

Laura G. Salverson

**THE
DARK WEAVER**

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L. G. SALVERSON

THE DARK WEAVER

Against the sombre background of the Old Generations
flame the scarlet banners of the New.

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AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

IN *The Dark Weaver* I have been chiefly concerned with the effects upon human character and conduct of the amazingly rapid changes from one world of ideas to another, nowhere more marked than in our Canadian Middle West.

To those who cannot know how the great plains unfolded to the settler like some Arabian Night's tale full of dark mystery, yet of an infinite variety of alluring charm, inestimable resources and, over all, a brooding hint of destruction to the fearful heart and unprogressive spirit, this tale may seem full of anachronisms. Its crude beginnings will, quite conceivably, appear unreal, its tragedies melodramatic, its joys artificial, and the underlying unity of creative purpose be entirely lost.

Yet in this story I have been as faithful to fact as in *The Viking Heart*, rejecting the purely imaginative for the real whenever possible, and holding fast the mental image of the West as a vast kaleidoscope in which the races of men, their sins and follies and momentary triumphs of happiness are only fragments of a fascinating drama, unfolded to the eternal stars.

The characters in this drama have their inspiration in reality, as befits good players, although they themselves are to be regarded as fictitious. The locale has been altered in almost every case.

PROLOGUE

“All the World’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.”

i THE STAGE

IN the depths of a wilderness that comprises an area greater than any old-world kingdom, a lazy, indeterminate stream meanders through the lowest of three prairie steppes. So vast they are, these basin lands rolling down from a mountainous west, that the smallest would make a kingdom as rich and extensive as that of the Pharaohs.

A quiet, spacious land, designed and destined for wide, heroic gestures—a magnificent stage set for magnificent action biding its time in tireless patience and with inscrutable purpose.

But of this virgin land only a minute part concerns us; a narrow strip, rather like an oblong tapestry when viewed from an elevation, whose variegated greens are interlaced with the dull silver of the little stream and the mottled brown of slow-drying marshes. A long lake lies in a curving barricade to the north-west. Dark forest rises tier on tier to the west.

It is vital, this forest, replete with mystery and quivering with life. The shadows vibrate to the rhythm of swift, sly, wilding denizens. The silence is dramatic. At any moment the sharp cry of a doomed creature may leap, like a fleeing bird, up from those deep black reaches. And, once the night has fallen, not a leaf stirs nor a shadow breaks formation but terror, formless, yet the more real, stalks out to possess the moonlight.

It is then the little stream sends a murmuring complaint through the land, and its water, so sluggish by the light of day, is seen to be a persistently moving band of lengthening starlight. And the bear and the wolf, the elk, and all the small terror-bound creatures whose freedom lies in the wind, go forward, each in his own sly fashion, for this is their fountain of living waters.

Here, while they drink with lowered heads, they see the stars like silver lilies at their feet, and the troubled silence hangs suspended like a heavy curtain on a fine white thread. Poised between fears, this much they have of freedom: a deep intake of breath, a sensuous quiver of undefined joy, and a swift rebound of undivined vitality. Then a twig snaps, a rope of leaves rocks in a sudden gust of wind, and a shadow falls upon the water. Instantly

the irresistible power of the forest draws them back into the blackness that veils ultimate destruction.

But the stream murmurs on. Season by season filling its veins with the brown marsh waters and the cold clear overflow of the lake beyond, the little stream increases in size and volume and by its erratic meandering changes the face of the land. Yet the first white man to penetrate this far looked upon its shining course with doubt, upon the tall dark forest and sighed, upon the long brown marshes and shook his head.

The general design was too sombre and gigantic. Low lands draining into a shallow stream and cut off from advancing civilization by walls of impenetrable forest did not inspire confidence. No! Despite an abundance of game and fish and sound timber decades must pass before this isolated land might profitably serve the needs of man.

Oh well, the little stream sang softly on, persistently weaving its living pattern and with its silvery, sensuous voice defying the menace of the dark forest. And on a still moonlight night a poet might have caught a new note vibrating through the quiet land—an elemental, indefinable challenge flung out upon the passing winds.

For here was a stage equipped with all the essentials for titanic action—yet not so much as one solitary actor to set the play in motion.

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ii THE PLAYERS

“We are no other than a moving row
Of Magic Shadow-shapes that come and go.”

THE BOYENS

Oline Vedel stood by the lambing sheds and looked out across the fiord. The waters were deep blue—almost as blue as the sky that rolled in a bright scarf back from the brows of the snow-capped mountains. And the pale amber globe of the sun, floating lightly as a feather, drew slowly across the cloudless peaks as if loath to leave the confines of a scene so beautiful.

A strange quiet possessed the land. The sheep on the green patches dotting the mountain-flank moved as softly as clouds and for once were silent. Nor was any sound to be heard from the big rambling farmhouse that faced upon the fiord, nor smoke to be seen up-curling from the tooth-edged chimney.

Oline’s eyes, blue as the blue fiord water, wandered back from the hills to mark this curiosity. All morning she had kept her courage high. Now the sight of that dead chimney set her crying. It was like her life, she thought. It adorned a good house reposing in the midst of fine fields replete with beauty, yet was burned out. For a hundred and fifty years the smoke coiling from that sturdy roof-tree had symbolized the hospitable activities of the Vedels. It had been like the perfume of their kindly hearts. Now the Vedels were no more.

Oline found a milking-stool and sat down heavily. She was very unwell and very unhappy. Yet the transitory discomforts of her present condition were almost welcome. Yes, she would be better soon enough—for that, alas! meant a renewal of relationships altogether hateful. What troubled her so grievously was an unreasoning, nameless terror of the future which at times almost threatened her reason. It was worst at night when, taut and sleepless, she lay with tearless eyes beside her husband. Even here in the white sunlight of her ancestral home the thought of an eternity of nights stretching into bleak oblivion with John beside her sent a deathly chill through her blood.

Yet the minister assured her she had been right to marry John. For had it not saved Sunholme from the auction block and her ageing parents the humiliation of dying by a strange hearth? God would reward her, so he had said. Certainly to sacrifice one’s selfish desire for the good of others was to

exercise the greatest virtue. Well, no doubt the little man was sincere—no doubt even now he would foresee God’s mysterious design for her highest blessing in the death of her parents just two months after this hateful marriage.

A cloud passed over the sun, casting an undulating shadow on the little green field before her. Somewhere distant, a cock crew and simultaneously a harsh rumble of carriage wheels broke the pastoral quiet. Oline pressed a hand to her over-burdened heart. John was coming for her. And her pathetic flight into the hills had been futile. She was still as sorely perplexed and as bitterly resentful. The calm beauty of her mountain home had not appeased her fear. Neither peace nor any assurance of righteousness had entered into her heart.

Yet, in the tranquillity of her deserted home she had come to see many things more clearly, but none to her heart’s comfort. Sunholme was saved—though from what and to what purpose it now seemed a little vague. For on the death of her parents the land had passed to her husband and yesterday John had signed away the dear green pastures and heaven-aspiring hills in exchange for city lots. That, too, was doubtless her reward. For that she had bartered her youth. For that she had dealt a deathblow to Jaegar Von Barholme’s faith, and heard from his stricken lips words that neither her mother’s tears of gratitude nor the minister’s cloudy comfort could obliterate. Even now, so close to respectable motherhood, she felt more than ever the Wanton of Jericho.

The noise of carriage wheels grinding the gravel of the treed approach to Sunholme acted as a spur. She rose hastily, smoothing back her hair and any traces of tears on her cold white cheeks. Oh, she must hurry! John was ill-pleased with these brooding moods. Still she lingered, her eyes dwelling a sad moment on Eagle Head, that impressive promontory where she and Jaegar had solemnly sworn to love each other till death should part them—oh, the sad, sweet, childish pity of it! Oline shut out the vision with cold, trembling fingers pressed against hot, tearless eyes. “Dear God,” she prayed, in stormy soul-sick passion, “at least make Jaegar happy! Let him not come to harm. Make him understand and forgive me—and let joy be known again in Sunholme.”

A little later she was driving toward the city behind a spirited pair of perfectly groomed horses. To the peasants along the road she appeared the perfect squire’s lady, dignified and a little haughty and greatly to be envied in her costly fur wrap and splendid equipage. John agreed with them. Pleased with his bargain and the comfort of his carriage he leaned back in satisfied contentment. He approved of Oline even more since their marriage.

She had lost some of her country bloom it is true. But skin so white and finely textured as hers was lovelier without the bucolic blushes that once had charmed him. Yes, in the main he was pleased with his wife. And although she protested that mountain air did not chill her as it might a city woman he was sufficiently enamoured of her beauty to smother her in furs, personally picked and approved. So now his acquisitive eyes explored the flawless contours of her clear-cut profile with calm satisfaction. Yes, she was a good investment, this sober little Oline with her curious reserve and soft seductive body. Yet it irked him just a little that she had made no comment on his thoughtfulness in coming to fetch her himself. She might at least have thanked him. Well, she was certainly the last word in reticence. But then, he would have detested a garrulous gossiping wife.

Moved by these reflections he reached out and patted her hand, exactly as he patted his mare when she brought him in from a canter. “Oline, my girl, I’ve decided to give up the town building scheme after all. Now don’t imagine I’m going to drag you back to stony Sunholme. Oh no. But I’ve just received a remarkable letter from Rydberg of the Danish Immigration Bureau. He tells me that his nephew Ephraim Marcusson is going to Canada which he believes is a country of vast opportunity for men with courage and capital. I’ve always wanted to go to America, and now with this scandal about Jaegar Von Barholme—as if we had any hand in his drinking himself to the dogs!—it seems an auspicious time—— Why, Oline, what’s the matter?”

