as we waited, and Bella was staring around the room—"I think you ought to know that Miss Caruthers is here." Bella only shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, thank goodness," she said, "I don't have to see her. The only pleasant thing I remember about my year of married life is that I did *not* meet Aunt Selina."

I rang again, but still there was no answer. And then it occurred to me that the stillness below-stairs was almost oppressive. Bella was noticing things, too, for she began to fasten her veil again with a malicious little smile.

"One of the things I remember my late husband saying," she said, "was that *he* could manage this house, and had done it for years, with flawless service. Stand on the bell, Kit."

I did. We stood there with the table, just as it had been left, between us, and waited for a response. Bella was growing impatient. She raised her eyebrows (she is very handsome, Bella is) and flung out her chin as if she began to enjoy the situation.

I thought I heard the rattle of silver from the pantry just then, and I hurried to the door in a rage. But the pantry was empty and full of dishes, and all the lights were out but one, burning dimly. I could have sworn that I saw one of the servants duck into the stairway to the basement, but when I got there the stairs were empty, and something was burning in the kitchen below.

Bella had followed me and was peering over my shoulder curiously.

"There isn't a servant in the house," she said triumphantly. And when we went down to the kitchen, she seemed to be right. It was in disgraceful disorder, and one of the bottles of wine that had been banished from the dining-room sat half empty on the floor.

"Drunk!" Bella said with conviction. But I didn't think so. There had not been time enough, for one thing. Suddenly I remembered the ambulance that had been the cause of Bella's appearance—for no one could believe her silly story about Takahiro. I didn't wait to voice my suspicions to her; I simply

left her there, staring helplessly at the confusion, and ran upstairs again: through the dining-room, past Jimmy and Aunt Selina, past Leila Mercer and Max, who were flirting on the stairs, up, up to the servants' bedrooms, and there my suspicions were verified. There was every evidence of a hasty flight; in three bedrooms five trunks stood locked and ominous, and the chests yawned with open doors, empty. Bella had been right: there was not a servant in the house.

As I emerged from the untidy emptiness of the servants' wing, I met Mr. Harbison coming out of the studio.

"I wish you would let me do some of this running about for you, Mrs. Wilson," he said gravely. "You are not well, and I can't think of anything worse for a headache. Has the butler's illness clogged the household machinery?"

"Worse," I replied, trying not to breathe in gasps. "I wouldn't be running around—like this—but there is not a servant in the house! They have gone, the entire lot."

"That's odd," he said slowly. "Gone! Are you sure?"

In reply I pointed to the servants' wing. "Trunks packed," I said tragically, "rooms empty, kitchen and pantries full of dishes. Did you ever hear anything like it?"

"Never," he asserted. "It makes me suspect——" What he suspected he did not say; instead, he turned on his heel, without a word of explanation, and ran down the stairs. I stood staring after him, wondering if every one in the place had gone crazy. Then I heard Betty Mercer scream and the rest talking loud and laughing, and Mr. Harbison came up the stairs again two at a time.

"How long has that Jap been ailing, Mrs. Wilson?" he asked.

"I—I don't know," I replied helplessly. "What *is* the trouble, anyhow?"

"I think he probably has something contagious," he said, "and it has scared the servants away. As Mrs. Brown said, he looked spotty. I suggested to your husband that it might be as well to get the house empty—in case we are correct."

"Oh, yes, by all means," I said eagerly. I couldn't get away from there too soon. "I'll go and get my——" Then I stopped. Why, the man wouldn't expect *me* to leave; I had to play out the wretched farce to the end!

"I'll go down and see them off," I finished lamely, and we went down the stairs.

Just for the moment I forgot Bella altogether. I found Aunt Selina bonneted and cloaked, taking a stirrup cup of Pomona for her nerves, and the rest throwing on their wraps in a hurry. Downstairs Max was telephoning for his car, which wasn't due for an hour, and Jim was walking up and down, swearing under his breath. With the prospect of getting rid of them all, and of going home comfortably to try and forget the whole wretched affair, I cheered up quite a lot. I even played up my part of hostess, and Dallas said, aside, that I was a brick.

Just then Jim threw open the door.

There was a man on the top step, with his mouth full of tacks, and he was nailing something to the door, just below Jim's Florentine bronze knocker, and standing back with his head on one side to see if it was straight.

"What are you doing?" Jim demanded fiercely, but the man only drove another tack. It was Mr. Harbison who stepped outside and read the card.

It said "Scarlet Fever."

"Scarlet fever," Mr. Harbison read, as if he couldn't believe it. Then he turned to us, huddled in the hall.

"It seems it wasn't measles, after all," he said cheerfully. "I move we get into Mr. Reed's automobile out there, and have a disinfection party. I suppose even you *blasé* society folks have not exhausted that kind of diversion."

But the man on the step spat his tacks in his hand and spoke for the first time.

"No, you don't," he said. "Not on your life. Just step back, please, and close the door. This house is quarantined."

III.

THERE is hardly any use trying to describe what followed. Anne Brown began to cry, and talk about the children. (She went to Europe once and stayed till they all got over the whooping-cough.) And Dallas said he had a

pull, because his mill controlled I forget how many votes, and the thing to do was to be quiet and comfortable and we would be out in the morning. Max took it as a huge joke, and somebody found him at the telephone, giving it to one of the papers. The Mercer girls were hysterically giggling, and Aunt Selina sat on a stiff-backed chair and took aromatic ammonia. As for Jim, he had collapsed on the lowest step of the stairs, and sat there with his head in his hands. When he did look up, he didn't dare to look at me.

The Harbison man was arguing with the impassive individual on the top step outside, and I saw him get out his pocketbook and offer a crisp bundle of bills. But the man from the Board of Health only smiled and tacked at his offensive sign. After a while Mr. Harbison came in and closed the door, and we stared at each other.

"I know what I'm going to do," I said, swallowing a lump in my throat: "I'm going to get out through a basement window at the back. I am going home."

"Home!" Aunt Selina gasped, almost dropping her ammonia bottle. "My dear Bella! Home?"

Jimmy groaned from the foot of the stairs, but Anne Brown was getting over her tears and now she turned on me in a temper.

"It's all your fault," she said. "I was going to stay at home and get a little sleep——"

"Well, you can sleep now," Dallas broke in. "There'll be nothing to do but sleep."

"I think you haven't grasped the situation, Dal," I said icily. "There will be plenty to do. There isn't a servant in the house!"

Then there *was* a row. We had worked back to the den now, and I stood in front of the fireplace and let the storm beat around me, and tried to look perfectly cold and indifferent, and not see Mr. Harbison's shocked face. No wonder he thought them a lot of savages, browbeating their hostess the way they did.

"It's a fool thing anyhow," Max Reed wound up, "to celebrate the anniversary of a divorce—especially——" Here he caught Jim's eye and stopped. But I had suddenly remembered. *Bella down in the basement!*

It was after midnight before they were rational enough to discuss ways and means, and of course the first thing suggested was that we all adjourn

below-stairs and clean up after the dinner. I could have slain Max Reed for the notion, and the Mercer girls for taking him up.

"Of course we will," they said in a duet. "What a lark!" And they actually began to pin up their dinner gowns. It was Jim who stopped that.

"Oh, look here, you people," he objected, "I'm not going to let you do that. We'll get some servants in to-morrow. I'll go down and put out the lights. There will be enough clean dishes for breakfast."

It was lucky for me that they started a new discussion then and there about who would get the breakfast. In the midst of the excitement I slipped away and carried the news to Bella. She was where I had left her, and she had made herself a cup of tea, and was very much at home, which was natural.

"Do you know," she said ominously, "that you have been away over an hour? And that I have gone through agonies of nervousness for fear Jim Wilson would come down and think I came here to see him."

"No one would think that, Bella," I soothed her. "Everybody knows you loathe him—Jim, too." She looked at me over the edge of her cup.

"I'll run along now," she said, "since Takahiro isn't here. And if Jim has any sense at all, he will clear out every maid in the house. I never saw such a kitchen. Well, lead the way, Kit. I suppose they are deep in bridge, or roulette, or something."

She was fixing her veil, and I saw I would have to tell her. Personally, I would much rather have told her the house was on fire.

"Wait a minute, Bella," I said. "You see, something queer has happened. You know this is the anniversary—well, you know what it is—and Jim was awfully glum. So we thought we would come——"

"What are you driving at?" she demanded. "You are a sea-green, Kit. What's the matter? You needn't think I mind because Jim has a jollification to celebrate his divorce."

"It—it was Takahiro—in the ambulance," I blurted. "Scarlet fever. We—Bella, we are shut in, quarantined."

She didn't faint. She just sat down and stared at me, and I stared back at her. Then a miserable alarm clock on the table suddenly went off like an explosion, and Bella began to laugh. I knew what that was—hysteria. She always had attacks like that when things went wrong. I was quite desperate by that time; I hoped they would all hear and come down and take her

upstairs and put her to bed like a Christian, so she could giggle her soul out. But after a bit she quieted down and began to cry softly, and I knew the worst was over. I gave her a shake, and she was so angry that she got over it altogether.

"Kit, you are horrid," she choked. "Don't you see what a position I am in? I am not going upstairs to face Anne and the rest of them. You can just put me in the coal cellar."

"Isn't there a window you could get through?" I asked desperately. "Locking the door doesn't shut up a whole house."

Bella's courage revived at that, and she said yes, there were windows, plenty of them, only she didn't see how she could get out. And I said she would *have* to get out, because I was playing Bella in the performance, and I didn't care for an understudy. Then the situation dawned on her, and she sat down and laughed herself weak in the knees. She wanted to stay, then, and see the fun out. But I was firm: she would have to go. Things were complicated enough without her.

Well, we looked funny, no doubt. Bella in a Russian pony automobile coat over the jet dinner-gown she had worn at the Clevelands' dinner, and I in cream lace, gathered up from the kitchen floor, with Bella's ermine pelerine around my bare shoulders, and dishes and overturned chairs everywhere.

Bella knew more about the lower regions of her ex-home than I would have thought. She opened a door in a corner and led the way through a narrow hall past the refrigerating-room, to a huge, cemented cellar, with a furnace in the centre, and a half-dozen electric lights making it really brilliant.

"Get a chair," Bella said over her shoulder, excitedly. "I can get out easily here, through the coal-hole. Imagine my——"

But it was my turn to grip Bella. From behind the furnace were coming the most terrible sounds, rasping noises that fairly frayed the silk of my nerves. We stood petrified for an instant. Then Bella laughed. "They are not all gone," she said carefully. "Some one is asleep there."

We tiptoed to where we could see around the furnace, and, sure enough, some one *was* asleep there. Only, it was not one of the servants; it was a portly policeman, with a newspaper and an empty plate on the floor on one side, and a champagne bottle on the other. He had slid down in his chair,

with his chin on his brass buttons, and his helmet had rolled a dozen feet away. Bella had to clap her hand over her mouth.

"Fairly caught!" she whispered. "Sartor resartus, the arrester arrested. Oh, Jim and his flawless service!"

But after we got over our surprise, we saw the situation was serious. The policeman was threatening to waken. Once he stopped snoring to yawn noisily, and we beat a hasty retreat. Bella switched off the lights in a hurry and locked the door behind us. We hardly breathed until we were back in the kitchen again, and everything quiet. And then Jimmy called my name from up above somewhere.

"I am going to call him down, Bella," I said firmly. "Let him help you out. I'm sure I don't see why I should have all this when the two of you ——"

"Oh, no, no! Surely, Kit, you wouldn't be so cruel!" she whispered pleadingly. "You know what he would think. He—oh, Kit, let them all get settled for the night, and then come down, like a dear, and help me out. I know loads of ways—honestly I do."

"If I leave you here," I debated, "what about the policeman?"

"Never mind him"—frantically. "Listen! There's Jim up in the pantry. Run, for the sake of heaven!"

So—I ran. At the top of the stairs I met Jimmy, very crumpled as to shirt-front and dejected as to face.

"I've been hunting everywhere for you," he said dismally. "I thought you had added to the general merriment by falling downstairs and breaking your neck."

I went past him with my chin up. Now that I had time to think about it, I was furiously angry with him.

"Kit!" he called after me appealingly, but I would not hear. Then he adopted different tactics. He took advantage of my catching my foot in the lace of my gown to pass me, and to stand with his back against the door.

"You're not going until you hear me, Kit," he declared miserably. "In the first place, for all you are down on me, is it my fault? Honestly, now?"

"Is it my fault!" I refused to speak.

"I was coming home to be miserable alone," he went on, "and—oh, I know you meant well, Kit; but *you* asked all these crazy people here."

“Perhaps you will give me credit for some things,” I said wearily. “I did *not* give Takahiro scarlet fever, for instance, and—if you will permit me to mention it—Aunt Selina is not *my* Aunt Selina.”

“That’s what I wanted to speak to you about,” Jimmy went on wretchedly, trying not to look at me. “You see, when they were rowing so about who would get breakfast—I never saw such a lot of people; half of them never touch breakfast, but of course now they want all kinds of things—when they were talking, Aunt Selina said she knew *you* would get it, being the hostess, and responsible, besides knowing where things were kept.” He had fixed his eyes on the orchids, and he looked shrunken, actually shrunken. “I thought,” he finished, “you might give me a few pointers now, and I could come down in the morning, and—and fuss up something, coffee and so on. I would say you did it! Oh, hang it all, Kit, why don’t you say something?”

“What do you want me to say?” I demanded. “That I love to cook, and of course I’ll fix trays and carry them up in the morning to Anne Brown and Leila Mercer and the rest; and that I will have the shaving water ready——”

“I know what I’m going to do,” Jimmy said, with sudden resolution. “Aunt Selina and her money can go to blazes. I am going right upstairs and tell her the truth, tell her who you are, what I am, and all the rest of it.” He opened the door.

“You’ll do nothing of the kind,” I gasped, catching him in time. “Don’t dare, Jimmy Wilson! Why, what would they think of me? After letting her call me Bella, and him—— Jim, if Mr. Harbison ever learns the truth, I—I will take poison. If we are going to be shut up here together, we will have to carry it on. I couldn’t stand the disgrace.”

In spite of a heroic effort, Jim looked relieved. “They have been hunting for the linen closet,” he said, more cheerfully, “and there will be room enough, I think. Harbison and I will hang out in the studio: there are two couches there. I’m afraid you’ll have to take Aunt Selina, Kit.”

“Certainly,” I said coldly. That was the way it was all along. Whenever there was something to do that no one else would undertake—any unpleasant responsibility—that entire mongrel household turned with one gesture and pointed its finger at me! Well, it is over now, and I ought not to be bitter, considering everything.

It was quite characteristic of that memorable evening (that is quite novelesque, I think) that my interview with Jimmy should have a sensational

ending. He was terribly down, of course, and as I was trying to pass him to the door, he caught my hand.

"You're a girl in a thousand, Kit," he said forlornly. "If I were not so damnably, hopelessly, idiotically in love with—somebody else, I would be crazy about you."

"Don't be maudlin," I retorted. "Would you mind letting my hand go?" I felt sure Bella could hear.

"Oh, come now, Kit," he implored, "we've always got along so well. It's a shame to let a thing like this make us bad friends. Aren't you ever going to forgive me?"

"Never," I said promptly. "When I once get away, I don't want ever to see you again. I was never so humiliated in my life. I loathe you!"

And of course then I turned around, and there was Aunt Selina with her eyes protruding until you could have knocked them off with a stick, and beside her, very red and uncomfortable, Mr. Harbison!

"Bella!" she said, in a shocked voice, "is that the way you speak to your husband! It is high time I came here, I think, and took a hand in this affair."

"Oh, never mind, Aunt Selina," Jim said, with a sheepish grin. "Kit—Bella is tired and nervous. This is the h—deuce of a situation. No—er—servants, and all that."

But Aunt Selina did mind, and showed it. She pulled the unlucky Harbison man in through the door and closed it, and then stood glaring at us both.

"Every little quarrel is an apple knocked from the tree of love," she announced oratorically.

"This was a very little quarrel," Jim said, edging toward the door; "a—a green apple, Aunt Selina, a colicky little green apple." But she was not to be diverted.

"Bella," she said severely, "you said you loathed him. You didn't mean that."

"But I do!" I cried hysterically. "There isn't any word to tell how I—how I detest him."

Then I swept past them all and flew to Bella's dressing-room and locked myself in. Aunt Selina knocked until she was tired, then gave up and went to bed.

That was the night Anne Brown's pearl collar was stolen!

IV.

Of course, one knows that there are people who in a different grade of society would be shoplifters and pickpockets. When they are restrained by obligation or environment they become a little over-keen at bridge, or take the wrong sables, or stuff a gold-backed brush into a muff at a reception. (You remember the ivory dressing set that Theodora Bucknell had fastened with fine gold chains? And the sensation it caused at the Bucknell cotillion when Mrs. Van Zire went sweeping to her carriage with two feet of gold chain hanging from the front of her wrap?)

But Anne's pearl collar was different. In the first place, instead of three or four hundred people, the suspicion had to be divided among ten. And of those ten, at least eight of us were friends, and the other two had been vouched for by the Browns and Jimmy. It was a horrible mix-up. For the necklace was gone—there couldn't be any doubt of that—and although, as Dallas said, it couldn't get out of the house, still, there were plenty of places to hide the thing.

The worst of our troubles really originated with Max Reed, after all. For it was Max who made the silly wager over the telephone, with Dick Bagley. He bet five hundred even that one of us, at least, would break quarantine within the next twenty-four hours, and of course that settled it. Dick told it around the club as a joke, and a man who owns a newspaper heard him and called up the paper. Then the paper called up the Health Office, after setting up a scare-head, "Will Money Free Them? Board of Health Versus Millionaire."

It was almost three when the house settled down—nobody had any night-clothes, although finally, through Dallas, who gave them to Anne, who gave them to the rest, we got some things of Jimmy's—and I was still dressed. The house was perfectly quiet, and, after listening carefully, I went slowly down the stairs. There was a light in the hall, and another back in the dining-room, and I got along without any trouble. But the pantry, where the stairs led down, was dark, and the wretched swinging door would not stay open.

I caught my skirt in the door as I went through, and I had to stop to loosen it. And in that awful minute I heard some one breathing just beside me. I had stooped to my gown, and I turned my head without straightening—I couldn't have raised myself to an erect posture, for my knees were giving way under me—and just at my feet lay the still glowing end of a match!

I had to swallow twice before I could speak. Then I said sharply:

"Who's there?"

The man was so close it is a wonder I had not walked into him; his voice was right at my ear.

"I am sorry I startled you," he said quietly. "I was afraid to speak suddenly, or move, for fear I would do—what I have done."

It was Mr. Harbison.

"I—I thought you were—it is very late," I managed to say, with dry lips. "Do you know where the electric switch is?"

"Mrs. Wilson!" It was clear he had not known me before. "Why, no; don't you?"

"I am all confused," I muttered, and beat a retreat into the dining-room. There, in the friendly light, we could at least see each other, and I think he was as much impressed by the fact that I had not undressed as I was by the fact that he *had*, partly. He wore a hideous dressing-gown of Jimmy's, much too small, and his hair, parted and plastered down in the early evening, stood up in a sort of brown brush all over his head. He was trying to flatten it with his hands.

"It must be three o'clock," he said, with polite surprise, "and the house is like a barn. You ought not to be running around with your arms uncovered, Mrs. Wilson. Surely you could have called some of us."

"I didn't wish to disturb any one," I said, with distinct truth.

"I suppose you are like me," he said. "The novelty of the situation—and everything. I got to thinking things over, and then I realized the studio was getting cold, so I thought I would come down and take a look at the furnace. I didn't suppose any one else would think of it. But I lost myself in that pantry and nearly went down the dumb-waiter." And, as if in judgment on me, at that instant came two rather terrific thumps from somewhere below, and inarticulate words, shouted rather than spoken. It was uncanny, of

course, coming as it did through the register at our feet. Mr. Harbison looked startled.

"Oh, by the way," I said, as carelessly as I could. "In the excitement, I forgot to mention it. There is a policeman asleep in the furnace room. I—I suppose we will have to keep him, now," I finished, as airily as I could.

"Oh, a policeman—in the cellar," he repeated, staring at me, and then he moved toward the pantry door.

"You needn't go down," I said desperately, with visions of Bella Knowles sitting on the kitchen table, surrounded by soiled dishes and all the cheerless aftermath of a dinner party. "Please don't go down. I—it's one of my rules—never to let a stranger go down to the kitchen. I—I'm peculiar—that way—and besides, it's—it's mussy."

Bang! Crash! through the register pipe, and some language quite articulate. Then silence.

"Look here, Mrs. Wilson," he said resolutely. "What do I care about the kitchen? I'm going down and arrest that policeman for disturbing the peace. He will have the pipes down."

"You must not go," I said, with desperate firmness. "He—he is probably in a very dangerous state just now. We—I—locked him in."

The Harbison man grinned and then became serious.

"Why don't you tell me the whole thing?" he asked. "You've been in trouble all evening, and—you can trust me, you know, because I am a stranger—because the minute this crazy quarantine is raised I am off to the Argentine Republic" (perhaps he said Chili) "and because I don't know anything at all about you. You see, I have to believe what you tell me, having no personal knowledge of any of you to go on. Now, tell me—whom have you hidden in the cellar, beside the policeman?"

"Come," I said, with sudden resolution, and led the way down the stairs.

He said nothing when he saw Bella, for which I was grateful. She was sitting at the table, with her arms in front of her, and her head buried in them. And then I saw she was asleep. Her hat and veil lay beside her, and she had taken off her coat and draped it around her. She had rummaged out a cold pheasant and some salad, and had evidently had a little supper. Supper and a nap, while I worried myself gray-headed about her!

"I wouldn't rouse her," Mr. Harbison said, as if the situation were quite ordinary. "If she can sleep like that where she is, let her alone. There are

only enough beds upstairs, I understand."

She began to rouse at that. She lifted her head with her eyes shut, and then opened them one at a time, blinked, and sat up. She didn't see him at first.

"You wretch!" she said ungratefully, after she had yawned. "Do you know what time it is? And that——" Then she saw Mr. Harbison and stood glaring at him.

"It's like this," I began, to him. "You see, we—I—— Bella, this is Mr. Harbison, and he is going to help you out." Then Bella came to my help.

"I am Miss Knowles," she said loftily (of course the court gave her back her name), "and I stopped in to-night, thinking the house was empty, to see about a—a butler. Unfortunately, the house was quarantined just at that time, and—here I am. Surely there cannot be any harm in helping me to get out?" (pleading tone). "I have not been exposed to any contagion, and in the exhausted state of my health the confinement would be positively dangerous."

She rolled her eyes at him, and I could see she was making an impression. Of course she was free. She had a perfect right to marry again, but I will say this: Bella is a lot better looking by electric light than she is the next morning.

The upshot of it was that the gentleman who built bridges and looked down on society from a lofty, lonely pinnacle agreed to help one of the most gleaming members of the aforesaid society to outwit the law.

It took about fifteen minutes to quiet the policeman. Nobody ever knew what Mr. Harbison did to him, but for twenty-four hours he was quite tractable. He changed after that, but that comes later in the story. Anyhow, the Harbison man went upstairs and came down with a Bagdad curtain and cushion to match, and took them into the furnace-room, and came out and locked the door behind him, and then we were ready for Bella's escape.

But there were four special officers and three reporters watching that house (that was the result of Max Reed's idiocy). Once, after trying all the other windows and finding them guarded, we discovered a little bit of a hole in an out of the way corner that looked like a ventilator and was covered with a heavy wire screen. No prisoners ever dug their way out of a dungeon with more energy than we attacked that screen, hacking at it with kitchen knives, whispering like conspirators, being scratched, frozen with the cold air one minute and boiling with excitement the next. And when the wire was

cut, and Bella had rolled her coat up and thrust it through, and was standing on a chair ready to follow, something that had looked like a barrel outside moved and said, “Oh, I wouldn’t do that if I were you. It would be certain to be undignified, and probably it would be unpleasant—later.”

We coaxed and pleaded, and tried to bribe, and that was one of the worst things we had to endure. For the whole conversation came out the next afternoon in the paper, with the most awful drawings, and the reporter said it was the flashing of the jewels we wore that first attracted his attention. And that brings me back to the robbery.

For when we had crept back to the kitchen, and Bella was fumbling for her handkerchief to cry into, and the Harbison man was trying to apologize for the language he had used to the reporter, and I was on the verge of a nervous chill—well, it was then that Bella forgot all about crying and jumped and held out her arm.

“My diamond bracelet!” she screeched. “Look, I’ve lost it.”

Well, we went over every inch of that basement, until I knew every crack in the flooring, every spot of the cement. And Bella was nasty, and said she had never seen that part of the house in such condition, and that if I had acted like a sane person and put her out, when she had no business there at all, she would have had her freedom and her bracelet, and that if we were playing a joke on her (as if we felt like joking!) we would please give her the bracelet and let her go and die in a corner; she felt very queer.

At half past four o’clock we gave up.

“It’s gone,” I said. “I don’t believe you wore it here. No one could have taken it. There wasn’t a soul in this part of the house.”

At five o’clock we put her to sleep in the den. She was in a fearful temper, and I was glad enough to be able to shut the door on her. Tom Harbison—that was his name—helped me to creep upstairs, and wanted to get me a glass of ale to make me sleep. But I said it would be of no use, as I had to get up and get the breakfast. The last thing he said was that the policeman seemed above the average in intelligence, and perhaps we could train him to do plain cooking and dish-washing.

I did not go to sleep at once. I lay on the chintz-covered divan in Bella’s dressing-room, and stared at the picture of her with the violets underneath. I couldn’t see what there was about Bella to inspire such undying devotion, but I had to admit that she had looked handsome that night, and that the Harbison man had certainly been impressed.

At seven o'clock Jimmy Wilson came up and pounded at my door, and I could have choked him joyfully. I dragged myself to the door and opened it, and then I heard excited voices. Everybody seemed to be up but Aunt Selina, and they were all talking at once.

Anne Brown's pearl collar had been stolen from the dressing-table in her room!

When we had all gathered in Anne's room (and we were a strange-looking lot. I gave my word to the others I would *not* put in the story what we wore that day until our trunks came) Jimmy held up his hand, and signified he wanted to say something.

"It's like this," he said: "until this thing is cleared up, for Heaven's sake let's try to be sane! If every fellow thinks the other fellow did it, this house will be a nice little hell to live in. And if anybody"—here he glared around—"if anybody has got funny and is hiding those jewels, I want to say that he'd better speak up now. Later, it won't be so easy for him. It's a mighty poor joke."

But nobody spoke.

V.

It was Betty Mercer who said she was hungry, and got them switched from the delicate subject of which of us was the thief to the quite as pressing subject of which was to be cook. Aunt Selina had slept quietly through the whole thing—we learned afterwards that she customarily slept on her left side, which was on her good ear. We gathered in the Dallas Brown room, and Jimmy proposed a plan.

"We can have anything sent in that we want," he suggested speciously, "and if Dal doesn't make good with the city fathers, you girls can get some clothes anyhow. Then, we can have dinner sent from one of the hotels."

"Why not all the meals?" Max suggested. "I hope you're not going to be small about things, Jimmy."

"It ought to be easy," Jim persisted, ignoring the remark, "for nine reasonably intelligent people to boil eggs and make coffee, which is all we need for breakfast, with some fruit."

"Nine of us!" Dallas said wickedly, looking at Tom Harbison. "Why nine of us? I thought Kit here, otherwise known as Bella, was going to show off her housewifely skill."

It ended, however, with Mr. Harbison writing out a lot of slips, cook, scullery-maid, chamber-maid, parlor-maid, furnace, and butler, and as that left two people over—we didn't count Aunt Selina—he added another furnace and a trained nurse. Betty Mercer drew the trained nurse slip, and of course she was delighted. It seems funny now to look back and think what a dreadful time she really had (Aunt Selina took the grippe, you know, that very day).

It was fate that I should go back to that awful kitchen, for of course my slip said "cook." Mr. Harbison was butler, and Max and Dal got the furnace, although neither of them had ever been any nearer to a bucket of coal than the coupons on mining stock. Anne got the bedrooms, and Leila was parlor-maid. It was Jimmy who got the scullery work, but he was quite crushed by this time and did not protest at all.

Max was in a very bad temper: I suppose he had not had enough sleep—no one had. But he came over while the lottery was going on and stood over me and demanded that I stop masquerading as another man's wife and generally making a fool of myself—which is the way he put it. And I knew in my heart he was right, and I hated him for it.

"Why don't you go and tell him—them?" I asked nastily. "Tell them that, to be obliging, I have nearly drowned in a sea of lies; tell them that I am not only not married, but that I never intend to marry. Tell them that we are a lot of idiots with nothing better to do than to trifle with strangers within our gates, people who build—I mean, people that are worth two to our one! Run and tell them."

He looked at me for a minute, then he turned on his heel and left me. It looked as though Max might be going to be difficult.

While I was improvising an apron out of a towel, and Anne was pinning a sheet into a kimona, so she could take off her dinner gown and still be proper, Dallas harked back to the robbery.

"Anne put the collar in the silver box there," he said. "I watched her do it, for I remember thinking it was the sole reminder I had that Consolidated Traction ever went above thirty-nine."

Max was looking around the room, examining the window-locks and whistling between his teeth. He was in disgrace with every one, for by that

time it was light enough to see three reporters with cameras waiting across the street for enough light to snap the house, and everybody knew that it was Max and his idiotic wager that had done it. He had made two or three conciliatory remarks, but no one would speak to him. His antics were so queer, however, that we were all watching him, and when he had felt over the rug with his hands, and raised the edges, and tried to lift out the chair-seats, and had shaken out Dal's shoes (he said people often hid things and then forgot all about it), he made a proposition.

"If you will take that infernal furnace from around my neck, I'll undertake to find either the jewels or show up the thief," he said quietly. And of course, with all the people in the house under suspicion, every one had to hail the suggestion with joy, and offer his assistance, and Jimmy had to take Max's share of the furnace. So they took the scullery slip downstairs to the policeman.

"In the first place," Max said, standing importantly in the middle of the room, "we retired between two and three—nearer three. So the theft occurred between three and six-thirty, when Anne woke up. Was your door locked, Dal?"

"No. The door into the hall was, but the door into the dressing-room was open for ventilation, and we found the door from there into the hall open this morning."

"From three until seven," Max repeated. "Was any one out of his room during that time?"

"I was," said Tom Harbison promptly, from the foot of the bed. "I was prowling all around somewhere about four, searching"—he glanced at me —"for a drink of water. But as I don't know a pearl from a glass bead, I hope you exonerate me."

Everybody laughed and said "Of course," and "Sure, old man," and changed the subject quickly. While that excitement was on, I got Jim to one side and told him about Bella. His good-natured face was radiant at first.

"I suppose she *did* come to see Takahiro, eh, Kit?" he asked delicately. "She didn't say anything about me?"

"Nothing good. She said the house was in a disgraceful condition," I said heartlessly. "And her diamond bracelet was stolen while she took a nap on the kitchen table"—he groaned—"and—oh, Jim, you are such a goose! If I could only manage my own affairs the way I could my friends'? She's too

sure of you, Jimmy. She knows you adore her, and—how brutal could you be, Jim?"

He eyed me thoughtfully.

"Fair," he said. "I may have undiscovered depths of brutality that I have never had occasion to use. However, I might try. Why?"

"Listen, Jim," I urged. "It was always Bella who did things here: she managed the house, she tyrannized over her friends, and she bullied you. Yes, she did. Now she's here, without your invitation, and she has to stay. It's your turn to bully, to dictate terms, to be coldly civil or politely rude. Make her furious at you. If she is jealous, so much the better."

"How far would you sacrifice yourself on the altar of friendship?" he asked.

"You may pay me all the attention you like, in public," I replied, and together we went to Bella.

There was an ominous pause when we went into the den. Bella was sitting by the register, with her furs on, and after one glance over her shoulder at us, she looked away again without speaking.

"Bella," Jim said appealingly. And then I pinched his arm, and he drew himself up and looked properly outraged.

"Bella," he said, coldly this time, "I can't imagine why you have put yourself in this ridiculous position, but since you have——"

She turned on him like a fury.

"Put *myself* in this position!" She was frantic. "It's a plot, a wretched trick of yours, this quarantine, to keep me here."

Jim gasped, but I gave him a warning glance, and he swallowed hard.

"On the contrary, Bella," he said, with maddening quiet, "I would be the last person in the world to wish to perpetuate an indiscretion of yours. For it was hardly discreet, was it, to visit a bachelor establishment alone at eleven o'clock at night? As far as my plotting to keep you here is concerned, I assure you that nothing could be further from my mind. Our paths were to be two parallel lines that never touch." He looked at me for approval, and Bella was choking.

"You are worse than I ever thought you," she stormed. "I thought you were only a—a fool. Now I know you—for a brute!"