Her face grey, a mask of despair, she stared at him miserably: “Jaegar—what did you say about Jaegar?” she whispered, digging her nails into the silky folds of the grey furs. “I—I don’t suppose I was listening, really——”

He laughed tolerantly. “My dear, can you believe it. I had quite forgotten that—well, little affair of yours. I dare say it’s a bit of a shock to reflect on such a narrow escape. Funny, I should forget to tell you. Well, it’s of no consequence really, though it took delicate handling. You see Jaegar began gambling with Company funds—the usual scapegrace nonsense you know. But I caught him in time and, with conditions such as they are the directors generously adopted my suggestion to attach his farm and drop the case. Why Oline! Oline——”

Indignation, rather than concern, edged the cold timbre of his voice. How utterly thoughtless of the woman to faint at such a time. Frowning, he stopped the horses and set to massaging his wife’s pale cheeks and cold hands. But Oline had withdrawn from the discomforts of consciousness, thoroughly indifferent to pats and platitudes. Well, there was nothing for it

but to seek aid in some messy Crofter's hut. And this such a wretched poverty-stricken district, too!

Still frowning, but with a faint sense of worry colouring his irritation, he settled Oline back amid the carriage cushions and set off again at a brisk trot down the stony road. From time to time he glanced at her hopefully, and again impatiently. But Oline persisted in her singular behaviour, oblivious of censure and solicitude alike. Not till Selma, a frowsy Crofter's widow, had worked over her with disagreeable peasant thoroughness, for all of ten minutes, in her comfortable rundown cottage, was she shaken from this stubborn coma. Even then she refused to stir, and lay moaning and groaning into the hard straw pillow of Selma's bed, with unreasonable childish hysteria.

John Boyen was above chiding his wife before inferiors. But such undignified behaviour seemed to demand some comment. "My dear!" his voice was cool and kind and a trifle nervous, "really, to see you carry on this way one might justifiably suspect us of quarrelling! It's embarrassing to say the least. Naturally I sympathize with the strain of your present condition. But really, my dear, for that reason if no other you must exercise a little self-control."

"Tch! Go on with you, Master Boyen," old Selma interrupted him, grinning widely. "Preaching's no good for such as she. Bless me, you'll have more sense when you've fathered more children! Now, of course, it may be nothing but the vapours and again it may be serious. You can't always tell in a first case. I'm thinking you'd better fetch the doctor, Master Boyen."

"The doctor? Nonsense, woman! You should know better than put such ideas into a young wife's head. . . . Oline, you're not really ill my girl? It can't possibly be what she says, eh?"

Oline shifted her gaze from the fantastic magic of the weaving shadows overhead to her husband's florid face. "No, I'm not nearly so ill as I was, John," she replied with exasperating calmness, "I see things in better light now. That helps— But just the same you had better do as she says."

For once his weight of words had no effect. Reasoning and argument were futile in the face of an obstinacy that took refuge in frozen silence. "Well, I must say you might at least give some consideration to my feelings in this matter!" said he, taking his hat and cane from Selma with chilling dignity. But instead of complying with this admirable suggestion as became a sensible wife, Oline began to laugh hysterically. "Where did you say we were?" she demanded shrilly. "Yes, yes—where?"

“Why, where, indeed, but at Ryelands,” he retorted peevishly, buttoning his ulster with scrupulous precision. “I should think you would recognize Ryelands.”

Whereat her foolish wavering laughter ended in a wail of sharp intolerable agony and the long deferred tears broke loose. “Tsk! Tsk!” Selma rushed at him like an angry hen. “Now then, master, you’ve made enough mischief with your nonsense. Be off! And that quickly. Why any sane goatherd would see how it is with your wife.”

Incredible impertinence! John Boyen stalked out of the hut in pained silence. The last sounds he heard were Oline’s silly hysterical babblings. “Ryelands! But of course—that’s in keeping with the rest. . . . The child should be born here—in Ryelands, which but for you would still be Jaegar’s.”

Thus it came to pass that Veder Boyen came into the world, prematurely, just as the stars were winking their brightest over the purple moors and gently sloping hills of Ryelands—all that remained of the once extensive Van Barholme estates. A weazened babe he was, with a thin complaining cry and eyes like luminous marbles.

But no one marked these deficiencies. Old Selma was much too concerned with the pale young mother, who, scarcely breathing, lay with closed eyes and steadfastly refused even to look at her son.

As for the father, sipping his nightly cup of hot chocolate in his comfortable town house—how should he even hazard what the fates had bestowed upon him?

THE MARCUSSONS

Ephraim Marcusson laughed at his dainty mother. Her quaint, old-fashioned views on the everlasting proprieties amused him almost as much as her rapier-sharp witticisms. Frankly, he idolized her, although like his father before him, he might not have admitted it. Nor would he have admitted that her occasional reproaches which always left him with a satisfying sense of superiority were an equal source of secret delight. She so frequently stressed trifles, and with the most innocent air imaginable, passed over major issues. For instance, she was close to angry tears now, not because Isabella, the object of their discussion, was seriously hurt through his idiocy, but because he had made it quite plain that to throw Helga Kroen at his head was a waste of time and ingenuity.

Laughing to himself he poked a brown forefinger at the canary’s silver cage. “Why, mother! I understood you to say Helga was coming here to take

part in the holiday festivities. How, then, should my affair with Isabella affect her?"

Halvor Marcusson dabbled at her glittering eyes, and, with something of the air of a cat at its toilet, daintily patted the perfectly laundered ruffles of her fine Swiss fichu, the slightest stirring of which gave off a sweet scent of lavender. "How you talk, Ephraim! As though you weren't aware it was your father's dearest wish that you and Helga should marry. She's a very rich girl, by no means without charm, and our possessions are much less than people suppose. Your dear father always believed in putting up a good front."

"And pretty women!" chuckled his son.

She drew herself up haughtily, epitomizing in the rigidity of her small, outraged form all the proprieties which amused her son, and, singularly, endeared her to him. "Ephraim, your father may have had his gallantries, but I must ask you to confine your judgments to his many accomplishments, and his unfailing courtesy."

Smiling, he put his hand on her slim shoulder, saying almost contritely: "There now, I'll say no more in that vein, I promise. And of course you'll tell Isabella you're reconciled—that she will be welcome. Good Lord!" he exclaimed, really serious, for she had thrust him away angrily. "Why, mother, what else can I do under the circumstances? I've told you how it happened—how after swilling Peder's wedding ale some fool proposed throwing the dagger, and the rose trellis for a target. God! It was awful, I tell you. Isabella had slipped away from the noisy crowd earlier in the evening and by some malicious streak of fate happened to come from behind the trellis just as I flung the accursed knife——"

Halvor held up her hand. "I know! I know! You've gone over it all before." She shuddered and wiped away a real tear this time. "I always hated these stunting parties—savage survivals of a barbarous age. But, my son, are you sure of yourself—sure that it's best? Oh, it's difficult to say, but you're so like your father I tremble for this marriage."

He flung back his head, the dark curling hair she loved tossing like a joyous mane, blue-black in the slanting sunlight. "Mother, mother! What a rare jewel you are to be sure! Why not say bluntly what you mean? That since the late Captain Marcusson couldn't remain faithful to the most charming of women, his poor son can't be expected to love, honour and cherish a young lady who has suffered injuries to a face far from beautiful."

Such brutal frankness was intolerable. Halvor Marcusson left her chair with a nervous bound, her little hands weaving angry gestures. "I cannot

abide personalities! Ephraim, must I remind you that throughout my married life I avoided the uselessly disagreeable. I'll argue no more, and, since there's no moving you in this matter, of course I'll go to Isabella and tell her she shall never have anything but kindness from me."

Ephraim made a quick noiseless step after her small retreating figure and caught her in his arms. His voice, always rich and deep, had now a wooing, seductive quality as he murmured against her cheek: "I knew you'd understand. As for me, she shall have kindness there also. May God smite me if I forget the debt I owe her!"

Her head against his shoulder, she shut her eyes, an odd pain awakened by that sensual note in her son's persuasive voice. It brought back so many bitter-sweet memories of a husband whose very sins had never failed of glamour. She sighed, thrusting him aside with a gesture at once impatient and final. "That will do, Ephraim. Naturally you will behave as a gentleman. But bear in mind there are many ways of hurting a woman. Physical violence is not always the worst."

Smiling, with just a hint of derisive amusement in his eyes, Ephraim opened the door for her to pass. "Isabella is very sensible. She has never expected the attentions pretty girls demand. I rather think a wife is better plain. Tell her I've gone to make the arrangements with the priest."

Easier said than done! The young woman who turned soft beseeching brown eyes upon Mrs. Marcusson when she manœuvred the conversation toward Ephraim had a decided will of her own. As an orphan who had been farmed out amongst distant and not always the most agreeable relatives, she had quickly come to make the most of her clear perceptions. She knew at once what mother Marcusson wanted, yet thoroughly disliked to say.

"Let us talk of something else," she said, turning restlessly on her couch and stroking, with really exquisite hands, the grey cat which dozed beside her. It was fragrant and dusk in the quiet room, the large double window emitting only a pale yellow light filtered through the heavy pine boughs that brushed the casement. In this pale shimmering glow Isabella's heavy hair resembled glossy black waves pouring over the white pillow. And what could be seen of her face for bandages had at least two charming attributes: pearly white skin and large intelligent eyes veiled under long up-curling lashes.