Well, it ended by Jim graciously permitting Bella to remain—there being nothing else to do—and by his magnanimously agreeing to keep her real identity from Aunt Selina and Mr. Harbison, and to break the news of her presence to Anne and the rest. It created a sensation beside which Anne's pearls faded away, although they came to the front again soon enough.

The Harbison man came down while I was standing hopelessly in front of the gas range, and showed me about it.

"I don't know that I ever saw one," he said cheerfully, "but I know the theory. Likewise, by the same token, this teakettle, set on the flame, will boil. That is not theory, however. That is early knowledge. 'Polly, put the kettle on; we'll all take tea.' Look at that, Mrs. Wilson. I didn't fight bacilli with boiled water at Chickamauga for nothing."

And then he let out the policeman and brought him into the kitchen. He was a large man, and his face was a curious mixture of amazement, alarm, and dignity. No doubt we did look queer, still in parts of our evening things and I in the white silk and lace petticoat that belonged under my gown, with a yellow and black pajama coat of Jimmy's as a sort of breakfast jacket.

"This is Officer Flannigan," Mr. Harbison said. "I explained our unfortunate position earlier in the morning, and he is prepared to accept our hospitality. Flannigan, every person in this house has got to work, as I also explained to you. You are appointed dish-washer and scullery maid."

The policeman looked dazed. Then, slowly, like dawn over a sleeping lake, a light of comprehension grew in his face.

"Sure," he said, laying his helmet on the table. "I'll be glad to be doing anything I can to help. Me and Mrs. Wilson—we used to be friends. It's many the time I've opened the carriage door for her, and she with her head in the air, and for all that, the pleasant smile. When any one around her was having a party and wanted a special officer, it was Mrs. Wilson that always said, 'Get Flannigan, Officer Timothy Flannigan. He's your man.' "

My heart had been going lower and lower. So he knew Bella, and he knew I was not Bella, although he had not grasped the fact that I was usurping her place. And the odious Harbison man sat on the table and swung his feet.

"Don't you think you had better attend to the table?" I asked coldly, and to my immense relief he went at once. Sounds of banging silver came down the stairs, and once the crash of broken china. And Officer Timothy Flannigan ground the coffee and gave his opinion of the Board of Health in

no stinted terms. As for me, I burned my fingers and the toast, and felt myself growing hot and cold, for I was going to be found out as soon as Flannigan grasped the situation.

Then, of course, I did the thing that caused me so much trouble later. I put down the egg poacher—at least, the Harbison man said it was a poacher—and went over and stood in front of the policeman.

"I don't suppose you will understand—exactly," I said, "but—but if anything occurs to—to make you think I am not—that things are not what they seem to be—I mean, what I say they are—you will understand that it is a joke, won't you? A joke, you know."

Yes, that was what I said. I know it sounds like a raving delirium, but when Max came down and squizzled some bacon, as he said, and told Flannigan about the robbery, and how, whether it was a joke or deadly earnest, somebody in the house had Anne's pearls, that wretched policeman winked at me solemnly over Max's shoulder. Oh, it was awful!

And, to add to my discomfort, the most unpleasant ideas *would* obtrude themselves. *What* was Mr. Harbison doing on the first floor of the house that night? Ice water, he said. But there had been plenty of water in the studio! And he had told me it was the furnace!

VI.

(*Letters found in the post-box after lifting of quarantine.*)

From Thomas Harbison, late Engineer of Bridges, Peruvian Trunk Lines, South America, to Henry Llewellyn, c/o Union Nitrate Company, Iquique, Chili.

Dear Old Man:

I think I was fully a week trying to drive out of my mind my last glimpse of you with your sickly grin, pretending to be tickled to pieces that the only other white man within two hundred miles of your shack was going on a holiday. You old bluffer! I used to hang over the rail of the steamer, on the way up, and see you standing as I left you beside the car with its mule and the Indian

driver, and behind you a million miles of soul-destroying pampa. Never mind, Jack; I sent yesterday by mail steamer the cigarettes, pipes and tobacco, canned goods and poker chips. Put in some magazines, too, and the collars. Don't know about the ties—guess it won't matter down there.

Nothing happened on the trip. One of the engines broke down three days out, and I spent all my time below-decks for forty-eight hours. Chief engineer raving with D. T.'s. Got the engine fixed in record time, and haven't got my hands clean yet. It was bully.

With this I send the papers, which will tell you how I happen to be here, and why I have leisure to write you three days after landing. If the situation were not so ridiculous, it would be maddening. Here I am, off for a holiday and congratulating myself that I am foot free and heart free—yes, my friend, heart free!—here I am, shut in the house of a man I never saw until last night, and wouldn't care if I never saw again, with a lot of people who never heard of me, who are almost equally vague about South America, who play as hard at bridge as I ever worked at building one (forgive this, won't you? The novelty has gone to my head), and who belong to the very class of extravagant, luxury-loving, non-producing parasites (isn't that what we called them?) that you and I used to revile from our lofty Andean pinnacle.

To come down to earth: here we are, six women and five men, including a policeman, not a servant in the house, and no one who knows how to do anything. They are really immensely interesting, those people: they all know each other very well, and it is "Jimmy" here, and "Dal" there—Dallas Brown, who went to India with me; you remember my speaking of him—and they are good-natured, too, except at meal-times. The little hostess, Mrs. Wilson, took over the cooking, and, although luncheon was better than breakfast, the food still leaves much to the imagination.

I wish you could see this Mrs. Wilson, Hal. You would change a whole lot of your ideas. She is a thoroughbred, sure enough, and of course some of her beauty is the result of the exquisite care about which you and I—still from our Andean pinnacle—used to rant. But the fact is, she is more than that. She has fire, and pluck, no end. If you could have seen her this morning, standing in front of a cold kitchen range, determined to conquer it, and had seen the tilt of her chin when I offered to take over the cooking—you

needn't grin; I can cook, and you know it—you would understand what I mean. It was so clear that she was paralyzed with fright at the idea of getting breakfast, and equally clear that she meant to do it. By the way, I have learned that her name was McNair before she married this would-be artist, Wilson, and that she is a daughter of the McNair who financed the Callao branch!

I have not met the others so intimately. There are two sisters named Mercer, inclined to be noisy—they are playing roulette in the next room now. One is small and dark, almost Hebraic in type, named Laura and called Lollie. The other, larger, very blonde and languishing, and with a decided preference for masculine society, even, saving the mark, mine! Dallas Brown's wife, good-looking, smokes cigarettes when I am not around—they all do, except Mrs. Wilson. Then there is a maiden aunt, who is ill to-day with grippe and excitement, and a Miss Knowles, called Bella, who came for a moment last night to see Mrs. Wilson, was caught in the quarantine (see papers), and, after hiding all night in the basement, is sulking all day in her room. Her presence created an excitement out of all proportion to the apparent cause.

From the fact that I have reason to know that my artist-host and his beautiful wife are on bad terms, and from the significant glances with which the announcement of Miss Knowles's presence was met, the state of affairs seems rather clear. Wilson impresses me as a spineless sort, anyhow, and when the lady of the basement shut herself away from the rest to-day and I happened on "Jimmy," as they call him, pleading with her through the door, I very nearly kicked him down the stairs. Oh, yes, I'll keep out, right enough; it isn't my affair.

By the way, after the quarantine and with the policeman locked in the furnace-room, a pearl necklace and a diamond bracelet were stolen! Just nine of us to divide the suspicion! Upon my word, Hal, it's the queerest situation I ever heard of. Which of us did it? I make a guess that not a few of us are fools, but which is the knave? The worst of it is, I am the only unaccredited member of the household!

This is more scandal than I ever wrote in my life. Lay it to circumscribed environment, and the lack of twenty miles over the pampas before breakfast. We have all been disinfected, and the

officious gentlemen from the Board of Health have taken their grins and their formaldehyde and gone. Ye gods, how we cough!

The Carlton order will go through all right, I think. 'Phoned him this morning. If it does, old man, we will take a month in September and explore the Mercator property.

Do you know, Hal, I have been thinking lately that you and I stick too close to the grind. Business is all right enough, but what's the use of spending one's best years succeeding in everything except the things that are worth while? I'll be thirty sooner than I care to say, and—oh, well, you won't understand. You'll sit down there, with the Southern Cross and the rest of the infernal astronomical galaxy looking down on you, and the Indians chanting in the village, and you will think I have grown sentimental. I have not. You and I down there have been looking at the world through the reverse end of the glass. It's a bully old world, Hal, and this is God's part of it.

Burn this letter after you read it: I suspect it is covered with germs. Well, happy days, old man.

Yours,

TOM

P.S. By the way, can't you spare some of the Indian pottery you picked up at Callao? I told Mrs. Wilson about it, and she was immensely interested. Send it to this address. Can you get it to the next steamer?—T.

From Maxwell Reed to Richard Burton Bagley, University Club, New York.

DEAR DICK:

Enclosed find my check for five hundred, as per wager. Possibly you were within your rights in protecting your bet in the manner you chose, but while I do not wish to be offensive, your reporters are damnably so.

Yours,

MAXWELL REED

From Officer Flannigan to Mrs. Maggie Flannigan, Erin Street.

Dear Maggie:

As soon as you receive this, go down to Mac and tell him the story as I tell you hear. Tell him I was walkin' my beat, and I'd been afther seein' Jimmy Alverini about doin' the right thing for Mac on Monday, at the poles, when I seen a man hangin' suspicious around this house, which is Mr. Wilson's, on Ninety-fifth. And av coorse, afther chasin' the man a mile or more, I lose him, which was not my fault. So I go back to the Wilson house, and tell them to be careful about closin' up fer the night, and while I'm standin' in the hall, with all the swells around me, sparklin' with jewels, the Board of Health sends a man to lock us all in, because the Jap that's been waiter has took the scarlet fever and gone to the hospitle. I stood me ground. I sez, sez I, you can't shtop an officer in pursute av his duty, I rayfuse to be shut in. Be shure to tell Mac that.

So here I am, and like to be for a month. Tell Mac there's four votes shut up tight here, and I can get them for him, if he can stop this monkey business.

Then go over to the Dago Church on Webster Avenue and put a dollar in Saint Anthony's box. He'll see me out of this scrape, right enough. Do it at once. Now remember, go to Mac first: may be you can get the dollar from him, and mind what you tell him.

Your husband,

Tim Flannigan

From Bella Knowles (ex-Wilson) to Mr. Reginald Barry Wolfe, Palm Beach, Fla.

Dear Reggie:

I've been thinking it over, Reggie, and I find I just can't. I'm a wretch, I know. You cannot think any worse of me than I do of myself. I honestly thought I meant it when I said "Yes," but I haven't the courage after all. Now, don't be silly enough to regret me, Reg. It's the best thing that ever happened to you; you will find a nice girl who has some illusions left, and who thinks you are perfect—you know I don't—and you will be a great deal happier than you deserve to be, and not half as much so as I wish.

Ever faithfully—ought this to be "faithless"?

Bella Jeannette Knowles

P.S. How is the chestnut mare Toddy wrote me about? Have her looked over and let me know, will you? One has to watch Toddy.—B.

From Miss Katherine McNair to her mother, Mrs. Theodore McNair, Hotel Hamilton, Bermuda.

DEAREST MOTHER:

I hope you will get this before you read the papers, and when you *do* read them, you are not to get excited and worried. I am as well as can be, and a great deal safer than I ever remember to have been in my life. We are quarantined, a lot of us, in Jim Wilson's house, because his irreproachable Jap did a very reproachable thing—took scarlet fever. Now read on before you get excited. *His room has been fumigated.* The danger is nil. I am well and happy. I can't be killed in a railway wreck or smashed when the car skids. Unless I drown myself in my bath, or jump through a window, positively nothing can happen me. So gather up all your maternal anxieties and cast them to the Bermuda sharks.

Anne Brown is here—see the papers for list—and if she cannot play propriety, Jimmy's Aunt Selina can. In fact, she doesn't play at it: she works. I have telephoned Lizette for some clothes—enough for a couple of weeks, although Dallas promises to get us out sooner. Now, dear, do go ahead and have a nice time; on no account come home. You could only have the carriage stop in front of the house, and wave to me through a window.

Mother, I want you to do something for me. The Manning boy is down there, and—this is awfully delicate, Mummy—but he's a nice boy, and I thought I liked him. I guess you know he has been rather attentive. Now, I *do* like him, Mumsy, but not the way I thought I did, and I want you to—very gently, of course—to discourage him a little. You know how I mean. He's a dear boy, but I am so tired of people who don't know anything but horses and motors.

And, oh, yes,—do you remember a girl named Lucille Mellon, who was at school with you in Rome? And that she married a man named Harbison? Well, her son is here! He builds railroads and bridges and things, and he even built himself an automobile down

in South America, because he couldn't afford to buy one, and burned wood in it! Wood! Think of it!

I wired father in Chicago for fear he would come rushing home. The picture in the paper of the face at the basement window is supposed to be Mr. Harbison, but of course it isn't any more like him than mine is like me.

Anne Brown mislaid her pearl collar when she took it off last night, and has fussed herself into a sick headache. She declares it was stolen! Some of the people are playing bridge, Betty Mercer is doing a cake-walk to the Rhapsodie Hongroise—Jim has no every day music—and the telephone is ringing. We have received enough flowers for a funeral—somebody sent Lollie a Gates Ajar, only with the gate shut!

There are no servants—think of it, Mummy. I wish you had made me learn to cook. Mr. Harbison has shown me a little—he was a soldier in the Spanish war—but we girls are a terribly ignorant lot, Mummy, about the real things of life.

Now don't worry. It is more sport than camping in the Adirondacks, and not nearly so damp.

Your loving daughter,

KATHERINE

P. S. South America must be wonderful. Why can't we put the *Gadfly* in commission, and take a coasting trip this summer? It is a shame to own a yacht and never use it.—K.

(*Sent by messenger.*)

Mr. Alex. Dodds, City Editor, Mail and Star,

DEAR D.

Can't get a picture. Have waited seven hours. They have closed the shutters.

MCCORD

(*By return messenger—written on back of previous note.*)

Watch the roof.—D.

VII.
Resuming Miss McNair's Narrative

THE most charitable thing would be to say nothing about that first day. We were baldly brutal—that's the only word for it. And Mr. Harbison, with his beautiful courtesy—the really sincere kind—tried to patch up one peace after another and failed. He rose superbly to the occasion, and made something that he called a South American goulash for luncheon, although it was too salty, and every one was thirsty the rest of the day.

Bella was horrid, of course. She locked herself in the dressing-room—it had been assigned to me, but that made no difference to Bella—and did her nails, and took three different baths, and refused to come to the table. And of course Jimmy was wild, and said she would starve. But I said, "Very well, let her starve." Not a tray left my kitchen. It was a comfort to have her shut up there anyhow: it postponed the time when she would come face to face with Flannigan.

While Betty Mercer was fussing with Aunt Selina—she was the nurse, you remember—trying to fix her pillows to suit her, and scalding her with a hot water bottle, and being called everything unpleasant, Max led a search of the house. He said the necklace and the bracelet must be hidden somewhere, and that no crevice was too small to neglect.

We made a formal search all together, except Aunt Selina, and we found a lot of things in different places that Jim said had been missing since the year one. But no jewels—nothing even suggesting a jewel was found. We had explored the entire house, every cupboard, every chest, even the insides of the couches and the pockets of Jim's clothes—which he resented bitterly—and found nothing, and I must say the situation was growing rather strained. Some one had taken the jewels; they hadn't walked away.

It was Flannigan who suggested the roof, and as we had tried every place else, we climbed there. Of course we didn't find anything, but after all day in the house with the shutters closed on account of reporters, the air was glorious. It was February, but quite mild and sunny, and we could look down over Riverside Drive and the Hudson, and even recognize people we knew on horseback and in cars. It was a pathetic joy, and we lined up along the parapet and watched the motor-boats racing on the river, and tried to feel that we were in the world, as well as of it, but it was very hard.

Betty Mercer had been making tea for Aunt Selina, and fussing a lot about it. Of course, when she heard us up there, she followed, tray and all, and we drank Aunt Selina's tea and had the first really nice time of the day. Bella had come up, too, but she was still stand-offish and queer, and she stood leaning against a chimney and staring out over the river. After a little Mr. Harbison put down his cup and went to her, and they talked quite confidentially for a long time. I thought it bad taste in Bella, under the circumstances, after snubbing Dallas and Max, and of course treating Jim like the dirt under her feet, to turn right around and be lovely to Mr. Harbison. Of course I was thinking of Jim: it was hard for him.