Until now Mrs. Marcusson had never thought of Isabella except as a sort of upper servant in her house more tolerated than considered. These hints of beauty, therefore, came as an enheartening surprise. Her voice softened: "My dear Isabella, believe me that beating about the bush is futile. Whatever

we may think or say Ephraim is determined——” She broke off in embarrassment, shook out her scented ruffles, and, smiling, continued: “I mean, my dear, men are impatient creatures in matters of the heart.”

Isabella stroked the cat. Her expression, despite bitterly contending emotions, had not varied. To Halvor, watching her critically, such armoured reticence seemed ominous. How should Ephraim find a measure of contentment in a wife so insensible and cold?

“It may seem impertinent, yet I must ask since frankness is best between us. Isabella, are you really so reluctant? Aren’t you the least fond of Ephraim, my dear?”

Isabella stopped stroking the cat, her hands dropping like leaves on the coverlet, her body as still and rigid as the dead. After a moment she spoke, clearly, distinctly, and for the first time the older woman was aware of the singular charm of her voice. “Mother Marcusson, it’s best we understood each other. I’ve wanted nothing so much as beauty to win Ephraim’s love—you’ll understand now how impossible his quixotic proposal seems—impossible and cruel!”

This was so different from Halvor’s expectations that she sat as if turned to stone. So this was what came of being charitable! She had taken a dowerless girl into the house and she had rewarded her by coveting her son! The impertinence, the impropriety of it passed tolerance! Swift pity succeeded her anger. Poor, plain Isabella—how mad the dream must have seemed! And how discreetly she had hidden her secret. Why, she dared wager even Ephraim, who knew only too well every girl in the village wore her best smile for him, had no inkling of Isabella’s real feelings in this crazy affair.

Halvor stirred uneasily. She had not lived with the late Captain Marcusson thirty years without acquiring most invaluable knowledge regarding his sex, and the equally invaluable gift of swift revision of sentiments. In rapid succession, she ran her mind’s eye over the marriageable girls she knew, including the wealthy Helga. Would any of them satisfy Ephraim for long? Would any one of them, touched as they were with this new fever of independence, put up with what she had silently endured or smilingly ignored at the hands of Ephraim’s father? No, she thought not. They were a harum-scarum, selfish lot these modern girls.

With new eyes she considered Isabella, her wealth of dark hair, warm brown eyes, and clear white skin, and she came to the conclusion that, whatever the final result, the beginning of this affair had at least the stimulating interest of mystery and pathos. She moved closer: “Isabella,

listen attentively, my dear—I shall not speak of it again. All the Marcussons have been philanderers; it's in their blood. They seem unable to help it. The possession of beauty avails nothing against it. You may not believe it, but once I was called the belle of my city. Yet long before Ephraim was born his father had gone on a cruise with a dancing girl from the gutter!"

Dry, thin laughter shook her small frame. "What a time that was! What explosions of temper and torrents of tears wasted my energy! How I hated and reproached my absent husband, vowing inquisitorial vengeance upon him! Yet when he returned I nearly died for joy. And that's how it always went to the end of the story. I think you'll see now that to fall in gracefully with what seems destined is much the best policy."

During this astonishing confidence Isabella retained her stoic calm, yet her heart was racing madly. Everything in the familiar room had suddenly acquired a curious glow of unreality. The eyes of the purring cat were lustrous gems in the dark. And the lovely cinnamon roses on her dressing-table caught in a long beam of light from the latticed window, were reflected in the mirror like shimmering drops of gold. "Very well," she agreed, her hand seeking Halvor's timidly and clinging tightly. "We shall pretend it's for the best. I only hope he will not come to hate me—to blame me too utterly for his lost freedom."

Once again that dry, thin laughter ruffled the silence, and Halvor, rising to leave, replied cryptically: "Spare your pains, Isabella. I have yet to hear of a Marcusson who mislaid freedom for a single hour. No, my dear, what you might with better profit dwell upon is your trip to Canada! Ephraim expects to go there in the spring."

THE HOLMQUISTS

Anton Holmquist was a queer fellow and none of the best, according to public opinion. In the first place, his erratic mother had been a refugee from Russia. She was a quarrelsome person who stoutly maintained that every evil under the sun had come upon mankind because it denied the Prophets of God and had chosen kings in their stead. Yet kings, be it marked, were not so divorced from common humanity as Emperors and Tzars! Add to the handicap of such a mother a male parent always in the thick of some seaman's brawl and public opinion seems justified. Anton could hardly be anything but queer with such parents to mould his opinions. From the first he had an unstable, nervous temperament, now wildly hilarious, now gloomy, which usually fetched him into trouble and sometimes set him weeping, to his mother's infinite disgust. They lived on the water-front,

where Illiana Petrovna was either to be found cleaning some other woman's house, or holding forth on the curse of monarchies in some ill-smelling tavern.

Not that Illiana Petrovna believed in work, particularly, but with a husband who fought himself out of every job something had to be done for the daily pottage. Then, too, she was secretly a little proud of her charring reputation. Not all cleaning women are both thorough and quick! Also, in a pinch, she might fill the place of a recalcitrant cook, in which event the only precaution necessary to insure success was to lock the liquor chest and give her her head with sauces.

It was said that as a woman in her early forties, when she first came to the Danish capital, Illiana Petrovna was undeniably good-looking, with a free swinging stride and a fine complexion. Even now she could be vastly entertaining and adjusted herself readily to the moods of her companions, usually striking the high note, for she was given to exaggeration in everything.

When Anton was twelve his father was killed in an effort to save a young boy trapped on a burning pleasure yacht. The grateful magnate whose only son was thus dearly rescued hastened to offer material assistance to Illiana, who instantly went off on her hobby-horse riding to ruin. Well! what did the rich gentleman take her for to offer blood money? No, though she lost a dozen husbands never would Illiana Petrovna sink to such depths as to eat from the hand of the people's destroyer!

The gentleman, not unnaturally, took umbrage at this singular reception. Devil take such impertinence! What was wrong with the woman? Was she hinting, by any chance, that he treated his workers like some brutal Russian overseer?

Ha! Illiana Petrovna had no doubt about it whatever! With horrid fluency she enumerated the exact sums paid to his various shop workers, winding up with an even livelier recitation as to how these miserable pittances found their predestined way back to him and his fellow thieves the doctors and undertakers. "I'll have you understand I wouldn't even take his burying money," she concluded with histrionic emphasis. "God save me, no! It's only proper the town should bury him. That much of the people's money won't get into bad contracts!"

Whereat the philanthropic gentleman, tired of patience and troubled with dyspepsia, would certainly have left her to her noble resolution had not his son set up a timely wail. He had just caught sight of Anton's dirty bare legs sticking cheerfully out from a heap of straw in the corner. "Oh, papa!" cried

the poor little rich boy, “just look! He hasn’t even shoes! Never mind what she says! It’s not fair his boy should go about like that! Papa—why, he laughed with the flames all around him: ‘Hang on, little man!’ he shouted, ‘We’ll get through, never fear!’ And when he caught me I could smell fire in his clothes but he hid my face in his breast. Oh, you must do something for his boy, dear papa!”

Which explains how Anton Holmquist eventually graduated from the Working College, although his teachers laid no great store by his good marks. He was too odd, too full of radical nonsense, and lazy besides. However, to everyone’s surprise he won a scholarship. But instead of going on to the university, he took a school in a sleepy rural community, and made a home for his mother.

So it really began to look as though the ghost of anarchistic Russia was laid at last. But, alas! only faith moves mountains. After the novelty of keeping a model cottage wore off Illiana Petrovna had her eyes opened. God bless us, yes! Under the outward peace and contentment of the little village she caught sight of the malicious skeleton. While her son corrected geography papers and untangled snarled sums she took infinite pains to point out to him the frightful delusions under which the poor villagers laboured.

For instance, there was the weaver. He believed himself happy, poor man, sitting hours at his loom, never surmising how underpaid he was, or how in another few years no one would buy his hand-woven tapestries and woollen cloths. And the priest went about with his greying head in the clouds just as if everyone didn’t know his sister cooked cabbage soup three times a week and seldom had cream in her coffee! Why, he might as well be a coalheaver and never have struggled through the seminary at all! And that’s how it was with the lot of them. Like goldfish in a tin trough, they mistook the stray crumbs that fell to them for the riches of life. Yet despite so much analytical counsel Anton actually seemed to thrive in this unnatural air of false security. Yes, incredible though it must seem, had not Gerty Johnson happened along in time poor Anton might have sunk to the calm levels of the deluded weaver.

Gerty was the sheriff’s niece and had been to boarding-school in Germany. In addition to a line or two of Schiller she could recite the Lord’s Prayer in quite intelligible German and, to the undying envy of the village maids, spoke of beer-gardens with a knowing little smirk that naturally led to thrilling speculations. Yet these cosmopolitan accomplishments had in no wise diminished her relish for the plain country dances, and the marked attentions of Anton Holmquist, the dashing young schoolmaster.