Max came and sat down beside me, and Flannigan, who had been sent down for more cups, passed the tea, putting the tray on top of the chimney. Jim was sitting grumpily on the ground, with his feet folded under him, playing Canfield in the shadow of the water tank, buying the deck out of one pocket and putting his winnings in the other. He was watching Bella, too, and she knew it, and she strained a point to captivate Mr. Harbison. Any one could see that.

And that was the picture that came out in the next morning's papers, tea-cups, cards, and all. For when some one looked up, there were four newspaper photographers on the roof of the next house, and they had the impertinence to thank us!

Flannigan had seen Bella by that time, but as he still didn't understand the situation, things were just the same. But his manner to me puzzled me; whenever he came near me he winked prodigiously, and during all the search he kept one eye on me, and seemed to be amused about something.

When the rest had gone down to dress for dinner, which was being sent in, thank goodness, I still sat on the parapet and watched the darkening river. I felt terribly lonely, all at once, and sad. There wasn't any one any nearer than father, in the West, or mother, in Bermuda, who really cared a rap whether I sat on that parapet all night or not, or who would really be sorry if I leaped over onto the dirty bricks of the next-door yard—not that I meant to, of course.

The lights came out across the river, and made purple and yellow streaks on the water, and one of the motor-boats came panting back to the yacht club, coughing and gasping as if it had overdone. Down on the street automobiles were starting and stopping, cabs rolling, doors slamming, all the maddening, delightful bustle of people who are foot-free, to dine out, to

dance, to go to the theatre, to do any of the thousand possibilities of a long February evening. And above them I sat on a roof and cried. Yes, cried.

I was roused by some one coughing just behind me, and I tried to straighten my face before I turned. It was Flannigan, his double row of brass buttons gleaming in the twilight.

"Excuse me, miss," he said affably, "but the boy from the hotel has left the dinner on the doorstep and run, the cowardly little divil! What'll I do with it? I went to Mrs. Wilson, but she says it's no concern of hers." He was evidently bewildered.

"You'd better keep it warm, Flannigan," I replied. "You needn't wait; I'm coming." But he did not go.

"If—if you'll excuse me, miss," he said, "don't you think ye'd bether tell 'em?"

"Tell them what?"

"The whole thing—the joke," he said confidentially, coming closer. "It's been great sport, now, hasn't it? But I'm afraid they will get on to it soon, and—some of them might not be agreeable. A pearl necklace is a pearl necklace, miss, and the lady's wild."

"What do you mean?" I gasped. "You don't think—why, Flannigan ____"

He merely grinned at me and thrust his hand down in his pocket. When he brought it up he had Bella's bracelet on his palm, glittering in the faint light.

"Where did you get it?" Between relief and the absurdity of the thing, I was almost hysterical. But Flannigan did not give me the bracelet; instead, it struck me his tone was suddenly severe.

"Now look here, miss," he said: "you've played your trick, and you've had your fun; the Lord knows it's only folks like you would play April fool jokes with a fortune! If you're the sinsible little woman you look to be, you'll put that pearl collar on the coal in the basement to-night, and let me find it."

"I haven't got the pearl collar," I protested. "I think you are crazy. Where did you get that bracelet?"

He edged away from me, as if he expected me to snatch it from him and run, but he was still trying in an elephantine way to treat the matter as a

joke.

"I found it in a drawer in the pantry," he said, "among the dirty linen. And if you're as smart as I think you are, I'll find the pearl collar there in the morning—and nothing said, miss."

So there I was, suspected of being responsible for Anne's pearl collar, as if I had not enough to worry me before. Of course I could have called them all together and told them, and made them explain to Flannigan what I had really meant by my delirious speech in the kitchen. But that would have meant telling the whole ridiculous story to Mr. Harbison, and having him think us all mad, and me a fool.

In all that overcrowded house there was only one place where I could be miserable with comfort. So I stayed on the roof, and cried a little, and then became angry and walked up and down, and clenched my hands and babbled helplessly. The boats on the river were yellow, horizontal streaks through my tears, and an early searchlight sent its shaft like a tangible thing in the darkness, just over my head. Then, finally, I curled down in a corner with my arms on the parapet, and the lights became more and more prismatic and finally formed themselves into a circle that was Bella's bracelet, and that kept winding around and around on something flat and not over-clean, that was Flannigan's palm.

I was roused by some one walking across the roof, the cracking of tin under feet, and a comfortable and companionable odor of tobacco. I moved a very little, and then I could see it was a man—the height and erectness told me which man. And just at that instant he saw me.

"Good Lord!" he ejaculated, and throwing his cigarette away he came across quickly. "Why, Mrs. Wilson, what in the world are you doing here? I thought—they said——"

"That I was sulking?" I finished disagreeably. "Perhaps I am. In fact, I'm quite sure of it."

"You were not," he said severely. "You have been asleep, in a February night, in the open air, with less clothing on than I wear in the tropics. Your arms are not half covered."

I had got up by this time, refusing his help, and, because my feet were numb, I sat down on the parapet for a moment. Oh, I knew what I looked like—one of those "Valley of the Nile After a Flood" pictures.

"There is one thing about you that is comforting," I sniffed. "You said precisely that same thing to me at three o'clock this morning. You never

startle me by saying anything unexpected."

He took a step toward me, and even in the dusk I could see that he was looking down at me oddly. All my bravado faded away and there was a queerish ringing in my ears.

"I would like to!" he said tensely. "I would like, this minute—I'm a fool, Mrs. Wilson," he finished miserably. "I ought to be drawn and quartered, but when I see you like this I—I get crazy. If you say the word, I'll—I'll go down and——" He clenched his fist.

It was reprehensible, of course, he saw that in an instant, for he shut his teeth over something that sounded very fierce, and strode away from me, to stand looking out over the river, with his hands thrust in his pockets. Of course the thing I should have done was to ignore it altogether, but he was so uncomfortable, so chastened, that, feline, feminine, whatever the instinct is, I could not let him go. I had been so wretched myself.

"What would you say?" I called over to him. He did not speak. "Would you tell me that I am a silly child for sulking?" No reply; he struck a match. "Or would you preach a little sermon about people—women—loving their husbands?"

He grunted savagely under his breath.

"Be quite honest," I pursued relentlessly. "Say that we are a lot of barbarians, say that because my—because Jimmy treats me outrageously—oh, he does; any one can see that—and because I loathe him—and any one can tell that—why don't you say you are shocked to the depths?" I was a little shocked myself by that time, but I couldn't stop, having started.

He came over to me, white-faced and towering, and he had the audacity to grip my arm and stand me on my feet, like a bad child—which I was, I dare say.

"Don't!" he said, in a husky, very pained voice. "You are only talking: you don't mean it. It isn't *you*. You know you care, or else why are you crying up here? And don't do it again—don't do—it—again—or I will——"

"You will—what?"

"Make a fool of myself, as I have now," he finished grimly. And then he stalked away and left me there alone, completely bewildered, to find my way down in the dark.

I groped along in the darkness, holding to the rail, for the staircase to the roof was very steep, and I went slowly. Half way down the stairs there was a

tiny landing, and I stopped. I could have sworn I heard Mr. Harbison's footsteps far below, growing fainter. I even smiled a little, there in the dark, although I had been rather profoundly shaken. The next instant I knew I had been wrong: some one was on the landing with me. I could hear short, sharp breathing, and then——

I am not sure that I struggled; in fact, I don't believe I did—I was too limp with amazement. The creature, to have lain in wait for me like that! And he was brutally strong: he caught me to him fiercely, and held me there, close, and he kissed me—not once or twice, but a half-dozen times, long kisses that filled me with hot shame for him, for myself, that I had—liked him. The roughness of his coat bruised my cheek: I loathed him. And then some one came whistling along the hall below, and he pushed me from him and stood listening, breathing in long, gasping breaths.

I ran: when my shaky knees would hold me, I ran. I wanted to hide my hot face, my disgust, my disillusion; I waited to put my head in mother's lap and cry; I wanted to die, or be ill, so I need never see him again. Perversely enough, I did none of those things. With my face still flaming, with burning eyes and hands that shook, I made a belated evening toilette and went slowly, haughtily, down the stairs. My hands were like ice, but I was consumed with rage. Oh, I would show him—that this was New York, not Iquique; that the roof was not his Andean table-land.

Every one elaborately ignored my absence from dinner. The Dallas Browns, Max, and Lollie were at bridge, Jim was alone in the den, walking the floor and biting at an unlighted cigar; Betty had returned to Aunt Selina, and was hysterical, they said, and Flannigan was in deep dejection because I had missed my dinner.

"Betty is making no end of a row," Max said, looking up from his game, "because the old lady upstairs insists on chloroform liniment. Betty says the smell makes her ill."

"And she can inhale Russian cigarettes," Anne said enviously, "and gasoline fumes, without turning a hair. I call a revoke, Dal: you trumped spades on the second round."

Dal flung over three tricks with very bad grace, and Anne counted them over with maddening deliberation.

"Game and rubber," she said. "Watch Dal, Max; he will cheat in the score if he can. Kit, don't have another clam while I am in this house. I have eaten so many lately my waist rises and falls with the tide."

“You have a stunning color, Kit,” Lollie said. “You are really quite superb. Who made that gown?”

“Where have you been hiding, *du kleine*?” Max whispered, under cover of showing me the evening paper, with a photograph of the house and a cross at the cellar window where we had tried to escape. “If one day in the house with you, Kit, puts me in this condition, what will a month do?”

From beyond the curtain of a sort of alcove, lighted with a red-shaded lamp, came a hum of conversation, Bella’s cool, even tones and a heavy masculine voice. They were laughing; I could feel my chin go up. He was not even hiding his shame in a corner.

“Max,” I asked, while the others clamored for him and the game, “has any one been up through the house since dinner? Any of the men?”

He looked at me curiously.

“Only Harbison,” he replied promptly. “Jim has been eating his heart out in the den ever since dinner, Dal played the Sonata Apassionata backwards on the pianola—he wanted to put through one of Anne’s lingerie waists, on a wager that it would play a tune; I played craps with Lollie Mercer, myself, and Flannigan has been washing dishes. Why?”

Well, that was conclusive, anyhow. I had had a faint hope that it might have been a joke, although it had borne all the evidences of sincerity, certainly. But it was past doubting now: he had lain in wait for me at the landing, and had kissed me, *me*, when he thought I was Jimmy’s wife. Oh, I must have been very light, very contemptible, if that was what he thought of me!

I went into the library and got a book, but it was impossible to read, with Jimmy lying on the couch giving vent to something between a sigh and a groan every few minutes. About eleven the cards stopped, and Bella said she would read palms. She began with Mr. Harbison, because she declared he had a wonderful hand, full of possibilities: she said he should have been a great inventor or a playwright, and that his attitude to women was one of homage, respect, almost reverence. He had the courage to look at me, and if a glance could have killed he would have withered away.

When Jimmy proffered *his* hand, she looked at it icily. Of course she could not refuse, with Mr. Harbison looking on.

“Rather negative,” she said coldly. “The lines are obscured by cushions of flesh; no heart line at all, mentality small, self-indulgence and irritability very marked.”

That was all I heard, for at that moment Betty burst into the room like a cyclone, only to collapse into a chair. “She’s a mean, cantankerous old woman!” she declared, feeling for her handkerchief. “You can take care of your own Aunt Selina, Jim Wilson. I shall never go near her again.”

“What did you do? Poison her?” Dallas asked with interest.

“Got—got camphor in her eyes!” snuffled Betty. “You never—heard such a noise. I wouldn’t be a trained nurse for anything in the world.”

“You’re not going to give her up, are you, Betty?” Jim asked imploringly. But Betty was, and said so plainly.

“Anyhow, she won’t have me back,” she finished, “and she has sent for —guess!”

“Have mercy!” Max cried, dropping to his knees. “Oh, fair ministering angel, she has not sent for me!”

“No,” Betty said maliciously. “She wants Bella—she’s crazy about her.”

VIII.

Really, I have left Aunt Selina rather out of it, but she was important as a cause, not as a result, at least at first; she came out strong later. I believe she was a very nice old woman, with strong likes and prejudices, which she was perfectly willing to pay for. At least, I only presume she had likes; I know she had prejudices.

Nobody ever understood why Bella consented to take Betty’s place with Aunt Selina. As for me, I was too much engrossed with my own affairs to pay the invalid much attention. Once or twice during the day I had stopped in to see her, and had been received frigidly and with marked disapproval. I was in disgrace, of course, after the scene in the dining-room the night before. I had stood like a naughty child, just inside the door, and replied meekly when she said the pillows were over-stuffed, and why didn’t I have the linen slips rinsed in starch water? She laid the blame for her illness on my heartless conduct of the night before, and she had made Jim read to her part of the afternoon from a book she carried with her, “Coals of Fire on the Domestic Hearth,” marking places for me to read.

She sent for me that night, just as I had taken off my gown, so I threw on a *liseuse*, and went in. To my horror, Jim was already there. At a gesture from Aunt Selina, he closed the door into the hall and tiptoed back beside the bed, where he sat staring at the figures on the silk comfort.

Aunt Selina's first words were:

"Where is that flibberty-gibbet?"

Jim looked at me.

"She means Betty," I explained. "She has gone to bed, I think."

"Don't—let—her—in—this—room—again," she said, with awful emphasis. "She is an infamous creature."

"Oh, come now, Aunt Selina," Jim broke in; "she's foolish perhaps, but she's a nice little thing." Aunt Selina's face was a curious study. Then she raised herself on her elbow and, taking a flat chamois-skin bag from under the pillow, held it out.

"My cameo breast-pin," she said solemnly, "my cuff-buttons with gold rims and storks painted on china in the middle; my watch, that has put me to bed and got me up for forty years, and my money. Five hundred and ten dollars and forty cents! Taken with the doors locked under my nose." Which was ambiguous, but forcible.

"But, good gracious, Miss Car—Aunt Selina!" I exclaimed, "you don't think Betty Mercer took those things?"

"No," she said grimly; "I think I probably got up in my sleep and lighted the fire with them, or sent 'em out for a walk." Then she stuffed the bag away and sat up resolutely in bed.

"Have you made up?" she demanded, looking from one to the other of us. "Bella, don't tell me you still persist in that nonsense."

"What nonsense?" I asked, getting ready to run.

"That you do not love him."

"Him?"

"James," she snapped irritably. "Do you suppose I mean the policeman?"

I looked over at Jimmy. She had got me by the hand, and Jimmy was making frantic gestures to tell her the whole thing and be done with it. But I had gone too far. The mill of the gods had crushed me already, and I didn't propose to be drawn out hideously mangled and held up as an example for

the next two or three weeks, although it was clear enough that Aunt Selina disapproved of me thoroughly, and would have been glad enough to find that no tie save the Board of Health held us together. And then Bella came in, and you wouldn't have known her. She had put on a straight white woollen wrapper, and she had her hair in two long braids down her back. She looked like a nice, wide-eyed little girl in her teens, and she had some lobster salad and a glass of port on a tray. When she saw the situation she put the things down and had the nastiness to stay and listen.

"I am not blind," Aunt Selina said, with one eye on the tray, "and you cannot hide things from me. You two silly children adore each other; I saw some things last night."

Bella took a step forward; then she stopped and shrugged her shoulders. Jim was purple.

"I saw you kiss her in the dining-room, remember that!" Aunt Selina went on, giving the screw another turn.

It was Bella's turn to be excited. She gave me one awful stare, then she fixed her eyes on Jim, who wriggled—simply squirmed.

"Besides," Aunt Selina went on, "you told me to-day that you loved her. Don't deny it, James."

Bella couldn't keep quiet another instant. She came over and stood at the foot of the bed.

"Please don't excite yourself, *dear* Miss Caruthers," she said, in a voice like ice. "Every one knows he loves her; he simply overflows with it. It—it is quite a by-word among their friends. They have been sitting together in a corner all evening."

Yes, that was what she said; when I had not spoken to Jimmy the whole time in the den. Bella was cattish, and she was jealous, too. I turned on my heel and went to the door; then I turned to her, with my hand on the knob.

"You have been misinformed," I said coldly. "You cannot possibly know, having spent three hours in a corner yourself—with Mr. Harbison." I abhor jealousy in a woman.

Well, Aunt Selina ate all the lobster salad, and drank the port after Bella had told her it was beef, iron, and wine, and she slept all night, and was able to sit up in a chair the next day, and was so infatuated with Bella that she would not let her out of her sight. But that is ahead of the story.

At midnight the house was fairly quiet, except for Jim, who kept walking around the halls because he couldn't sleep. I got up at last and ordered him to bed, and he had the audacity to have a grievance with me.

"Look at my situation now!" he said, sitting pensively on a steam radiator. "Aunt Selina is crazy. I only kissed your hand, anyhow, and I don't know why you sat in the den all evening; you might have known that Bella would notice it. Why couldn't you leave me alone to my misery?"