Ah, but it was all very well for the threadbare priest, the roistering blacksmith, or the deluded weaver and his small farm customers to sit back tolerantly and even smile upon such doings. Herr Johnson, the sheriff, had his dignity to consider, to say nothing of his bottling factory and the gilt-edged bonds Gerty's aunt held in her name. Anton himself was not so bad, but on more than one occasion and not under the finest auspices either, Herr Johnson had heard Illiana Petrovna holding forth in a manner dangerously suggestive of heresy against the vested gods he worshipped. No, it was not to be expected Herr Johnson should permit his niece to associate with Illiana Petrovna's son.

But Anton remained impervious to the sheriff's politic hints and occasional barbs. He went right on attending the village dances, mingling with the elect, and dancing with Gerty as often as before. On several occasions he even took her to the refreshment booth! Now that was going too far! Whatever the cost to his personal pride, Herr Johnson decided to pay a visit to the Holmquist cottage and end the affair amicably but firmly.

Illiana Petrovna, unfortunately for all concerned, had just received a letter from a former crony in the capital—said crony writing from the lock-up, where, presumably, she was meditating upon the impropriety of pelting a wedding party with decayed vegetables. Illiana glowed with suppressed martyrdom. Ho! And why should she not have thrown whatever she pleased? Everyone knew the bride's papa was a rascally landlord who never mended the roofs or the drains and exacted the last farthing, no matter what the circumstances of his people! She was so huffed up about it that Herr Johnson, entering at the moment with portly condescension, struck her as an instrument of God in the shape of a scapegoat for the sins of his fellow capitalists. Upon him fell the vials of her indignation and pent-up heresies. She thundered like a prophet and sobbed like an expiring prima donna. Not even in Russia had she surpassed this splendid oratory.

Herr Johnson shuddered and grew pale at the mere thought of his dear little Gerty in such a mad house. His natural impulse was to flee as from the plague. But the dignity of his public office called for the exercise of courage and an unruffled, tolerant mien. "Tut, tut, my good woman," he breathed upon her anger majestically, "persons of your station cannot understand the exact principles upon which civilized society functions. Someone must rule, Illiana Petrovna, and assume charge of public utilities and trusts. Tut, tut! What nonsense you utter to be sure!"

A red rag this, to Illiana Petrovna. Arms akimbo, she faced him, fury and fanatical joy blazing in her eyes. "So! It's nonsense I speak, is it? Well, God be praised, that's quickly remedied. Perhaps you'd like to hear what Holy

Writ has to say of those who strip the widow and the orphan of their farthing—backed by a Little local history to bring the thought home? Tut, tut, why bluster? Of course the law was on your side, Herr Johnson, when you evicted old dame Haukness and foreclosed the Benson land. Oh, to be sure! That's how some grow fat and twiddle gold watch-chains while others rot in jail! But you needn't stand there puffing like a gobbler gorged on stolen grain and think to see me humbled by what you've come to say. Oh, I know! It's about my son. He's not good enough for Gerty, whose mamma was a dairymaid and her papa as black a scamp as yourself. Anton isn't good enough because his mother calls things by their right names and his father was fool enough to die saving a rich man's son!"

The sheriff, red as a harvestmoon and hot as love's fire, swore under his breath as he thrust on his hat. "Illiana Petrovna, you've not heard the last of this! I came prepared to be reasonable, now you shall see what power means, my woman."

"Ho, ho!" she jibed after him, "but you'll find, my little turkey-cock, that hate is stronger. Destroy my son Herr Johnson, and watch what will befall your dainty niece!"

But, naturally, what did befall was that Anton lost his job. His services were cancelled and a teacher more in sympathy with law and order was found to instruct the growing youth of the village. Anton took it badly. He had formed a taste for good food and decent lodgings and all those little niceties heretofore outside his derelict existence.

Illiana Petrovna was genuinely shocked. God bless us! The boy thought less of her principles than the food in his stomach. It was disgraceful! She was thoroughly ashamed of him but nevertheless determined to put straight his little apple-cart, if that was what gave him joy.

With calculated cunning she began to affect a humble and contrite manner in the houses necessity once again drove her to serve. She was often found quietly weeping into the soapsuds and silver polish. She refused food, and resolutely refused a bracing drop even on the coldest mornings. Contrition so abject and obvious could hardly fail of its effect.

The village dames, at best but simple souls, began to mutter amongst themselves. What, they now demanded, had Anton actually done that his poor old mother should be made to suffer? And what, if you please, was so remarkable about Gerty Johnson except her German accent? True, the Holmquists were poor and Illiana must turn her hand to earn an honest penny whenever she could, but who was free of that necessity except the

sheriff? A questionable virtue, now they came to think of it, which incensed them the more on Anton's behalf.

As a consequence Gerty began to suffer. Spineless and unimaginative though she was, it none the less mortified and wounded her deeply to be singled out as some inhuman monster responsible for the destruction of innocent persons. Besides, she really admired Anton although his periodical flights of wild fancy had left her a little confused and even terrified. But what was that compared to the terror she experienced at the thought of having to marry Mr. Bloom, the barrister, whose head resembled a skinned apple, and who had, in addition, two pale-eyed lumpy daughters!

To be sure, it may have been altruistic pity alone which drove her to the Holmquist cottage the day after Mr. Bloom proffered his suit and toasted Herr Johnson in good Jamaica rum, but only Illiana professed to believe it. Indeed Illiana Petrovna was so moved she tenderly suggested the young lovers might as well pocket wounded pride and apply for a licence in the capital.

Anton was not so definite. Perhaps his ardour had cooled in the weeks Gerty had held obediently aloof. He kept harping on jobs and money until at length, thoroughly out of patience, his mother cried sharply, "Yes, yes. I see that I was wrong, my little ones. It is out of the question that Anton should marry now. Poor boy, it was his misfortune to aspire so high. . . ."

That was more than even Gerty's vanity could support with calm. Her round little face flushed crimson, and something like temper shone in her eyes. "Oh, but I don't see why! I mean—Uncle John was just horrid to interfere. Anton's got to get another chance."

Illiana Petrovna wiped a sly eye. "My little one, the poor are without an advocate. What can such as we do, my child, unless—but no—even to dream of it is foolishness."

"To dream of what, good Illiana?" Gerty demanded impetuously.

"A foreign country where all of us might begin again—might really live," said Illiana Petrovna, rubbing her capable hands together to hide their sudden tremor.

"Oh, how perfectly romantic!" cried Gerty, running up to Anton like a kitten and snuggling into his bosom. "Of course we'll go. I have a little money papa left me. Oh, Anton, where shall it be?"

"We will go to Canada," said Anton, smiling curiously at his irrepressible mother over Gerty's soft yellow head. "It is a big country—we should lose ourselves there without difficulty."

Illiana Petrovna laughed. "Wrong, Anton! We shall plant ourselves firmly in the heart of it, that big Canada beyond the seas!"

HARTMAN AND BEAUR

The old doctor blew into his mug, skilfully adjusted his whiskers and grunted. "I shall stop here no more, Oscar. These soapsuds are terrible. It makes one long for the Middle Ages when the Devil walked abroad contracting for souls like a modern business man. Ah, you needn't look so contemptuous, young sir. No less a personage than the ex-chancellor's grandfather took great pride in having repaired the marvellous bridge Satan built in a night at Frankfort-on-the-Main. And any man with two eyes in his head can to this day see the hole through which he fell—I refer, of course, to Satan, not the honourable chancellor's grandfather—when he failed of his design. That is to say when the good workman with whom he bargained came to his senses and went the fiend one better. Those were good days, my friend. A man was not compelled then, as now, to concentrate his heroic tendencies on stale beer and bad sausages. Of course there are politics, in pursuit of which a fair-sized lion roars up and down the country. But even Herr Bismarck falls short of the medieval Satan with his persuasive voice and autocratic tricks. Buttons, braid and bluster! That's the new order epitomized. Soon there'll be nothing but noise, no real humanity—only automatons squawking and creaking on their crazy revolutions. I see no virtue, much less sense, in prolonging the lives of such creatures!"

Oscar Beaur, blond, blue-eyed, and stoop-shouldered, showing plainly the ineradicable marks of his difficult, poverty-stricken childhood, listened inattentively. He was thoroughly accustomed to these soapsud orations. The business in hand was to eat. So he ate, slowly and methodically, with no particular relish, although he had often enjoyed worse fare. Besides, he was troubled, struggling with the self-same problems of the future, which he very well knew engaged Dr. Hartman's sober hours and not Herr Bismarck's imperialistic trumpeting.

A man's voice, resonant and slightly nasal, drifted in from the cobbled street, every word clearly audible through the open window. The young German started, left off eating and turned scarlet. The doctor, glancing quickly at his companion, set down his mug and leaned forward to see better. "Ha! Ha!" he began laughing in the mirthless, irritating fashion of cynics who have outgrown the small miseries of youth.

Oscar considered him coldly. "Herr Doctor, you have drunk too much. Enough at any rate."

The doctor blandly continued to gaze into the street, that exasperating sibilant chuckle of his as trying to patience as the buzzing of a wasp. Finally, casting a humorous yet appraising glance at Oscar's moody face he replied cheerfully: "Right you are, Oscar. The sight of that fathead in his phaeton confirms our joint opinions. I've had enough—and that goes for his gay canary! Whatever else fool thing you do, steer clear of Sophia Hauffman."

Oscar Beaur, stung out of reason, swung round on his friend, blazing anger distorting his normally calm face. "How profound your penetration grows, Herr Doctor! But be comforted. Even if your advice were in any particular timely, Fräulein Hauffman's refined prejudices make everything safe. I assure you the fräulein would as soon encourage a leper as myself!"

"So I perceive," growled the Herr Doctor into his mug. "But now listen to me with patience for a change. My dear fellow, your infatuation is no secret. Nor have I forgotten how like a fool you saved that silly piece from drowning last summer. That's the way with you sentimentalists—always thwarting nature's best laid schemes! But I digress. What I meant to say was this: You doubtless assume, because Fräulein Hauffman has dainty little hands, coos like a stockdove, and lives in a stone house, she must as a matter of course be socially superior to common fry like yourself? Well, my good Oscar, prepare for a pleasant shock. That most exclusive fräulein's mamma was once an upper servant in my own mother's house. Yes, and when I was just about your age I suffered a lapse from sanity and married the dear creature."

Oscar's astonishment was really comic. His eyes, almost protruding from their sockets, fixed with hypnotic fascination on the dowdy little man who dared fabricate such monstrous impossibilities. His lips opening and shutting soundlessly, gave his face the ludicrous expression of a grinning puppet. Herr Hartman, shaken by inward mirth, resumed lightly, "Oh, you needn't look so startled, my lad. Youth is a queer lunacy at best. Who was I to escape the mysterious pangs peculiar to the male species? Moreover, I was something of a socialist in those days. Oh, I won't go so far as to say I believed all men equal, but I must have nursed the hope as regards women. Barbo was such an angelic creature. When the sun glanced down upon her golden head as she dusted the books in our library I used to find myself thinking of Joan of Arc."

The doctor broke into dry chuckles extremely trying to the poor young man who hung upon his words in feverish distress. It was indecent, really, for an old man to speak in this fashion about the beautiful idealisms and sublime passions of youth! Yet the Herr Doctor, who must perceive his distress, merely grinned and, draining the last of his disgusting soapsuds,

continued, "Well, I assure you there was some reason for the faith that was in me. Like the blessed Joan, Barbo had her voices. Marvellous voices! They spurred her over class barriers into my youthful arms, and out of them with miraculous facility into the solid lap of Militarism. Oh, Barbo was certainly inspired. And, like all Heaven's favourites, thunderbolts blasted a broad path for her triumphant progress.

"The sympathetic officer who saved her from my modest courtyard was shortly thereafter blown to pieces while rescuing a barrel of beer for his major. The major, a little gouty but gallant, immediately responded to the noble sacrifice by proposing to the lovely widow. Barbo, by now certain of her destiny, accepted the offer graciously, convinced—as proved to be the case—that here was but another stepping-stone to bigger fry and better fate. However, it all simmers down to this: Your precious little fräulein has the honour to be the daughter of the beer-barrel hero. Her three successive step-papas have contributed nothing so spectacular to fame but, happily for the fräulein and her mamma, supplemented their heroic deficiencies by material assets. Herr Hauffman especially. Unless memory fails me that worthy gentleman doubled an already considerable fortune by inventing a sauce for stale meat.

"Alas, it must be fairly clear now, that you, my poor Oscar, who were left to an asylum in nothing but your baby shift can never hope to mate with the potted-ham heiresses of this world."

Young Beur, still dazed and speechless, began to recall bits of gossip to which, until now, he had never given serious thought. Not infrequently he had heard that Doctor Hartman had a colourful history and that he had thrown away a brilliant career. He also knew that the Herr Doctor was not so old in years as his grey hair and dissolute appearance led one to believe. And when he chose he could converse with the grace and charm only possible to a well-stored, cultured mind. In other words, it now dawned on Oscar that the Herr Doctor was a brilliant man cut off from his past by a caprice as foolishly romantic and ideally futile as anything the bards had immortalized. It was astonishing!

Still bewildered yet stirred by rare excitement, Oscar stared at his old friend as with new vision. So this seedy little grey-beard with his frayed linen, spotted cravat and rusty clothes that always looked as though his inseparable wolfhound slept on them at nights, was a hero of romance and a scion of an ancient house! How embarrassing to the canons of heredity! Why, Oscar could readily imagine a father confessor pointing to the Herr Doctor as a living witness to the wages of sin. Social sin at that, and what could be more terrible in Imperial Germany!

Doctor Hartman, seemingly oblivious of the young man's astonished regard, took up his mug with a flourish and chuckled. "Here's to your thoughts, my friend! I'll wager they run true for once! You may not attain the profession you covet, but you'll hardly fall shorter of success than I. But look now, my boy, I'm serious about wanting to quit this place. I've been thinking over what a fellow told me about the hardships of the immigrants in the New World—in Canada, to be exact—where so many of our God-fearing Mennonites have settled recently. It seems they haven't even a capable pedlar of pills in this wilderness to which they transport their vile diseases!"

Vastly amused by the effects of this announcement, he exclaimed with mock severity: "Come, come, Oscar, turn up the corners of your mouth. I loathe a man to resemble a fish! But to continue: I can't send you through the university, and if I could I doubtless wouldn't, but I can pay our passage to Canada! Well, what do you say?"

"To Canada? Are you serious, Herr Doctor? But where would you go? It is an immense country, I am told. As big, if not bigger, than the American Republic! Had you thought of a definite place?"

"Certainly not!" growled Herr Hartman, banging down his empty mug. "I've had enough of exactitudes and precisions! I'm going to Canada to lose all the abominable precepts of Prussian materialism which is killing our country. I shall go as a vagabond, bound for adventure primitive and stark as the muddled exploits of father Adam! And you, my lad, may emulate the serpent for all I care!"

BOOK ONE
THE CURTAIN RISES

CHAPTER I

OLINE VEDEL BOYEN paused in her restless pacing before the prairie schooners ranged like prehistoric beasts in a semicircle under the sheltering wing of the Black Poplars, and listened intently. Oh, she was right. Someone else preferred the sanctuary of the deserted wagons to the forced gaiety down by the camp-fires on the river-bank. And this someone wept!

“Lucky she!” Oline muttered bitterly, easing the whimpering child higher in her arms. Poor little creature. She pitied, but could not love him, and his father was always so vexed by his nervousness and fear of strange faces. Oh, but she was weary! As weary as though she had lived a dozen lives in the weeks that separated her from home and civilization. From the first the trip had been a horrible nightmare—storms at sea, the protracted delay in Ontario, where John had arranged to meet this body of home-seekers, the comfortless trains to St. Paul, and finally these bone-shaking prairie vehicles the like of which she had never conceived. She could understand how one might weep and feel the better for it. But this was Isabella Marcusson weeping!

Startled by this realization, so confounding to her preconceived ideas of the fortunate young woman, Olive hastily climbed into the wagon and laid the child in his swing-bed. After pinning down his blankets and screening the infant against the mosquitoes that rose in black clouds from the marshes, she decided to risk John’s anger and slip away to the Marcusson wagon.

She was not admitted immediately. Indeed, for what seemed an interminable period, she received no response to her timid yet earnest inquiry. And the darkness, in which she now seemed lost, had never before revealed so plainly its terrifying aspects. Her impulse was to fly—not alone from the unresponsive being who resented her sympathy, but the whole intolerable scene—and leave behind for ever this caravan of strange people, poles apart in taste and heredity, yet all bound over to the same inscrutable destiny. But, alas, neither she nor the secretive Isabella, whose lonely weeping betrayed such sore distress, might hope to escape. Then, surely, exiled as they were from everything loved and familiar, foolish pride ought not to stand in the way of simple neighbourly kindness. “Isabella,” she called again, almost tearfully. “Dear Isabella—I don’t want to intrude but, please, I’d so like to speak with you.”

Yet when the wagon curtains parted and Isabella motioned her to enter all the little homely phrases of polite consolation died on her lips. Misery is quickly contagious. And here was misery so acute that Oline was instantly caught up on a wave of fresh resentment towards a scheme of things which at best was but a tangled skein in the hands of a blind Weaver totally indifferent to the human threads he broke.

Isabella, like some tragic muse, terrible in her intensity, gazed straight before her and said, "It's all so hopeless—so useless. Oh, I'm not at all sure I can go on."

This attitude in a woman heretofore consistently cheerful and, to Oline's belief, with little reason for such abject despair, raised a sharp, ill-considered retort. "Nonsense! Of course you can go on. We all go on no matter how we whine and whimper!"

Oline spoke with asperity astonishing to herself. "We all go on for the simple unheroic reason we can't do otherwise."

"No, you are wrong, Oline," Isabella returned quietly. "There are degrees of unhappiness which only the individual sufferer can possibly understand. When I say I can't go on it has nothing to do with the hardships of the life before us. It's something much harder to endure—and impossible to explain."

But there she was wrong. The white moonlight streaming through the parted doorway revealed a picture not easily forgotten or misunderstood; a woman, with proud, defiant eyes luminous with unshed tears, and fingers that traced with unconscious tyrannic fidelity the livid scar on her cold white cheek.

"Oh, my dear!" broke from Oline, "surely you won't let that interfere with happiness? Forgive me—I've no business to speak this way. But if you must brood on the accident why not consider how much worse it might have been?"

"Worse? You mean I might have been made really repulsive?" Repressed emotion made Isabella's voice rough and unnatural. "In that case I should have been wisely pigeon-holed—caring for the blind or the leper!"