"Very well," I said, much offended. "After this I shall sit with Flannigan, in the kitchen. He is the only gentleman in the house."

I left him babbling apologies and went to bed, but I had an uncomfortable feeling that Bella had been a witness of our conversation, for the door into Aunt Selina's room closed softly as I passed.

I knew beforehand that I was not going to sleep. The instant I turned out the light the nightmare events of the evening ranged themselves in a procession, or a series of tableaux, one after the other: Flannigan on the roof, with the bracelet on his palm, looking accusingly at me; Mr. Harbison and the scene on the roof, with my flippancy; and the result of that flippancy—the man on the stairs, the arms that held me, the terrible kisses that had scorched my face—it was awful! And then the absurd situation across Aunt Selina's bed, and Bella's face! Oh, it was all so ridiculous—my having thought that the Harbison man was a gentleman, and finding him a cad, and worse. It was excruciatingly funny. I quite got a headache from laughing; indeed, I laughed until I found I was crying, and then I knew I was going to have an attack of strangulated emotion, called hysteria. So I got up and turned on all the lights, and bathed my face with cologne, and felt better.

But I did not go to sleep. When the hall clock chimed two, I discovered I was hungry. I had had nothing since luncheon, and even the thirst following the South American goulash was gone. There was probably something to eat in the pantry, and if there was not, I was quite equal to going to the basement.

As it happened, however, I found a very orderly assortment of left-overs and a pitcher of milk, which had no business there, in the pantry, and with plenty of light I was not at all frightened.

I ate bread and butter and drank milk, and was fast becoming a rational person again; I had pulled out one of the drawers part way, and with a tray across the corner I had improvised a comfortable seat. And then I noticed that the drawer was full of soiled napkins, and I remembered the bracelet. I

hardly know why I decided to go through the drawer again, after Flannigan had already done it, but I did. I finished my milk and then, getting down on my knees, I proceeded systematically to empty the drawer. I took out perhaps a dozen napkins and as many doilies without finding anything. Then I took out a large tray cloth, and there was something on it that made me look further. One corner of it had been scorched, the clear and well defined imprint of a lighted cigarette or cigar, a blackened streak that trailed off into a brown and then into yellow. I had a queer, trembly feeling, as if I were on the brink of a discovery—perhaps Anne's pearls, or the cuff-buttons with gold rims and storks painted on china in the centre. But the only thing I found, down in the corner of the drawer, was a half-burned cigarette.

To me, it seemed quite enough. It was one of the South American cigarettes, with a tobacco wrapper instead of paper, that Mr. Harbison smoked!

IX.

(*Clipped from* the Evening Chronicle of February fifth.)

ATTEMPT AT ESCAPE FRUSTRATED

MEMBERS OF THE FOUR HUNDRED DEFY THE LAW

Special Officer McCloud, on duty at the quarantined house of James Wilson, artist and clubman, on Ninety-fifth Street, reported this morning a daring attempt at escape, made at 3 a.m. It is in this house that some eight or nine members of the smart set were imprisoned during the course of a dinner party, when the Japanese butler developed scarlet fever. The party shut in the house includes Miss Katherine McNair, the daughter of Theodore McNair, of the Inter-ocean system; Mr. and Mrs. Dallas Brown, the Misses Mercer, Maxwell Reed, the well-known clubman and whip, and a Mr. Thomas Harbison, guest of the Dallas Browns and a South American.

Officer McCloud's story, told to a *Chronicle* reporter this morning, is as follows: The occupants of the house had been uneasy all day. From the air of subdued bustle, and from a careful inspection of the roof, made by the entire party during the

afternoon, his suspicions had been aroused. Nothing unusual, however, occurred during the early part of the night. From eight o'clock to twelve McCloud was relieved from duty, his place being taken by Michael Shane, of the Eighty-sixth Street Station.

When McCloud came on duty at midnight, Shane reported that about eleven o'clock the searchlight of a steamer on the river, flashing over the house, had shown a man crouching on the parapet, evidently surveying the roof across, which at this point is only twelve feet distant, with a view to making his escape. On seeing Shane below, however, he had beat a retreat, but not before the officer had seen him distinctly. He was dressed in evening clothes, and wore a light tan overcoat.

Officer McCloud relieved Shane at midnight, and sent for a plain-clothes man from the station-house. This man was stationed on the roof of the Bevington residence next door, with strict injunctions to prevent an escape from the quarantined mansion. Nothing suspicious having occurred, the man on the roof left about 3 A.M., reporting to McCloud below that everything was quiet. At that moment, glancing skyward, one of the officers was astounded to see a long narrow board project itself from the coping of the Wilson house, waver uncertainly for a moment, and then advance stealthily toward the parapet across. When it was within a foot or two of a resting place, McCloud called sharply to the invisible refugee above, at the same time firing his revolver into the ground.

The result was surprising. The board stopped, trembled, swayed a little, and dropped, missing the vigilant officers by a hair's breadth, and crashing to the cement with terrific force. An inspection of the roof from the Bevington house, later, revealed nothing unusual. It is evident, however, that the quarantine is proving irksome to the inhabitants of the sequestered residence, most of whom are typical society folk, without resources in themselves. Their condition, without valets and maids, is certainly pitiable. It has been rumored that the ladies are doing their own hair, and that the gentlemen have been reduced to putting their own buttons in their shirts. This deplorable situation, however, is unavoidable.

The vigilance of the Board of Health has been most commendable in this case. Beginning with a wager over the

> telephone that they would break quarantine in twenty-four hours, and ending with the attempt to span a twelve-foot gulf with a board, over which to cross to freedom, these shut-in society folk have shown a characteristic disregard of the laws of the State. It is quite time to extend to the millionaire the same strictness that keeps the commuter at home for three weeks with the measles; that makes him get the milk bottles and groceries from the gate-post and smell like dog-soap for a month afterwards, as a result of disinfection.

I was quite ill the next morning—from excitement, I suppose. Anyhow, I did not get up, and there wasn't any breakfast. Jim said he roused Flannigan at eight o'clock, to go down and get a fire started, and then went back to bed. Anyhow, Flannigan did not get up. He appeared, sheepishly, at half past ten, and by that time Bella was down, in a towering rage, and had burned her hand and got the fire started, and taken up a tray for Aunt Selina and herself.

As the others straggled down they boiled themselves an egg, or ate some fruit, and nobody put anything away. Lollie Mercer made me some tea and scorched toast, and brought it, about eleven o'clock.

"I never saw such a house," she declared. "A dozen housemaids couldn't put it in order. Why should every man that smokes drop his ashes wherever he happens to be?"

"That's the question of the ages," I replied languidly. "What was Max talking so horribly about a little while ago." Lollie looked up aggrieved.

"About nothing at all," she declared. "Anne told me to clean the bath tubs with oil, and I did it, that's all. Now Max says he couldn't get it off, and his clothes stick to him, and if he should light a cigarette he would explode. He can clean his own tub to-morrow," she finished vindictively.

Jimmy came in then, bringing Anne for propriety—a concession to Bella—and read me the paper.

"Now, what do you think of that?" he demanded. "What sort of a newspaper lie do you call it? It makes me crazy: everybody with a mental picture of me leaning over a parapet, waving a board, with the rest of you sitting on my legs to keep me from overbalancing!"

"Maybe it is true," I suggested. "Not of you, Jim—but some one may have tried to get out that way. In fact, I think it extremely likely."

“Who? Flannigan? You couldn’t drive him out. He’s having the time of his life. Do you suspect me?”

“Come away and don’t fight,” Anne broke in pacifically. “You will have to have luncheon sent in, Jimmy; nobody has ordered anything from the shops, and I feel like old Mother Hubbard.”

“I wish you would all go out,” I said wearily. “If every man in the house says he didn’t try to get over to the next roof last night, well and good. But you might look and see if the board is still lying where it fell.”

There was an instantaneous rush for the window, and a second’s pause. Then Jimmy’s voice, incredulous, awed:

“Well, I’ll be—blessed. There’s the board!”

I stayed in my room all that day. My head really ached, and then, too, I did not care to meet Mr. Harbison. It would have to come; I realized that a meeting was inevitable, but I wanted time to think how I would meet him. It would be impossible to cut him, without rousing the curiosity of the others to fever pitch; and it was equally impossible to ignore the disgraceful episode on the stairs. As it happened, however, I need not have worried. I went down to dinner, languidly, when every one was seated, and found Max at my right, and Mr. Harbison moved over beside Bella. Every one was talking at once, for Flannigan, ambling around the table as airily as he walked his rounds, had presented Bella with her bracelet on a salad plate, garnished with endive. He had found it in the furnace room, he maintained, where she must have dropped it. And he looked at me stealthily, to approve his mendacity!

Every one was famished, and as they ate they discussed the board in the areaway, and pretended to deride it as a clever bit of press work, to revive a dying sensation. No one was deceived: Anne’s pearls and the attempt at escape, coming just after, pointed only to one thing. I looked around the table, dazed. Flannigan, almost the only unknown quantity, might have tried to escape the night before, but he would not have been in dress clothes. Besides, he must be eliminated, as far as the pearls were concerned, having been locked in the furnace room that night. There was no one among the girls to suspect. The Mercer girls had stunning pearls, and could secure all they wanted legitimately; and Bella disliked them. Oh, there was no question about it, I decided: Dallas and Anne had taken a wolf to their bosom—or is it a viper?—and the Harbison man was the creature. Although I will say that, looking over the table, at Jimmy’s breadth and not very imposing personality, at Max’s lean length, sallow skin, and scrubby black

mustache, at Dallas, blond, growing bald and florid, and then at the Harbison boy, tall, muscular, clear-eyed, and sunburned, one would have taken Max at first choice as the villain, with Dal next, Jim third, and the Harbison boy not in the running.

It was just after dinner that the surprise was sprung on me. Mr. Harbison came around to me gravely, and asked me if I felt able to go up on the roof. On the roof, after last night! I had to gather myself together; luckily, the others were pushing back their chairs, showing Flannigan the liqueur glasses to take up, and lighting cigarettes.

"I do not care to go," I said icily.

"The others are coming," he persisted, "and I—I could give you an arm up the stairs."

"I believe you are quite good at that," I said, looking at him steadily. "Thank you, I may go, but not—with you."

He really went rather white. Then he bowed ceremoniously and left me.

Max got me a wrap, end every one except Mr. Harbison and Bella, who was taking a mass of indigestibles to Aunt Selina, went to the roof.

"Where is Tom?" Anne asked, as we reached the foot of the stairs.

"Gone ahead to fix things," was the answer. But he was not there. At the top of the last flight I stopped, dumb with amazement: the roof had been transformed, enchanted. It was a fairy-land of lights and foliage and colors. I had to stop and rub my eyes. From the bleakness of a tin roof in February, to the brightness and greenery of a July roof garden!

"You were the immediate inspiration, Kit," Dallas said. "Harbison thought your headache might come from lack of exercise and fresh air, and he has worked us like nailers all day. I've a blister on my right palm, and Harbison got shocked while he was wiring the place, and nearly fell over the parapet. We bought out two florists by telephone."

It was a most amazing transformation. At each corner a pole had been erected, and wires crossed the roof diagonally, hung with red and amber bulbs. Around the chimneys had been massed evergreen trees in tubs, hiding their brick-and-mortar ugliness, and among the trees tiny lights were strung. Along the parapet were rows of geometrical boxwood plants in bright red crocks, and the flaps of a crimson and white tent had been thrown open, showing lights within, and rugs, wicker chairs, and cushions.

Max raised a glass of benedictine and posed for a moment, melodramatically.

"To the Wilson roof garden!" he said. "To Kit, who inspired; to the creators, who perspired; and to Takahiro—may he not have expired."

Every one was very gay; I think the knowledge that to-morrow Aunt Selina might be with them urged them to make the most of this last night of freedom. I tried to be jolly, and succeeded in being feverish. Mr. Harbison did not appear to enjoy what he had wrought. Jim brought up his guitar and sang love songs in a beautiful tenor, looking at Bella all the time. And Bella sat in a steamer chair, with a rug over her and a spangled veil on her head, looking at the boats on the river—about as soft and as chastened as an acetylene headlight.

And after Max had told a most improbable tale, which Leila advised him to sprinkle salt on, and Dallas had done a clog dance, Bella said it was time for her complexion sleep, and went downstairs, which broke up the party.

"If she only gave half as much care to her immortal soul," Anne said when she had gone, "as she does to her skin, she would let that nice Harbison boy alone. She must have been brutal to him to-night, for he went to bed at nine o'clock. At least, I suppose he went to bed: he shut himself in the studio, and when I knocked he advised me not to come in."

I had pleaded my headache as an excuse for avoiding Aunt Selina all day, and she had not sent for me. Bella was really quite extraordinary. She was never in the habit of putting herself out for any one, and she always declared that the very odor of a sick-room drove her to Scotch and soda. But here she was, rubbing Aunt Selina's back with chloroform liniment—and you know how that smells—getting her up in a chair, dressed in one of Bella's wadded silk robes, with pillows under her feet, and then doing her hair in elaborate puffs—braiding her gray switch and bringing it, coronet-fashion, around the top of her head. She even put rice powder on Aunt Selina's nose, and dabbed violet water behind her ears, and said she couldn't understand why she (Aunt Selina) had never married, but of course she probably would some day!

The result was, of course, that the old lady wouldn't let Bella out of her sight, except to go to the kitchen for something to eat for her. That very day Bella got the doctor to order ale for Aunt Selina (oh, yes: the doctor could come in; anything could come in, but nothing could go out) and she had three pints of Bass, and learned to eat anchovies and caviare—all in one day.

Bella's conduct to Jim was disgraceful. She snubbed him, ignored him, tramped on him, and Jim was growing positively flabby. He spent most of his time writing letters to the Board of Health and playing solitaire. He was a pathetic figure.

Well, we went to bed fairly early. Bella had massaged Aunt Selina's face and rubbed in cold cream, Anne and Dallas had compromised on which window should be open in their bedroom, and the men had matched to see who should look at the furnace. I did not expect to sleep, but the cold night air had done its work, and I was asleep almost immediately.

Some time during the early part of the night I wakened, and, after turning and twisting uneasily, I realized that I was cold. The couch in Bella's dressing-room was comfortable enough, but narrow and low. I remember distinctly (that was what was so maddening: everybody thought I dreamed it)—I remember getting an eiderdown comfort that was folded at my feet, and pulling it up around me. In the luxury of its warmth I snuggled down and went to sleep almost instantly. It seemed to me I had slept for hours, but it was probably an hour or less, when something roused me. The room was perfectly dark, and there was not a sound save the faint ticking of the clock, but I was wide awake.

And then came the incident that in its ghastly, horrible absurdity made the rest of the people, shout with laughter the next day. It was not funny then. For suddenly the eiderdown comfort began to slip. I had heard no footstep, not the slightest sound approaching me, but the comfort moved; from my chin, inch by inch, it slipped to my shoulders; awfully, inevitably, hair-raisingly, it moved. I could feel my blood gather around my heart, leaving me cold and nerveless. As it passed my hands I gave an involuntary clutch for it, to feel it slip away from my fingers. Then the full horror of the situation took hold of me: as the comfort slid past my feet I sat up and screamed at the top of my voice.

Of course people came running in in all sorts of things. I was still sitting up, declaring I had seen a ghost and that the house was haunted. Dallas came rushing in, struggling for the second armhole of his dressing-gown, and Bella had already turned on the lights. They said I had had a nightmare, and not to sleep on my back, and perhaps I was taking the grippe.

And just then Jimmy came running down the stairs, and fell over something, almost breaking his wrist. It was the eiderdown comfort, half way up the studio staircase!

X.

Aunt Selina got up the next morning and Jim told her all the strange things that had been happening. She fixed on Flannigan, of course, although she still suspected Betty of her watch and other valuables. The incident of the comfort she called nervous indigestion and bad hours.

She spent the entire day going through the store-room and linen closets, and running her fingers over things for dust. Whenever she found any she looked at me, drew a long breath, and said, "Poor James!" It was maddening. And when she went through his clothes and found some buttons off (Jim didn't keep a man, and Takahiro had stopped at his boots) she looked at me quite awfully.

"His mother was a perfect housekeeper," she said. "James was brought up in clothes with the buttons on, put on clean shelves."

"Didn't they put them on him?" I asked, almost hysterically. It had been a bad morning, after a worse night. Every one had found fault with the breakfast, and they straggled down one at a time until I was frantic. Then Flannigan had talked at me about the pearls, and Mr. Harbison had said, "Good-morning," very stiffly, and nearly rattled the inside of the furnace out.

Early in the morning, too, I overheard a scrap of conversation between the policeman and our gentleman-adventurer from South America. Something had gone wrong with the telephone and Mr. Harbison was fussing over it with a screw-driver and a pair of scissors—all the tools he could find. Flannigan was lifting rugs to shake them on the roof—Bella's order.

"Wash the table linen!" he was grumbling. "I'll do what I can that's necessary. Grub has to be, and dishes has to be washed—I'll admit that. If you're particular, make up your bed every day; I don't object. But don't tell me we have to use thirty-three table napkins a day. What did folks do before napkins was invented? Tell me that!"—triumphantly.

"What's the answer?" Mr. Harbison said absently, evidently with the screw-driver in his mouth.

"Used their pocket handkerchiefs! And if the worst comes to the worst, Mr. Harbison, these folks here can use their sleeves, for all I care—not that the women has any sleeves to speak of. Wash clothes I will not."

“Well, don’t worry Mrs. Wilson about it,” the other voice said. Flannigan straightened himself with a grunt.

“Mrs. Wilson!” he said. “A lot she would worry. She’s been a disappointment to me, Mr. Harbison, me thinking that now she’d come back to him, after leavin’ him the way she did, they’d be like two turtle doves. Lord! the cook next door——”

But what the cook had told about Bella and Jimmy was not divulged, for the Harbison man caught him up with a jerk and sent Flannigan, grumbling, with his rugs to the roof.

It did not seem possible to carry on the deception much longer, but if things were bad now, what would they be when Aunt Selina learned she had been lied to, made ridiculous, generally deceived? And how would I be able to live in the house with her when she did know? Luckily, every one was so puzzled over the mystery in the house that loads of little things that would have been absolutely damning were never noticed at all. For instance, my asking Jimmy at luncheon that day if he took cream in his coffee! And Max, coming to the rescue by dropping his watch in his glass of water, and creating a diversion and a laugh by saying not to mind; it had been in soak before.

Some time that afternoon Lollie hunted me out in the tent. I had fled to the roof to avoid Aunt Selina, who did not dare to brave the February air. Lollie wore an air of mystery, and although no one could possibly have overheard, she closed the door to the steps, and, coming over, drew a chair close to mine.

“Have you seen much of Tom to-day?” she asked, as an introduction.

“I suppose you mean Mr. Harbison, Lollie,” I said. “No—not any more than I could help. Don’t whisper, he couldn’t possibly hear you. And if it’s scandal I don’t want to hear it.”

“Look here, Kit,” she retorted, “you needn’t be so superior. If I like to talk scandal, I’m not so sure you aren’t making it.”

That was the way right along: *I* was making scandal; *I* brought them there to dinner; *I* let Bella in!

And of course Anne came up then, and began on me at once.

“You are a very bad girl,” she began. “What do you mean by treating Tom Harbison the way you do? He is heart-broken.”

“I think you overestimate my influence over him,” I retorted. “I haven’t treated him badly, because I haven’t paid any attention to him.”

Anne threw up her hands.

“There you are!” she said. “He worked all day yesterday fixing this place for you—yes, for you, my dear. I am not blind—and last night you refused to let him bring you up.”

“He told you!” I flamed.

“He wondered what he had done. And as you wouldn’t let him come within speaking distance of you, he came to me.”

“I am sorry, Anne, since you are fond of him,” I said. “But to me he is impossible—intolerable. My reasons are quite sufficient.”

“Kit is quite right, Anne,” Leila broke in. “I tell you, there is something queer about him.”

Anne stiffened.

“He is perfect,” she declared. “Of good family, warm-hearted, courageous, handsome, clever—what more do you ask?”

“Honesty,” said Leila hotly. “That a man should be what he says he is.”

Anne and I both stared.

“It was your Mr. Harbison,” Leila went on, “who tried to escape from the house by putting a board across to the next roof!”

“I don’t believe it,” said Anne. “You might bring me a picture of him, board in hand, and I wouldn’t believe it.”

“Don’t, then,” said Lollie cruelly. “Let him get away with your pearls; they are yours. Only, as sure as anything, the man who tried to escape from this house had a reason for escaping, and the papers said a man in evening dress and light overcoat. I found Mr. Harbison’s overcoat to-day lying in a heap in one of the maids’ rooms, and it was covered with brick dust all over the front. A button had even been torn off.”

“Pooh!” Anne said, when she had recovered herself a little. “There isn’t any reason, as far as that goes, why Flannigan shouldn’t have worn Tom’s overcoat, or—any of the others.”

“Flannigan!” Leila said loftily. “Why, his arms are like piano-legs; he couldn’t get into it. As for the others, there is only one person who would fit, or nearly fit, that overcoat, and that is Dallas, Anne.”

While Anne was choking down her wrath, Leila got up and darted out of the tent. When she came back she was triumphant.

"Look," she said, holding out her hand. And on her palm lay a lightish brown button. "I found it just where the paper said the board was thrown out, and it is from Mr. Harbison's overcoat, without a doubt."

Of course I should not have been surprised. A man who would kiss a woman on a dark staircase—a woman he had known only two days—was capable of anything.

"Kit has only been a little keener than the rest of us," Lollie said. "She found him out yesterday."

"Upon my word," Anne said indignantly, preparing to go, "if I didn't know you girls so well, I would think you were crazy. And now, just to offset this, I can tell you something. Flannigan told me this morning not to worry; that he has my pearl collar spotted, and *young ladies will have their jokes*!"

Yes, as I said before, it was a cheerful, joy-producing situation.

I sat and thought it over after Anne's parting shot, when Leila had flounced downstairs. Things were closing up: I gave the situation twenty-four hours to develop. At the end of that time Flannigan would accuse me openly of knowing where the pearls were; I would explain my silly remark to him, and the mine would explode—under Aunt Selina.

I was sunk in dejected reverie when some one came on the roof. When he was opposite the opening in the tent, I saw Mr. Harbison, and at that moment he saw me. He paused uncertainly, then he made an evident effort and came over to me.

"You are—better to-day?"

"Quite well, thank you."

"I am glad you find the tent useful. Does it keep off the wind?"

"It is quite a shelter"—frigidly.

He still stood, struggling for something to say. Evidently nothing came to his mind, for he lifted the cap he was wearing, and, turning away, began to work with the wiring of the roof. He was clever with tools; one could see that. If he was a professional gentleman-burglar, no doubt he needed to be. After a bit, finding it necessary to climb onto the parapet, he took off his coat, without even a glance in my direction, and fell to work vigorously.

One need not like a man, to admire him physically, any more than one needs to like a race-horse or any other splendid animal. No one could deny that the man on the parapet was a splendid animal; he looked quite big enough and strong enough to have tossed his slender bridge across the gulf to the next roof, without any difficulty, and coördinate enough to have crossed on it with a flourish to safety.

Just then there was a rending, tearing sound from the corner, and a muttered ejaculation. I looked up in time to see Mr. Harbison throw up his arms, make a futile attempt to regain his balance, and disappear over the edge of the roof. One instant he was standing there, splendid, superb; the next, the corner of the parapet was empty, all that stood there was a broken, splintered post and a tangle of wires.

I could not move at first; at least, it seemed hours before the full significance of the thing penetrated my dazed brain. When I got up I seemed to walk, to crawl, with leaden weights holding my feet.

When I got to the corner I had to catch the post for support. I knew somebody was saying, "Oh, how terrible!" over and over. It was only afterwards that I knew it had been myself. And then some other voice was saying, "Don't be alarmed. Please don't be frightened. I'm all right."

I dared to look over the parapet, finally, and instead of a crushed and unspeakable body, there was Mr. Harbison, sitting about eight feet below me, with his feet swinging into space and a long red scratch from the corner of his eye across his cheek. There was a sort of a mansard there, with windows, and just enough of a coping to keep him from rolling off.

"I thought you had fallen—all the way," I gasped, trying to keep my lips from trembling. "I—oh, don't dangle your feet like that!"

He did not seem at all glad of his escape. He sat there gloomily, peering into the gulf beneath.

"If it wasn't so—er—messy and generally unpleasant," he replied, without looking up, "I would slide off and go the rest of the way."

"You are childish," I said severely. "See if you can get through the window behind you. If you cannot, I'll come down and unfasten it." But the window was open, and I had a chance to sit down and gather up the scattered ends of my nerves. To my surprise, however, when he came back he made no effort to renew our conversation. He ignored me completely, and went to work at once to repair the damage to his wires, with his back to me.

“I think you are very rude,” I said at last. “You fell over there and I thought you were killed. The nervous shock I experienced is just as bad as if you had gone—all the way.”

He put down the hammer and came over to me without speaking. Then, when he was quite close, he said:

“I am very sorry if I startled you. I did not flatter myself that you would be profoundly affected, in any event.”

“Oh, as to that,” I said lightly, “it makes me ill for days if my car runs over a dog.” He looked at me in silence. “You are not going to get up on that parapet again?”

“Mrs. Wilson,” he said, without paying the slightest attention to my question, “will you tell me what I have done?”

“Done?”

“Or have not done? I have racked my brains—stayed awake all of last night. At first I hoped it was impersonal, that, womanlike, you were merely venting general disfavor on one particular individual. But—your hostility is to me, personally.”

I raised my eyebrows, coldly interrogative.

“Perhaps,” he went on calmly—“perhaps I was a fool here on the roof—the night before last. If I said anything that I should not, I ask your pardon. If it is not that, I think you ought to ask mine.”

I was angry enough then.

“There can be only one opinion about your conduct,” I retorted warmly. “It was worse than brutal. It—it was unspeakable. I have no words for it—except that I loathe it—and you.”

He was very grim by this time. “I have heard you say something like that before—only I was not the unfortunate in that case.”

“Oh!” I was choking.

“Under different circumstances I should be the last person to recall anything so—personal. But the circumstances are unusual.” He took an angry step toward me. “Will you tell me what I have done? Or shall I go down and ask the others?”

“You wouldn’t dare,” I cried, “or I will tell them what you did! How you waylaid me on those stairs there, and forced your caresses, your kisses, on

me! Oh, I could die with shame!"

The silence that followed was as unexpected as it was ominous. I knew he was staring at me, and I was furious to find myself so emotional, so much more the excited of the two. Finally I looked up.

"You cannot deny it," I said, a sort of anti-climax.

"No." He was very quiet, very grim, quite composed. "No," he repented judicially. "I do not deny it."

He did not? Or he would not? Which?

XI.

Max was still hunting Anne's pearls, using them, the men declared, as a good excuse to avoid tinkering with the furnace or repairing the dumb-waiter, which took the queerest notions, and stopped once, half way up from the kitchen, for an hour, with the dinner on it. Anyhow, Max was searching the house systematically armed with a copy of Poe's "Purloined Letter" and Gaboriau's "Monsieur Lecoq". He went through the seats of the chairs with a hat-pin, tore up the beds, and lifted rugs, until the house was in a state of confusion. And the next day, the fourth, he found something—not much, but it was curious. He had been in the studio, poking around behind the dusty pictures, with Jimmy expostulating every time he moved anything and the rest standing around watching him.

Max was strutting.

"We get it by elimination," he said importantly. "The pearls being nowhere else in the house, they must be here in the studio. Three parts of the studio having yielded nothing, they must be in the fourth. Ladies and gentlemen, let me have your attention for one moment. I tap this canvas with my wand—there is nothing up my sleeve. Then I prepare to move the canvas —so. And I put my hand in the pocket of this disreputable velvet coat, so. Behold!"

Then he gave a low exclamation and looked at something he held in his hand. Every one stepped forward, and on his palm was the small diamond clasp from Anne's collar!

Jimmy was apoplectic. He tried to smile, but no one else did.

“Well, I’ll be flabbergasted!” he said. “I say, you people, you don’t think for a minute that I put that thing there? Why, I haven’t worn that coat for a month. It’s—it’s a trick of yours, Max.”

But Max shook his head; he looked stupefied, and stood gazing from the clasp to the pocket of the old painting-coat. Betty dropped onto a folding stool, that promptly collapsed with her and created a welcome diversion, while Anne pounced on the clasp greedily, with a little cry.

“We will find it all now,” she said excitedly. “Did you look in the other pockets, Max?”

Then, for the first time, I was conscious of an air of constraint among the men. Dallas was whistling softly, and Mr. Harbison, having rescued Betty, was standing silent and aloof, watching the scene with non-committal eyes. It was Max who spoke first, after a hurried inventory of the other pockets.

“Nothing else,” he said constrainedly. “I’ll move the rest of the canvases.”

But Jim interfered, to every one’s surprise.

“I wouldn’t, if I were you, Max. There’s nothing back there. I had ’em out yesterday.” He was quite pale.

“Nonsense!” Max said gruffly. “If it’s a practical joke, Jim, why don’t you ’fess up? Anne has worried enough.”

“The pearls are not there, I tell you,” Jim began. Although the studio was cold, there were little fine beads of moisture on his face. “I must ask you not to move those pictures.” And then Aunt Selina came to the rescue: she stalked over and stood with her back against the stack of canvases.

“As far as I can understand this,” she declaimed, “you gentlemen are trying to intimate that James knows something of that young woman’s jewelry, because you found part of it in his pocket. Certainly you will not move the pictures. How do you know that the young gentleman who said he found it there didn’t have it up his sleeve?”

She looked around triumphantly, and Max glowered. Dallas soothed her, however.

“Exactly so,” he said. “How do we know that Max didn’t have the clasp up his sleeve? My dear lady, neither my wife nor I care anything for the pearls, as compared with the priceless pearl of peace. I suggest tea on the roof; those in favor——? My arm, Miss Caruthers.”

It was all well enough for Jim to say later that he didn't dare to have the canvases moved, for he had stuck behind them all sorts of chorus girl photographs and life-class crayons that were not for Aunt Selina's eye, besides four empty siphons, two full ones, and three bottles of whisky. Not a soul in the house believed him: there was a new element of suspicion and discord in the house.

Every one went up on the roof and left him to his mystery. Anne drank her tea in a preoccupied silence, with half-closed eyes, an attitude that boded ill to somebody. The rest were feverishly gay, and Aunt Selina, with a pair of arctics on her feet and a hot-water bottle at her back, sat in the middle of the tent and told me familiar anecdotes of Jimmy's early youth (had he known, he would have slain her). Betty and Mr. Harbison had found a baseball, and were running around like a pair of children. It was quite certain that neither his escape from death nor my accusation weighed heavily on him.

At a quarter before six Dallas put down his tea-cup and grunted his way to the furnace; the men usually attended to it before dressing for dinner, and this was Dal's day. Flannigan had been relieved of that part of the work, after twice setting fire to a chimney. In five minutes Dal came back, and spoke a few words to Max, who went down with him, and in ten minutes more Flannigan puffed up the steps and called Mr. Harbison. Aunt Selina was busy with the time Jimmy had swallowed an open safety-pin, so I could not go at once, but I knew something new had transpired. As soon as the pin had been coughed up, or taken out of his nose—I forget which—I slipped away quietly and went down the stairs.

There was no one in the studio, or even in the library. I could hear voices from somewhere, faint voices that talked rapidly, and after awhile I located the sounds under my feet. The men were all in the basement, and something must have happened. I flew back to the basement stairs, to meet Mr. Harbison at the foot. He was grimy and dusty, with streaks of coal dust over his face, and he had been examining his revolver. I was just in time to see him slip it into his pocket.

"What is the matter?" I demanded. "Is any one hurt?"

"No one," he said coolly. "We've been cleaning out the furnace."

"With a revolver! How interesting—and unusual!" I said drily, and slipped past him as he barred my way. He was not pleased; I heard him mutter something and come rapidly after me, but I had the voices as a guide, and I was not going to be turned back like a child. The men had gathered around a low stone arch in the furnace-room, and were looking down a short

flight of steps, into a sort of vault, evidently under the pavement. A faint light came from a small grating above, and there was a close, musty smell in the air.

"I tell you it must have been last night," Dallas was saying. "Wilson and I were here before we went to bed, and I'll swear that hole was not there then."

"It was not there this morning, sir," Flannigan insisted. "It has been made during the day."

"And it could not have been done this afternoon," Mr. Harbison said quietly. "I was fussing with the telephone wire down here. I would have heard the noise."

Something in his voice made me look at him, and certainly his expression was unusual. He was watching us all most intently while Dallas pointed out to me the cause of the excitement. From the main floor of the furnace-room, a flight of stone steps surmounted by an arch led into the coal cellar, beneath the street. The coal cellar was of brick, with a cement floor, and in the left wall there gaped an opening about three feet by three, lending into a cavernous void, perfectly black—evidently a similar vault belonging to the next house.