Oline found it difficult to reconcile this caustic bitterness with the gentle woman whose quiet cheerfulness had, hitherto, somehow radiated encouragement and comfort for all. What strange beings we are, thought she, and how amazingly blind to all but surface indications. Now for the first time she was beginning to understand how all those detailed newspaper accounts of the thrilling Marcusson romance were sheer torment to the proud and supersensitive Isabella. Yet she in common with a thousand other

foolish women had devoured the accounts of that colourful wedding. Why, she knew the rigmarole by heart: the bride's gown was of Spanish lace over ivory satin, as had been customary for innumerable Marcusson brides; she wore pearls, a gift from the groom, and the finest of cob-web oriental veils to shield her face from the curious crowd that thronged the cathedral precincts and paved the carriage drive with red roses!

Astonishing to reflect she had thought this barbarous display and noisy fanfare enviable at the time! Now she longed to put out her hand in understanding fellowship. But Isabella was as unapproachable in her tragic mood as she was illusive in her habitual cheerfulness. Some innate quality of the soul imposed upon her spiritual barriers confounding to others and, as Oline surmised, confusing to herself.

As if to terminate the leaden restraint that bound them, a man's gay laughter rang out on the still air with startling clarity. So the bridegroom made merry though the bride wept! Isabella winced just perceptibly and began speaking in low, hurried, defensive sentences, "I shouldn't mind so much if Mother Marcusson were less concerned. She's wonderful Oline—the kind of person generations of social effort makes. Naturally she distrusts me a little, fears I shall make a scene like any common servant girl. But why should I? It isn't as though I had ever believed myself faintly admired. From the first I quite understood a Marcusson was bound to exercise a chivalry synonymous with the name. If he had killed me with that knife I dare say Ephraim would have fulfilled his imaginary obligation by rushing into a monastery!"

"Oh, Isabella! This is morbid and foolish and gets you nowhere. Yet I'm selfishly glad you told me. For believe me I know the futility of kicking against the pricks—and what it means to walk in a path of someone else's choosing."

"But it's wrong!" Isabella interrupted sharply. "I've come to suspect our Christian compliance for plain cowardice! And it makes me afraid, Oline. There's something in the vital air of this trackless wilderness that challenges human values—there's something here could break us as a sea-wind breaks a child's boat."

Well, what was there to say? Oline sighed, glancing almost furtively into the dark without. No, idle words could not affect, much less alter, the truth of Isabella's strange perception. For even the boldest spirit must tremble at times before the lonely splendour of these endless prairies, quivering with secret purpose and unconquerable might. "But how ridiculous we are!" she exclaimed, forcing a note of gaiety into her chiding. "What sublime nonsense to take ourselves so seriously! Why, that's what scares us, Isabella.

Our precious vanities can't stand up to the challenge of this brand new world. We'll all feel better once our hands are busy with familiar household cares."

Very true. But at the sound of the heavy, familiar footsteps approaching, her voice broke, and thought scattered like leaves in a gust of wind. Dutiful John! Displeased though he would be to find her absent from their wagon he must, of course, fetch her as though she were a wayward child liable to injury!

Something dangerously like hatred blazed in her heart. What after all, did Isabella know of the real degradation of womanhood? Loving, to the point of worship, a husband whose excitable passions had at least the merit of being spontaneously poetic, what could she know of the burning humiliation and physical revulsion inseparable from subjection to a man one's whole being abhorred? And some called it holy matrimony!

Absorbed though she was by her own problem Isabella did not fail to mark the rapid change that occurred in her friend at the sound of John's voice calling for her. Rising swiftly, she helped Oline over the high wheel into his outstretched arms, remarking coolly, "You seem to have enjoyed yourselves down by the fire. What a pity young Mrs. Holmquist should miss the fun. She seemed very ill at supper."

"Not too ill to make eyes at Ephraim, I'll wager!" John responded with what he deemed rare humour. "But seriously speaking, I'd not give it a thought, Mrs. Marcusson. These delicate-looking girls are often quite strong, and Dr. Hartman is very capable when sober. Yes, indeed. And if I may say so Gerty Holmquist is probably more frightened than the case justifies."

"John! Then the poor little thing is seriously ill?" Oline shook free of his arm and started away only to be swiftly overtaken and none too pleasantly restrained. "Come, my dear, no foolishness. What do we pay a doctor for if not to spare us sleepless hours? I'm tired and need undisturbed rest. There's plenty of time to fuss over Gerty to-morrow."

Isabella watching from her wagon saw them quickly swallowed up in hungry darkness—a darkness that leered back at her like some lascivious beast intent on destruction. It was with relief she heard her mother-in-law's dry little chuckle as she climbed unaided over the wheel. "Don't let me disturb you Isabella, such ponderous thought must come to something. Besides, I'm still quite able to move unaided! But I must say you might have put the evening to livelier uses."

"Possibly, but I imagine the merry-makers did very nicely without me."

“Much too nicely!” Mrs. Marcusson was seldom so sharp or impatient as now. “Really, Isabella, you must make an effort. Every hussy under forty has her eye on Ephraim’s pocketbook. We can’t afford a scandal this early in the game.”

“No, I suppose not.” Isabella agreed dryly, smiling with tolerant contempt into the sinister darkness as she thought of her husband’s easy laughter. “It would be rather a pity to begin a new-fashioned pilgrimage with old-fashioned scandal.”

CHAPTER II

ISABELLA MARCUSSON stood beside the window of the hotel bedroom which for almost six months had been her home in the new country. Twilight and soft fleecy snow possessed the crooked street. Seldom had it been so quiet, for the King's Hotel was near the river wharf where the male idlers, often the worse for their leisure, loved to forgather. But now that winter had set in the gay conclaves were suspended, save for an occasional encounter of rivermen and trappers, and the lazy amble of the idler had changed to a brisk walk.

To-night only a few had passed the window: a company runner, merry with bells; two squaws, their favourite purchases of tea, sugar and tobacco, securely tied in red bandannas; and a young officer from the Osborne Barracks, with an olive-skinned lithe young girl laughing beside him. They floated past the watcher at the window as if borne along by the ever-present wind.

"Impertinent creature!" said a voice so close that she almost jumped. Halvor had always walked softly and now, shod in moccasins (which she thought most amusing footwear), her approach was as inaudible as a cat's. A little annoyed, Isabella shrugged. "Oh, I don't know," she retorted. "They are so very pretty, these Métis women, one can't expect too much humility in them!"

"Pretty savages you mean!" snapped the older woman, rubbing at the frosted window-pane with a lace-edged handkerchief. "I shall be thankful to get out of this singular town, although I will miss the friendly Scotch settlers, and have always enjoyed seeing men strut about in uniforms. You, I suppose, are quite unimpressed by these red-coated Canadian police? Of course! Well, we won't go into that. What I started out to say was that the prevailing mixture of dandified civilization and sheer barbarism gets on my nerves at times. Ephraim should know better than keep us here."

Isabella, smiling at the antics of an urchin tumbling about in the street, cast about in her mind for the expected rejoinder. Halvor disliked putting into concrete words any problem pertaining to her son that particularly worried her. And her present worry had nothing to do with the incongruities of the busy little frontier town. After some thought Isabella said, "The hunters will be back for supplies in the spring. John expects a brisk trade from that. I don't think Ephraim could persuade him to leave for Maple Bluffs until that's over."

“Oh! and Oline’s condition has no bearing on the matter, I suppose?” Halvor demanded tartly. “It hasn’t occurred to John Boyen that even his wife is subject to the same mortal risks that killed poor little Gerty Holmquist and annoyed him so much by halting the caravan three days!”

To her amazement Isabella flared up vehemently, her face suddenly drained of colour. “Oline won’t die! Freedom doesn’t come that easily to bond-women and slaves bear charmed lives—and what else are Oline and I? Oh, no! Life won’t release us until we’ve repaid with interest the purchasing price.”

“What foolishness! If that’s the sort of thing goes on in your level head I’d hate to confess Oline.” Halvor sat down and affected to fan herself briskly with a postage-stamp handkerchief: “Dear me! To tell the truth I find you both tiresomely ridiculous. Of course I quite realize that Oline’s babies seem bent on arriving with inconsiderate speed, but after all she has her own nature to blame for that. And with a paternal Shylock like John to provide for them she has nothing to fear on that score. The sensible brute invested in government securities back home to balance the possible risks he might take in this country! Well—what’s all the fuming about then? Goodness knows women have been cluttering the world with infants since Eve——”

To Isabella’s vast relief a sharp knock at the door interrupted the dialogue. Hastening to the summons she was met by the grinning youngster who served the hotel in a dozen capacities. “Mr. Marcusson says to tell you he won’t be home till to-morrow,” said the lad, bobbing his closely shorn head in excellent imitation of a ducking hen. “Sure, ma’am, he’s going ’crost the river to a dance. That’s what he said.”

When he was gone Halvor, as though struck by sudden chill, drew her chair closer to the carron stove that heated the double room, and sighed impatiently. “Well, there you are! What did I tell you last Sunday? We shouldn’t have gone to that French Cathedral. The girls are much too pretty!”

Isabella, affecting perfect unconcern, began rummaging through her boxes, humming softly as she laid out bits of lace and linen and coloured thread. Then in her softly melodious voice she said placatingly: “Mother, I’m sure you’d rather be alone to finish your weekly letters—and don’t forget to include my love. John is away on business so Oline and I have planned a sewing orgy. If you get lonely join us for coffee at nine. No persuasion on John’s part—nor even the price quoted—can induce Oline to give up that old-land habit.”