The whole place was ghostly, full of shadows, shivery with possibilities. It was Mr. Harbison finally who took Jim's candle and crawled through the aperture. We waited in dead silence, listening to his feet crunching over the coal beyond, watching the faint yellow light that came through the ragged opening in the wall. Then he came back and called through to us.

"Place is locked, over here," he said. "Heavy oak door at the head of the steps. Whoever made that opening has done a prodigious amount of labor for nothing."

The weapon, a crowbar, lay on the ground beside the bricks, and he picked it up and balanced it on his hand. Dallas's florid face was almost comical in his bewilderment; as for Jimmy—he slammed a lump of coal at the furnace and walked away. At the door he turned around.

"Why don't you accuse me of it?" he asked bitterly. "Maybe you could find a lump of coal in my pockets if you searched me."

He stalked up the stairs then and left us. Dallas and I went up together, but we did not talk. There seemed to be nothing to say. Not until I had closed and locked the door of my room did I venture to look at something that I carried in the palm of my hand. It was a watch, not running—a

gentleman's flat gold watch, and it had been hanging by its fob to a nail in the bricks beside the aperture.

In the back of the watch was a picture of a girl, cut from a newspaper, and the initials T. H. H.

It was my picture!

XII.

I was the first one down for dinner that night, and I had Mr. Harbison's guilty watch in my girdle. I found him in the library, staring through the February gloom at the blank wall of the next house, and quite unconscious of the reporter with a drawing pad just below him in the areaway. I went over and closed the shutters before his very eyes, but even then he did not move.

"Will you be good enough to turn around?" I demanded at last.

"Oh!" he said, wheeling. "Are *you* here?"

There wasn't any reply to that, so I took the watch and placed it on the library table between us. The effect was all I had hoped. He stared at it for an instant, then at me, and with his hand out-stretched for it, stopped.

"Where did you find it?" he asked. I couldn't understand his expression. He looked embarrassed, but not at all afraid.

"I think you know, Mr. Harbison," I retorted.

"You opened it?"

"Yes."

We stood looking each at the other across the table. It was his glance that wavered.

"About that picture—of you," he said at last. "You see, down there in South America, a fellow hasn't much to do in the evenings, and a—a chum of mine and I—we were awfully down on what we called the plutocrats, the—the leisure classes. And when that picture of yours came in the paper, we had—we had an argument. He said——"

"What did he say?"

“Well, he said it was the picture of an empty-faced society girl.”

“Oh!” I exclaimed.

“I—I maintained there were possibilities in the face.” He put both hands on the table, and, bending forward, looked down at me. “Well, I was a fool, I admit. I said your eyes were kind and candid, in spite of that haughty mouth. I said you would be incapable of deception. You see, I said I was a fool.”

“I think you are exceedingly rude,” I managed finally. “If you want to know where I found your watch, it was down in the coal cellar. And if you admit you are an idiot, I am not. I—I know all about Bella’s bracelet—and the board on the roof, and—oh, if you would only leave—Anne’s necklace—on the coal, or somewhere—and get away——”

My voice got beyond me then, and I dropped into a chair and covered my face. I could feel him staring at the back of my head.

“Well, I’ll be”—something or other, he said finally, and then he turned on his heel and went out. By the time I had got my eyes dry (yes, I was crying; I always do when I am angry) I heard Jim coming downstairs, and I tucked the watch out of sight in my belt. Would any one have foreseen the trouble that watch would make!

Jim was sulky. He dropped into a chair and stretched out his legs, looking gloomily at nothing. Then he got up and ambled into his den, closing the door behind him without having spoken a word. It was more than human nature could stand.

When I went into the den he was stretched on the davenport with his face buried in the cushions. He looked absolutely wilted, and every line of him was drooping.

“Go on out, Kit,” he said, in a smothered voice. “Be a good girl and don’t follow me around.”

“You are shameless,” I gasped. “Follow you! When you are hung around my neck like a—like a——” “Mill-stone” was what I wanted to say, but I couldn’t think of it. “And you dared to tell Mr. Harbison. You—you wretch!”

He turned over and looked up from his cushions like an ill-treated and suffering cherub.

“I’m done for, Kit,” he groaned. “Bella went up to the studio after we left, and investigated that corner.”

"What did she find? The necklace?" I asked eagerly. He was too wretched to notice this.

"No, that picture of you that I did last winter. She is crazy—says she is going up to sit in Takahiro's room and catch the fever and die."

"I'm not interested in Bella," I said coldly. "If she recognized that picture of me, she's the first person who ever did. And if you want my opinion about your telling Mr. Harbison, I think you did it because you were jealous of him and Bella."

Jim sat up and nursed a pillow. He was growing more complacent.

"I was, for a fact," he admitted. "But it seems there's nothing to it. He—he as much as told me so. He was keeping Bella away from me on *your* account."

"Fiddlesticks!" I said rudely, and somebody hammered on the door and opened it.

"Pardon me for disturbing you," Bella said, in her best dear-me-I'm-glad-I-knocked manner. "But—Flannigan says the dinner has not come."

"Good Lord!" Jim exclaimed. "I forgot to order the confounded dinner!"

It was eight o'clock by that time, and as it took an hour at least after telephoning the order, everybody looked blank when they heard. The entire family, except Mr. Harbison, who had not appeared again, escorted Jim to the 'phone and hung around hungrily, suggesting new dishes every minute. And then—he couldn't raise the Central. It was fifteen minutes before we gave up, and stood staring at each other despairingly.

"Call out a window, and get one of those infernal reporters to do something useful for once," Max suggested. But he was indignantly hushed. We would have starved first. Jim was peering into the transmitter and knocking the receiver against his hand like a watch that has stopped. But nothing happened. Flannigan reported a box of breakfast food, two lemons, and a pineapple cheese, a combination that didn't seem to lend itself to anything.

We went back to the dining-room from sheer force of habit and sat around the table and looked at the lemonade Flannigan had made. Anne *would* talk about the salad her last cook had concocted, and Max told about a little town in Connecticut where the restaurant keeper smokes a corn-cob pipe while he cooks the most luscious fried clams in America. And Aunt

Selina told about how, in her family, they had a recipe for chicken smothered in cream. And then we sipped the weak lemonade and nibbled at the cheese.

"To change this gridiron martyrdom," Dallas said finally, "where's Harbison? Still looking for his watch?"

"Watch!" Everybody said it in a different tone.

"Sure," he responded. "Says his watch was taken last night from the studio. Better get him down to take a squint at the telephone. Likely he can fix it."

Flannigan was beside me with the cheese. And at that moment I felt Mr. Harbison's stolen watch slip out of my girdle, slide greasily across my lap, and clatter to the floor. Flannigan stooped, but luckily it had gone under the table. To have had it picked up, to have to explain how I got it, to see them try to ignore my picture pasted in it—oh, it was impossible! I put my foot over it.

"Drop something?" Dallas asked perfunctorily, rising. Flannigan was still half kneeling.

"A fork," I said, as easily as I could, and the conversation went on. But Flannigan knew, and I knew he knew. He watched my every movement like a hawk after that, standing just behind my chair. I dropped my useless napkin, to have it whirled up before it reached the floor. I said to Betty that my shoe buckle was loose, and actually got the watch in my hand, only to let it slip at the critical moment. Then they all got up and went sadly back to the library, and Flannigan and I faced each other.

Flannigan was not a handsome man at any time, but up to then he had at least looked amiable. But as I stood with my hand on the back of my chair, his face grew suddenly menacing. The silence was absolute: I was the guiltiest wretch alive, and opposite me the law towered and glowered, and held the yellow remnant of a pineapple cheese! And in the silence that wretched watch lay and ticked and ticked and ticked. Then Flannigan creaked over and closed the door into the hall, came back, picked up the watch, and looked at it.

"You're unlucky, I'm thinkin'," he said finally. "You've got the nerve all right, but you ain't cute enough."

"I don't know what you mean," I quavered. "Give me that watch to return to Mr. Harbison."

"Not on your life," he retorted easily. "I give it back myself, like I did the bracelet, and—like I'm going to give back the necklace, if you'll act like a sensible little girl."

I could only choke.

"It's foolish, any way you look at it," he persisted. "Here you are, lots of friends, folks that think you're all right. Why, I reckon there isn't one of them that wouldn't lend you money if you needed it so bad."

"Will you be still?" I said furiously. "Mr. Harbison left that watch—with me—an hour ago. Get him, and he will tell you so himself?"

"Of course he would," Flannigan conceded, looking at me with grudging approval. "He wouldn't be what I think he is, if he didn't lie up and down for you." There were voices in the hall. Flannigan came closer. "An hour ago, you say. And he told me it was gone this morning! It's a losing game, miss. I'll give you twenty-four hours, and then—the necklace, if you please, miss."

Max came in just then, and, adroit as Flannigan was, I think he saw the watch. He said nothing about it, however, and only asked if we had seen Mr. Harbison.

"Can't find him," he said, "and Dal's put the telephone together and has enough left over to make another. Where do you suppose Harbison put the tools? We're working with a corkscrew and two palette knives."

They worked the rest of the evening, but the telephone refused to revive and every one was famishing. Individually our pride was at a low ebb, but collectively it was still formidable. So we sat around, and Jim played Grieg with the soft stops on, and Aunt Selina went to bed. The weather had changed, and it was sleeting, but anything was better than the drawing-room. I was in a mood to battle with the elements or to cry—or both—so I slipped out, threw somebody's overcoat over my shoulders, put on a man's soft hat—Dal's, I think—and went up to the roof.

It was dark in the third-floor hall, and I had to feel my way to the foot of the stairs. I went up quietly, and turned the knob of the door to the roof. At first it would not open, and I could hear the wind howling outside. Finally, however, I got the door open a little and wormed my way through. It was not entirely dark out there, in spite of the storm. A faint reflection of the street lights made it possible to distinguish the outlines of the boxwood plants, swaying in the wind, and the chimneys and the tent. And then—a dark figure disentangled itself from the nearest chimney and seemed to hurl itself

at me. I remember putting out my hands and trying to say something, but the figure caught me by the shoulders and knocked me back against the door-frame. From miles away a heavy voice was saying, “So I’ve got you!” and then the roof gave way, and I was floating out on the storm, and sleet was beating in my face, and the wind was saying over and over, “Open your eyes, for God’s sake!”

I did open them after awhile, and finally I made out that I was lying on the ground in the tent. The lights were on, and I had a cold and damp feeling, as if some one had been rubbing snow on my face.

I seemed to be alone, but in a second somebody came into the tent, and I saw it was Mr. Harbison, and that he had a double handful of half-melted snow. He looked frantic and determined, and only my sitting up quickly prevented my getting another snow bath. My neck felt queer and stiff, and I was very dizzy. When he saw that I was conscious he dropped the snow and stood looking down at me.

“Do you know,” he asked grimly, “that I very nearly choked you to death a little while ago?”

“It wouldn’t surprise me to be told so,” I said. “Do I know too much, or what is it, Mr. Harbison?” I felt terribly ill, but I would not let him see it. “It is queer, isn’t it,—how we always select the roof for our little—differences?” He seemed to relax somewhat at my gibe.

“I didn’t know it was you,” he explained shortly. “I was waiting for—some one, and in the hat you wore, and the coat, I mistook you. That’s all. Can you stand?”

“No,” I retorted. I could, but his summary manner displeased me. The sequel, however, was rather amazing, for he stooped suddenly and picked me up and the next instant we were out in the storm together. At the door he stooped and felt for the knob.

“Turn it,” he commanded. “I can’t reach it.”

“I’ll do nothing of the kind,” I said shrewishly. “Let me down; I can walk perfectly well.”

He hesitated. Then he slid me slowly to my feet, but he did not open the door at once. “Are you afraid to let me carry you down those stairs, after—Tuesday night?” he asked, very low. “You still think I did that?”

I had never been less sure of it than at that moment, but an imp of perversity made me retort, “Yes.”

He hardly seemed to hear me. He stood looking down at me as I leaned against the door-frame.

"Good Lord!" he groaned. "To think that I might have killed you!" And then—he stooped suddenly and kissed me.

The next moment the door was open, and he was leading me down into the house. At the foot of the staircase he paused, still holding my hand, and faced me in the darkness.

"I am not sorry," he said steadily. "I suppose I ought to be, but I'm not. Only—I want you to know that I was not guilty—before. I didn't intend to now. I am—almost as much surprised as you are."

I was quite unable to speak, but I wrenched my hand loose. He stepped back to let me pass, and I went down the hall alone.

XIII.

I DIDN'T go to the drawing-room again. I went into my own room and sat in the dark, and tried to be furiously angry, and only succeeded in feeling queer and tingly. One thing was absolutely certain: not the same man, but two different men, had kissed me on the stairs to the roof. It sounds rather horrid and discriminating, but there was all the difference in the world.

But then—who had? And for whom had Mr. Harbison been waiting on the roof. "Did you know that I nearly choked you to death a few minutes ago?" Then he rather expected to finish off somebody in that way! Who? Dal, Max, Jim, or Flannigan? It was queer, too, but suddenly I realized that no matter how many suspicious things I mustered up against him—and there were plenty—down in my heart I didn't believe him guilty of anything, except this last and unforgivable offense. Whoever was trying to leave the house had taken the necklace, that seemed clear, unless Max was still foolishly trying to break quarantine and create one of the sensations he so dearly loved. This was a new idea, and some things upheld it, but Max had been playing bridge when I was kissed on the stairs, and there was still left that ridiculous incident of the comfort.

Bella came up after I had gone to bed, and turned on the light to brush her hair.

“If I don’t leave this mausoleum soon, I’ll be carried out,” she declared. “You in bed, Lollie Mercer and Dal flirting, Anne hysterical, and Jim making his will in the den! You will have to take Aunt Selina to-night, Kit; I’m all in.”

“If you’ll put her to bed, I’ll keep her there,” I conceded, after some parley.

“You’re a dear.” Bella came back from the door. “Look here, Kit, you know Jim pretty well. Don’t you think he looks badly? Thinner?”

“He’s a wreck,” I said soberly. “You have a lot to answer for, Bella.”

Bella went over to the cheval glass and looked in it. “I avoid him all I can,” she said, posing. “He’s awfully funny; he’s so afraid I’ll think he’s serious about you. He can’t realize that for me he simply doesn’t exist.”

Well, I took Aunt Selina, and about two o’clock, while I was in my first sleep, I woke to find her standing beside me, tugging at my arm.

“There’s somebody in the house,” she whispered. “Thieves!”

“If they’re in they’ll not get out to-night,” I said.

“I tell you, I saw a man skulking on the stairs,” she insisted.

I got up, ungraciously enough, and put on my dressing-gown. Aunt Selina, who had her hair in crimps, tied a veil over her head, and together we went to the head of the stairs. Aunt Selina leaned far over and peered down.

“He is in the library,” she whispered. “I can see a light.”

The lust of battle was in Aunt Selina’s eye. She girded her robe about her and began to descend the stairs cautiously. We went through the hall and stopped at the library door. It was empty, but from the den beyond came a hum of voices and the cheerful glow of firelight. I realized the situation then, but it was too late.

“You can argue all you like,” Bella was saying, in her clear, high tones. “You have forfeited your right to make love to me. It’s—it’s highly improper, under the circumstances.”

And then Jim! “You swallow a camel and stick at a gnat. Why did you meet me here, if you didn’t expect me to make love to you? I’ve stood for a lot, Bella, but this foolishness will have to end. Either you love me—or you don’t. I’m desperate.” He drew a long, forlorn breath.

“Poor old Jim!” This was Bella. A pause. Then—“Let my hand alone!” Also Bella.

“It is *my* hand”—Jim’s most fatuous tone. “*There* is where you wore my ring. There’s the mark still.” Sounds of Jim kissing Bella’s ring-finger. “What did you do with it? Throw it away?” More sounds.

Aunt Selina crossed the library swiftly, and again I followed. Bella was sitting in a low chair by the fire, looking at the logs, in the most exquisite *liseuse* of chiffon and ribbon. Jim was on his knees, staring at her adoringly, and holding both her hands.

“I’ll tell you a secret,” Bella was saying, looking as coy as she knew how—which was considerable. “I—I still wear it, on a chain around my neck.”

“You darling!” Jim said, and slid his arm around her.

Then Aunt Selina turned to me and gave me a push. “Go right up to bed,” she said in her most awful tone. “Just leave this affair to me.”

Jim and Bella were both on their feet by that time.

“Now,” Aunt Selina began, turning on them, “how long has this shameless condition of things existed?”