Illiana Petrovna, draped in a Hudson's Bay blanket, a fold of which cosily cradled her tiny granddaughter, flung wide the door for Isabella when she arrived at her friend's stuffy overheated rooms. "God bless us, if it isn't herself," grinned she, and was off on a gallop. "Calm as the Virgin and cool as a queen. Well, that's what comes of being a lady. But come in, come in! You needn't mind me, little madam, for as you see, I'm on the point of leaving. And would you believe it, I was just saying to myself: Illiana Petrovna, you thriftless creature. If you've got a shred of sense you'll march right off to Mrs. Marcusson and ask her whether she thinks the master will be needing my Anton before spring. He has a chance of work until then."

Smiling at Oline who was coaxing little Veder into his night-dress, Isabella replied simply. "I'm afraid I know very little of my husband's business affairs, Illiana. But if Anton knows where the dance is being held at St. Boniface to-night he'll find Ephraim there."

Illiana cuddled the child in her bosom. "God forbid I should gossip," said she piously, "yet that much I could tell you myself, though to be sure I never dreamt the master would honour a Métis betrothal party. Well, I must hurry. Anton will want to deck himself in fine feathers if he's to go trailing Mr. Marcusson to such gay doings."

"What a cat!" Oline exclaimed when the door closed behind the irrepressible scalawag. "But I suppose we must put up with her. In her own queer fashion she's really kind. And we won't have too much help in the new settlement."

"Thanks to John, we have Dr. Hartman," Isabella reminded her, always eager to draw attention to the best in his character.

"Oh, yes, I suppose we should feel rich and jubilant with a doctor and a charing-nurse in our midst, and a barrel of whisky to go before us like an ark of the covenant in the wilderness!"

"You must be better to be so cynical, Oline," her friend consoled her merrily, "Bacchus or Beer, what matter so long as a spirit leads us? Really, my dear, if sacred history may properly be paraphrased I'd say Ephraim has doubtless crossed the river to fetch a maid Miriam to beat the timbrel in the promised land!"

CHAPTER III

IN less than a year John Boyen had acquired eight hundred acres of land. Some of it was heavily timbered, some covered in small cedars, white poplars and brush, but the greater part was fertile prairie interspersed with easily-drained marshes. And these rich acres converged upon the lake, on whose waters Ephraim Marcusson hoped to sail a brigade of boats under contract to the Fur Company—a strangely elastic contract, be it said, with unprecedented liberties of action for which he was prepared to pay handsomely, assured of as handsome returns.

On matters of business and general plans for the settlement they hoped to control the partners usually agreed. But their personal employments and methods of procedure were diametrically opposed. Ephraim, by nature an organizer, took advantage of any occasion to win men for his service. To the conventional, ever-consistent John his behaviour seemed frivolous and undignified. Money and a properly Victorian pomposity of manner was his sincere idea of a gentlemanly contribution to society. Moreover, in his opinion, it was a sacred obligation to graft the restraining proprieties on the hybrid nation taking root in Canada.

Ephraim laughed at him. “To the devil with diapers and dogma!” was his undignified maxim in pledge of new and wider liberties. He had gaiety and good will. He played the violin with a voluptuous abandon no Métis could resist. They followed him at will like the Piper of Hamelin. Which, alas! was even more true of the women—a dangerous business in any frontier village.

But, as a rule, he evaded the complexities of serious flirtation by shifting his preferences so adroitly the eclipsed favourite was induced to accept the whole thing as a flattering dream. To Ephraim it was even less than a dream. And yet as he roguishly explained to his mother, how should a man love music and not dance? How should he dance without some lovely maid clasped to his heart? And how, with the divine creature palpitating in his arms, should he be less than kind?

Dame Marcusson had the good sense to stress business rather than propriety, when she felt in duty bound to touch on these charming delinquencies. But on Monday following the week-end carousal at St. Boniface she forsook her usual diplomacy. For some inexplicable reason his appearance disturbed her profoundly. Despite his customarily agreeable address she thought him changed, his manner forced and his nerves jumpy.

Yet he never drank to excess, for like his father before him he preferred a keen edge to the senses.

Critical and increasingly apprehensive, she watched him sorting papers on his desk. Yes, she was sure of it—for once the easy Marcusson conscience was troubled! Tossing aside the sampler she was working she said forthrightly: “When you’ve done shuffling those papers you might tell me what fresh tricks you’ve been up to.”

She had the satisfaction of seeing him start. Then he laughed—a little shamelessly, she thought. “But how should I know where to begin?” he grinned. “Are you referring to tricks of trade, dearest, or—well, just tricks in general?”

“Ah, you know what I mean, Ephraim Marcusson,” she retorted with asperity. “And now listen to a little common sense. Your poor wife never complains but that doesn’t justify neglecting her outrageously. Try to remember that Isabella is only a girl. A few months hence she’ll be buried in your forsaken wilderness without so much as a single little fling at life. Upon my soul, I often regret my coercing her into this mess!”

“Oh, you didn’t tell me that——” Ephraim began in a queer voice. “I mean, I hadn’t thought, under the circumstances, that coercion was necessary.”

Halvor wisely dropped her glowing eyes. “Well, as you yourself might say, why should I have told you? Perhaps I trembled for your little quixotic notion if you had discovered a woman lived who didn’t particularly crave to marry you.”

“Oh!” Ephraim could be very eloquent in a single word. “So that’s how it was. Well—I’m afraid it’s past remedy now. By the way, where is the poor victim?”

“With Oline as usual. Veder might better have been her son. She takes most care of him. His mother detests him.”

“What?” Ephraim was thoroughly shocked. “You mean to say Oline detests her own child?”

Halvor broke into dry little chuckles not unlike the sound of winter leaves barked on a frozen surface. “How quaint men are!” she giped. “How delightfully primitive their simple logic! The offspring of one’s flesh no matter how joylessly begotten must be precious—welcome beyond reason, health or comfort? Dear me, of course! But these excellent tribal shibboleths notwithstanding I’m forced to admit poor Oline is in bed from an overdose of something that good little mammas never take.”

“You can’t be serious? Yet such a jest is scarcely in keeping with your general principles. Why, good heavens, the woman can’t be sane—and after all John did for her, too.” Ephraim bounded from his seat and, to his mother’s malicious enjoyment, strode in agitation to the window.

“Yes, it is frightfully ungrateful, isn’t it?” she pursued ironically. “Imagine paying three thousand dollars for a woman only to have her balk like that! But then, perhaps we shouldn’t forget that Sunholme brought a very decent profit—and wasn’t there something besides the bride won from Jaegar Von Barholme?”

“Mother, you astonish me!” Like all men of loose morals Ephraim expected delicacy and circumspection in the conduct of his own women. Licence might be amusing in the lower orders but any departure from good taste was intolerable in a woman of refinement. Genuinely affronted he stared at the irritating lady trying to penetrate the real motive behind her scandalous utterances. For, of course, here was some diabolic feminine guile at work! But for what?

Smiling serenely Halvor pressed her advantage. “Ah, I quite agree that to find a woman speaking the truth bluntly is shocking—almost as shocking as the horrid crime of disputing the amours of a husband! And, considering the interminable strictures bearing on the conduct of females it’s astonishing anyone should attempt either misdemeanour. Perhaps it’s the country. As Isabella says, our poor little vanities and polite lies lose significance here. Which enheartens me to ask again what you were up to this week-end?”

He did not reply immediately. For something in the street had captured his attention. His fingers, which a moment before were drumming idly on the pane, spread like the talons of a hunting hawk descending for a kill. “I thought you said Isabella was downstairs with Oline?” he flared indignantly.

“Why, so I did,” she replied amiably, inwardly elated that some innocent act of his wife should thus affect him. “Of course she may have had other plans in mind. I didn’t trouble to ask. Have you, by any chance, discovered the miscreant crossing the street?”

For answer she was whisked to the window to enjoy a most timely jest. Yes, there in plain sight of all the hotel gossips was Isabella, unusually attractive in scarlet dolman and hat, smiling adorably upon the young man who was certainly dawdling over the pretty business of helping her down from a smart cutter!

How priceless! Halvor found difficulty dissembling her intense delight in the amusing situation. The most carefully plotted scheme could not have provoked a more desirable reaction in her volatile son. Hitherto indifferent,

the vision of Isabella smiling upon another instantly roused in him the rage of a Sultan discovering an intrigue in his harem. "So that's the poor victim pining away through neglect!" he snapped, glaring at the pair below. "And who the devil is he? A house guest I suppose!"

"Ah no! There's no such person here." His unnatural parent hastened to rout the comforting possibility. "No—I've played whist with all our gentlemen, and never saw the man here."

Which was true. But she might have added that Dr. Hartman had introduced the stranger to herself and Isabella at church last Sunday. An admirable young man she had thought him, too. For, according to the old doctor, Oscar Beaur had succeeded despite the obstacles of poverty and a strange language in obtaining his medical degree in Ontario and immediately came west to join his benefactor. A very nice young man whose admiration for Isabella was instantaneous, as she quickly noted.

Ephraim resumed his tapping on the pane with comical violence. "Well, I'm happy to see you exaggerated my wife's loneliness. But no doubt in light of what you told me she prefers the liberty afforded by neglect."

"Oh, quite possibly," Mrs. Marcusson assented cheerfully. "I've heard Oline sigh to that effect. You know my dear, women are changing. The wretched creatures no longer see the universe in terms of a husband and puling babies! But to get back to my original, very simple question—why not tell me the worst while we're still alone?"