It was hardly my affair then, so I left, and locked myself in my own room, and waited for things to happen. But everything was quiet, and after awhile they all came up, almost amiably, and at first I thought they hadn’t told her. But she stopped outside my door and said very distinctly: “Bad as this affair is, I can understand every part in it but Miss McNair’s!” And with that parting shot she went to bed. As I said before, it was that way all the time. They blamed *me* for the quarantine; Aunt Selina turned on *me*; Flannigan accused *me* of every crime in the calendar; and if any one was to be kissed, they kissed *me*!

I didn’t go to sleep again, and toward morning I distinctly heard the knob of the door turn. I mistrusted my ears, however, and so I got up quietly and went over in the darkness. There was nothing to be heard, but when I put my hand on the knob I felt it move under my fingers. The counter pressure evidently alarmed whoever it was, for the knob was released, and nothing more happened. By this time anything so uncomplicated as the fumbling of a knob at night had no power to disturb me, and I went back to bed and to sleep.

In the morning Mr. Harbison repaired the telephone, and he reported that it had been deliberately disconnected by some one. The wires were cut through, where they came into the house, and it looked as though it had been done by some practised hand. That was Friday.

The first thing we did, of course, was to order something to eat, and Aunt Selina went to bed with indigestion just after luncheon. No one was very sorry, for she had been unpleasant all morning. In the afternoon she thought she was dying, and she sent for Bella and Jim, and they made it all up. She went to sleep holding a hand of each of them, and slept three hours and never let go!

About two in the afternoon the sun came out, and the rest of us went to the roof. The sleet had melted and the air was fairly warm. Two housemaids dusting rugs on the top of the next house came over and stared at us, and somebody in an automobile down on Riverside Drive stood up and waved at us. It was very cheerful, and hopelessly lonely. Max, who had been almost savage to me for two days, came over and sat down on the parapet beside me.

"Have you happened to notice," he began, "that our friend Jim ate no luncheon?"

"I haven't noticed Jim at all," I flashed, my last night's humiliation still in my mind.

"If somebody would put the question up to me," Max went on didactically, "I would say that James is not well. He looks queer, and, to be quite truthful, I think he has a rash."

"Don't be an alarmist," I said. "Anyhow, Jim may have anything he wants, for all I am interested."

I stayed on the roof after the others had gone, and for some time I thought I was alone. After awhile, however, I got a whiff of smoke, and then I saw Mr. Harbison far over in the corner, one foot on the parapet, moodily smoking a pipe. He was gazing out over the river, and paying no attention to me. This was natural, considering that I had hardly spoken to him since Thursday.

I would not let him drive me away, so I sat still, and it grew darker and colder. He filled his pipe now and then, but he never looked in my direction. Finally, however, as it grew very dusk, he knocked the ashes out and came toward me.

"I am going to make a request, Miss McNair," he said evenly. "Please keep off the roof after sunset. There are—reasons." I had risen and was preparing to go downstairs.

"Unless I know the reasons, I refuse to do anything of the kind," I retorted. He bowed.

"Then the door will be kept locked," he rejoined, and opened it for me. He did not follow me, but stood watching until I was down, and I heard him close the roof door firmly behind me.

It is hardly necessary to go into the incidents of that evening: how they took Jim aside and inspected him, and how Max was right; how they tried to talk Jim over, and how he refused to be quarantined and said he always got a rash from early strawberries, and that they were a lot of fools, and he hoped to thunder if he *did* have it they'd all get it. The only way they got him shut away in one of the servants' rooms was by Bella promising to sit outside in the hall and read to him through the closed door. When the doctor came he said it looked suspicious, and he put him on a liquid diet and said he could tell us positively in the morning.

Late that evening Betty Mercer and Dallas were writing verses of condolence, to be signed by all of us and sent to Jim, when Bella came running down the stairs.

"Jim's delirious," she announced tragically from the doorway. "You shut him in there, all alone, and now he's delirious. I'll never forgive any of you."

Dal wanted to go up at once, but Anne wouldn't let him. So Max went, with Bella following, and I telephoned for the doctor again. But Max came down after awhile, and said Jim wasn't delirious at all, and then he took Dal and Mr. Harbison into the den, and they talked for an hour. Just before they came out they sent for Flannigan. It was very mysterious.

Nothing more happened that evening, and the next day, Saturday, was quiet enough. The doctor was still in doubt about Jim. Max proposed to me in the afternoon, while the rest were conversing with Jim through a closed door. He said he hadn't really had any hope, but he thought he would feel better if he got it out of his system. And he said if he took anything from Jim and died, he wanted me to remember him kindly.

From that Saturday night until Monday night, when the final event occurred, there was a succession of mysterious events. In the first place, that evening Flannigan came upstairs to the library and called all the men into

the hall. Before they closed the door I had time to see a sort of rope, that seemed to be made of all kinds of things tied together, trunk straps, bed sheets, and something of Flannigan's that he pointed to with rage, and said he hadn't been able to keep his clothes on all day. When the men came back, they refused to discuss the matter, and long after the feminine contingent had gone to bed, I could hear them talking downstairs.

Betty Mercer came into my room very early Sunday morning and said Anne Brown wanted me. I went over at once, and Anne was sitting up in bed, crying. Dal had slipped out of the room at daylight, she said, and hadn't come back. He had thought she was asleep, but she wasn't, and she knew he was dead, for nothing ever made Dal get up on Sunday before noon.

There was no one moving in the house, and I hardly knew what to do. It was Betty who said she would go up and rouse Mr. Harbison and Max, who had taken Jim's place in the studio. She started out bravely enough, but in a minute we heard her flying back. Anne grew perfectly white.

"He's lying on the upper stairs!" Betty cried, and we all ran out. It was quite true. Dal was lying on the stairs in a bath-robe, with one of Jim's Indian war-clubs in his hand. And he was sound asleep!

He looked somewhat embarrassed when he roused and saw us standing around. He said he was going to play a practical joke on somebody and fell asleep in the middle of it. And Anne said he wasn't even an intelligent liar, and went back to bed in a temper. But Betty came in with me, and we sat and looked at each other and didn't say much. The situation was beyond us.

On that evening—Sunday—the really serious event of the quarantine occurred. It had grown stormy again, and Mr. Harbison went up to the roof to see how the tent stood the strain. He was gone a long time—fully an hour—and finally Betty Mercer, who had really hung around him quite noticeably all day—Betty said he must have blown away, and Dallas went to look for him. In a few minutes Dal came racing downstairs and called Max, and of course the entire party followed like the tail of a comet. We passed Bella, fast asleep in the upper hall, in a chair, her head against a sheet wrung out of disinfectant nailed across the door of Jim's room. She roused when she heard us, and followed, still yawning, along the hall and up to the roof.

Max had turned on the electric lights, and was kneeling over something that lay prone on the tin. It was Mr. Harbison, quite unconscious, and bleeding from a cut over one eye. I tried to ask if he were dead, but my lips were stiff with horror. And then he opened his eyes, and said he was awfully sorry but he didn't dance, and went off again.

Well, it's too terrible to go over. They got him downstairs to the studio and made him as comfortable as they could, and we sent for the doctor again. By daylight there was a trained nurse in charge, and we were all shut out, and there was nothing to do but sit and wait. It was awful!

About noon they let Jim out. It seems there was nothing the matter with him but a stomach rash. Then the four men, including Flannigan, went to the roof and stayed a long time. I know, for I was in the upper hall outside the studio. I stayed there most of the day and got things that the nurse needed. I don't know why mother didn't let me study nursing—I always wanted to do it. And I felt so helpless and childish now, when there were things to be done.

I caught Max as the men came down, and drew him aside.

"You'll have to tell me something, Max," I said. "I'm going crazy. What does it all mean? Who hurt him?"

Max looked at me quite a long time. "I'm darned if I understand you women," he said gravely. "I thought you disliked Harbison."

"So I do—I did," I supplemented. "But some one has injured him——"

"Pooh! Ran into a chimney," Max interrupted. "Or do you think I tried to brain him?" But his lightness did not deceive me.

The day dragged on. Downstairs people ate and read and wrote letters, and outside newspaper men talked together and gazed over at the house and photographed the doctor coming in and the doctor going out. As for me, I sat in Bella's chair in the upper hall, and listened to the crackle of the nurse's starched skirts.

About midnight that night the doctor made his final trip, and when he came out he was smiling.

"He's doing very well, Miss McNair," he said. "He's partly conscious now, and in about an hour you can let the nurse here have a little sleep. Don't let him talk."

And so at last I went through the familiar door into an unfamiliar room, with basins and towels and bottles around and a screen made of Jim's largest canvases, and some one on the improvised bed tried to turn and look at me. He did not speak, and I sat down beside him; after awhile he put his hand over mine as it lay on the bed.

"You are much better to me than I deserve," he said softly. And because his eyes were disconcerting, I put an ice cloth promptly over them.

“Much better than you deserve,” I said gently, and patted the cloth to place. We were very quiet for a long time. I think he dozed, and when he roused he was more himself. He took the cloth off at once, and looked around for me.

“Can’t you sit here beside me?” he asked. “You are miles away.” It was three feet. So I sat down close to him, for he was not to be excited.

“It’s awfully good of you to do this,” he said finally. “I’ve been desperately sorry, Kit—about the other night. I was mad—crazy.”

“Don’t talk about it,” I interrupted, and tried to give him his medicine. He pushed the spoon aside.

“But I want to talk about it,” he persisted. “I think about it all the time. You seemed so convinced that I was a blackguard that—somehow—nothing seemed to matter.”

“What is happening downstairs?” I asked, for there were all kinds of sounds coming up. But the man on the bed was not going to be put off.

“When I thought you were married to Wilson, it was bad enough, God knows. And then—I learned you were not, and it went to my head. I was almost delirious that night. The instant I held you in my arms it was all over. I loved you the first time I saw you, Kit. I suppose I’m a fool to talk like this.”

“Then there must be two of us,” I said, half crying, half smiling. And I slid on my knees beside him.

At that instant Dallas opened the door and stepped into the room. He was covered with dirt and he had a hatchet in his hand. He was a fierce and triumphant object. “Well, the mystery is solved,” he shouted. “Why, Kit, I’m ashamed of you! Get up off your knees.”

XIV.

Letter from Thomas Harbison, late Engineer of Bridges, Peruvian Trunk Lines, South America, to Henry Llewellyn, Union Nitrate Co., Iquique, Chili.

Dear Old Man:

This will go on the same steamer as my last letter of six days ago—or is it six years? Read the other one first. It may prepare you for this. Hal, she wasn't married at all! She was the victim of a conspiracy to deceive the spinster aunt—that is all. The real wife is Miss Bella Knowles, the lady of the basement, you remember, who divorced her liege and then regretted it. So she wasn't married,—Miss McNair,—but she will be soon. You're to take the very next boat and come up here, and we'll all go back on the *Gadfly*.

We cabled her mother at Bermuda, and talked to her father over long distance to Chicago this morning. We will have to wait until they get back, I suppose.

I think I am excited, and I know I am not lucid, but the quarantine was lifted two hours ago. It seems there was nothing much the matter with the Jap. For the other events, read the enclosed clipping from this morning's paper. You can imagine the excitement we had. Now it is all over, I don't mind telling you that I put in a bad seven days. We were a lot of idiots not to have thought of the real explanation. We had stepped over that box of soap dozens of times.

Now remember—the next steamer for yours. I believe it's to be in a church, and you'll have to stand by me, old man. I'm in a blue funk when I think about it. Happy days.

Yours,

Tom

Bella Knowles (ex-Wilson) to Mr. Reginald Barry Wolfe, Palm Beach, Fla.

Dear Reg:

Don't bother about the mare, Reg. I am going to Italy and shall not need her. Of course by the time you get this you'll have heard. I think people owe me a vote of thanks for giving them something to talk about. Now, Reg dear, Jim and I are going abroad until the excitement is over, and I want you to see that the *real* version gets out. Tell everybody that I was thrown out of the car just at the corner of Ninety-fifth and West End Avenue, and while I was unconscious the policeman on the beat recognized me and carried me to Jim's. We were quarantined there, policeman and all. The

enclosed newspaper cutting will prove this, for you see the policeman is mentioned.

We are all getting ready to leave, but such an excitement as we have had! One of the men, a Mr. Harbison, was almost murdered. In fact, I wonder we were not all assassinated.

Would you like to help Jim again through the ceremony? He says he never feels married unless you are around.

Hastily yours,

BELLA

Clipped from the *Evening Chronicle* of Monday, February the tenth.

ROBBERIES SOLVED

QUARANTINE AT WILSON HOME LIFTED UNDER UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES

On the discovery that the Japanese butler was suffering from nothing more serious than chicken-pox, the quarantine at the home of James Wilson, millionaire and artist, was lifted to-day. Immediately after, the representative of the *Chronicle* obtained from the several victims a detailed account of the strange events which culminated in the call for the police at two o'clock this morning.

Eleven persons were shut in the house seven days ago, during a dinner party. Of the eleven, nine were well known New York people, prominent in social and financial circles. A tenth, Officer Flannigan, suffered imprisonment in pursuit of his duty, and has been mentioned for promotion in his district.

Immediately after the quarantine, and while the house was closely guarded by health officers and newspaper men, strange events began to take place. The first night a pearl collar and a diamond bracelet were missing. Shortly after, Miss Caruthers, an aunt of Mr. Wilson, was robbed of ten thousand dollars in cash and some antique jewelry of great value. A watch also disappeared, and telephone wires were mysteriously cut.

The culmination of the mystery came on Saturday night, when Mr. Thomas Harbison, one of the party, was found unconscious and badly injured on the roof of the house. When Mr. Harbison

became conscious, he told certain suspicions to the masculine members of the party, but, notwithstanding vigorous efforts, nothing was discovered until one o'clock this morning. At that time, according to the victims of this miscarriage of municipal justice, the entire household was asleep, except one man, Mr. Dallas Brown, well known as the M.F.H. of the Cloverly Hunt Club. Mr. Brown, for certain reasons, had stationed himself in a dark corner near the head of the lower stairs. For some time the house was quiet. Then his attention was aroused by peculiar scraping noises in the rear of the house. Hastily arousing Mr. Maxwell Reed, whose room was near, they proceeded to investigate. The noises were finally traced to the dumb-waiter shaft, and on investigation the cage was found to have stuck fast between two floors. Stifled oaths and groans were proceeding from the cage, and the cables were being violently agitated. As soon as the two gentlemen understood the situation, they sent in a police call, and after two hours of hard work the cage was lowered to the basement kitchen and the prisoner released.

Gaunt, unshaven, and dirty, the police had no difficulty in recognizing Lawrence McGuirk, better known as "Tubby McGuirk," celebrated second story-man and all-round thief, whose absence from his accustomed haunts has troubled the central station for a week.

Realizing that he was caught, McGuirk led the way to a box of soap in the cellar, and unearthed, or unsoaped, his booty. Of his experiences in the quarantined house, of his attempts to escape by means of a board, a home-made rope, and a hole in the cellar, of his midnight prowlings in search of food, of days in a closet in one of the servants' rooms, and of nights when he wandered, shivering, in search of bedclothing—all these things McGuirk described feelingly. He seemed glad to talk, after his week's silence, and spoke at length of the struggle he had made to hide the pearl collar. For three days, he said, it was concealed in the pocket of an old smoking-coat in Mr. Wilson's studio.

Surrounded by hapless society folk whose plight he had helped to render unendurable, McGuirk was hand-cuffed and led away. At the doorway a rather unusual incident occurred. Miss Caruthers, aunt of Mr. Wilson and chaperon of the party, stepped forward and confronted the prisoner.

"Young man," she said grimly, "I'll thank you to return what you took from *me* last Tuesday night."

McGuirk stared, then shuddered and turned suddenly pale.

"Good Lord!" he ejaculated. "On the stairs to the roof! *You!*"

Miss Caruthers and the remainder of the party professed absolute ignorance as to his meaning,—and quite broken, McGuirk was taken away.

At the door he waved his hand to the circle of reporters and policemen who had so faithfully guarded the house for a week.

"Good-by, fellows," he called feebly. "I ain't sorry, I ain't. Jail'll be paradise after this."

Note to Miss Kit McNair written by Mr. Thomas Harbison on back of a trunk tag.

Don't you know I won't see you until to-morrow! For heaven's sake, get away from this crowd and come into the den. If you don't, I will kiss you good-by before everybody. Are you coming?

T.

(Written below, in a feminine hand)
No indeed.
(This was scratched out and beneath)
Coming.

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.

A cover has been created for this eBook.

[The end of *Seven Days* by Mary Roberts Rinehart]