He flew into a fine rage, striding about the room, black as a whirlwind, choking on suppressed invectives. A good fight, or a fling at some susceptible mortal with the whiplash of his tongue, would have relieved his pent-up emotion. His mother, he knew, was impervious to any such stage effects, so thoroughly had the father prepared her for the son. The one time he had known her the least weak, was in the case of Isabella, which he now surmised had risen from sympathy with her, rather than concern for him.

Well, that too was more comprehensible now he had seen his wife in the rarefied atmosphere of another's indubitable admiration. He also began to suspect that a modicum of justice tintured his mother's bitter sarcasm. At least he was forced to admit the absurdity of his fixed idea that none but he might safeguard Isabella's well-being. But then, had he really considered her individual well-being at the time of his grandiloquent gesture? No, he had not. He saw that now with clarity as annoying as his belated realization of Isabella's unquestionable grace and charm. Why, she had something about her as virginal and delicately aloof as a young birch-tree in spring.

He glanced almost appealingly at his mother. But she—as he might have known, seemed utterly intent upon her sampler: waiting with characteristic patience, for his temper to die for lack of fuel to fan it. And, of course, she would return to the initial attack with the persistence of a gadfly.

Nor was he long left in doubt. Quietly, yet with unmistakable firmness she said: “Suppose you tell now about that dance. I’m sure it will be highly illuminating.”

He caught his breath sharply, and to the watchful mother it seemed that each line of his good-looking face registered frank disgust. “Devil take it, mother! How should I explain what mystifies myself? You’ve never seen one of these Red River dances as the Métis dance them. It’s delirium. It’s madness of the most damning sort. You begin in a dream and end in a nightmare. At the start you desire only to express your joy in living, yet finish with a ravishing hunger for life itself. Try to imagine the scene: A big friendly loghouse, such as our peasants build in the poorer districts back home, welcomes you with gaiety and light. As you enter, a chorus of voices chimes ‘Ho! Ho! Ho! Welcome, little brother, welcome!’ and the hoarse fiddles scraping away ceaselessly seem to be calling just to you. Everything is misty and humid. The light, a pale borealis cast by the tallow burners, plays magic with the guests who are squatting on the floor against the walls, or whirling to the medley of the dance. And in the dim corner opposite the gaping fireplace is a four-poster bed spread with a red blanket that reflects the glow of the firelight.

“Imagine, too, the sound of weaving feet, agile, tireless, the shock of heels obliterated by soft moccasin leather. Imagine the smell of smouldering pine logs, sweating human bodies, cooking food and shaggy dogs; all to the tune of laughing young voices and the gleam of passionate dark eyes——”

“Well, well, to the point, my son.” Halvor’s slippered foot beat an impatient tattoo. “Out with it, who is she and what does she want?”

Ephraim winced, a circumstance so exceptional it rekindled her former grave misgivings. This escapade, whatever its nature, must be worse than usual, she mused, and felt sincerely grateful her daughter-in-law was as high hearted as she was proud. Grateful—yet swiftly resentful as well! For if women were less patient men might acquire a modicum of moral sense. But before any of this found utterance in words Ephraim had recovered his customary provocative manner. “What does she want, you ask? Ah! You would never suspect it of a dangerous siren, madam. But upon my soul, it’s bread and butter she wants. Just bread and butter! Which less irrelevantly than you may suppose, puts me in mind of John for whom I have an important message. So if you’ll excuse me and kindly explain to Isabella

I'm still alive and likely to remain so to her misfortune, I'll dash away to offer the Boyens the bread-seeking siren for a nursemaid. Strange though it may seem I object to my wife in that role so continuously."

.....

But John Boyen was not easily persuaded at any time, especially in matters that entailed any expenditure however slight. With the righteous austerity of little souls he demanded definite proofs that the girl, whose praises Ephraim sang so glibly, was a respectable character. Why for all they knew she might be one of those diseased thieving wenches who preyed upon the streets! And even if this were not the case, what guarantee had he that she was reasonably clean and thrifty and fit to have about the house? That is, if he conceded the necessity of a nursemaid at all. True, Oline was a bit under the weather at present, but that would pass. Queer wasn't it, that civilized women should produce their progeny in gastric fits and tears.

Ephraim was guilty of a forthright yawn. Oline and her progeny might be swallowed in Limbo for all he cared. Women who mated and nested with the regularity of sparrows ought to be hung! Reasons far removed from sympathy for John's wife made him press with patience the claims of Marie Batoche. She was young and strong and of a highly entertaining disposition. Mrs. Boyen would be sure to like her. At this point he fetched a sigh that might have done justice to the theatre. "Poor Oline! It's to be hoped her friends exaggerate her delicate condition. As you say all this may pass—if she lives!"

John stopped thunderstruck, in the midst of making out a bill of sale, by the insolence of the remark. Why, not only was it in bad taste to suggest the possibility of such mishap in the Boyen menage but in effect it accused John himself of bad judgment! And John was as jealous of his sound judgment as of his health, his food and the sacred authority of a husband. He laid down his pen, fitting it carefully into a wire holder, and straightening a waistcoat inclined to betray an increasing paunch, he frowned severely: "Now, Ephraim, as you know, it's not my habit to joke about such matters. I might even say I find it thoroughly distasteful." He paused, fingering the heavy gold chain suspended like a petrified snake across his broad chest, and fixed cold, unblinking blue eyes upon his erratic partner. Ephraim, noting these insignificant yet somehow repellent characteristics found himself thinking how intolerable the touch of those hands must be on sensitive flesh—how destructive of romance those calculating eyes!

But John was off now at a good clip: "Yes, Ephraim, such things ought not to be subject to jest. However, let that pass. But since you introduced

personalities into a purely business discussion I shall avail myself of the opportunity to point out once more the dangers of certain pastimes to which you seem addicted. Rumours, my dear Ephraim, can be very destructive in their influence upon trade.”

Ephraim laughed, but with an inflection not altogether pleasant to hear. “True! True! And we might add middle-class morality is safe as rotten eggs! But may I remind you that we were discussing Marie Batoche? Perhaps I should have mentioned at the start that if we take the girl off his hands, Isidore, her brother, agrees to bring us his winter catch of furs.”

“*Perhaps* you should have said so before! My dear Ephraim, why engage in pointless arguments with something so important left unsaid? Naturally, that alters everything. Isidore Batoche is said to be a splendid trapper. Upon my soul, I can’t see why you couldn’t have mentioned the furs long ago and spared us this disagreeable—I might almost say contentious, argument.”

Ephraim rose to leave, smiling now in the slow derisive manner which never failed to exasperate John. “Oh, I may have been thinking of my own wife,” he said. “You know, we Marcussons are peculiar in more ways than one. It hasn’t appealed to me particularly, having Isabella playing nursemaid to your son.”

A remark John resented so deeply he repeated it to Oline when he came to kiss her good night, as he dutifully did upon retiring. To his amazement she burst out laughing. Behaviour so singular struck him as abnormal, and besides reminded him unpleasantly of certain dangers Dr. Hartman had stressed on his last visit. Well, paternity had its price, he reflected generously. One had to be patient with women. “There, there, my dear!” He patted Oline’s soft white shoulder, sighing despite himself. “There, there, I don’t wonder you are amused. As though a childless woman could help becoming attached to our Veder. Sometimes Ephraim annoys me to the breaking-point!”

CHAPTER IV

SPRING came early that year, with driving head winds and steady sunshine to rout the ice and snow. In April Ephraim sent his wife and mother down to the new loghouse which had been built for them on the banks of Little River, some miles north of Maple Bluffs. A delayed shipment of miscellaneous goods from St. Paul necessitated his remaining behind, but he hoped to join his family in time to spend a few quiet days before beginning operations on the lake.

Several families were leaving for the new settlement at this time, and Oline, dreading to be cut off from her intimate friends with her accouchment so near, begged to be permitted to go in their train. John would not hear of it. His arrangements were made for a month hence and the chatter of excitable women was not likely to change him. Moreover, as he told Mrs. Marcusson with patient dignity, he detested the ministrations of strangers, and Oline knew exactly how his food must be prepared.

When the little caravan was gone, taking among others Dr. Hartman whose bluff kindliness was in itself a tonic, Oline relapsed into the old habit of morbid introspection. Completely estranged from the life she lived she withdrew more deeply into her strange dark thoughts, finding comfort in the age-old hypocrisy that happiness was not an end in itself nor peace dependent upon physical harmony. A pitiful substitute for the joy she had once dreamed of, yet welcome and jealously maintained after such futile rebellion of the senses.

This brooding passivity puzzled and sometimes almost frightened Marie Batoche. From the first she thought her mistress a strange, unnatural woman. Young, obviously good-looking in her normal state, with sufficient means and a husband incapable of infidelity—a few random experiments having satisfied Marie of that—yet she consistently displayed the dubitable resignation of a prisoner. But yes, it was enough to make the good God angry. For, consider, she did not even caress her child! The little Veder followed his golden-haired mother with pathetic adoration and never got more than a desultory pat on the little head!

Not quite two years old the child was pathetically grave, his large grey eyes seemed to beg for affection, and his sensitive well-turned mouth rarely smiled. Spindly and awkward, given to colds in the head and a silent way of crying that vexed his father, the tragic child was a perpetual reminder to Oline of the cowardice that makes unwilling motherhood possible. There

were times, too, when he stared into the street with such sweet gravity and stillness it set her rebellious soul crying for the pale wraith of the child she once had dreamed. . . .

Marie Batoche gave up trying to understand such a mistress and dwelt instead upon thoughts of the dashing M'sieu Marcusson—m'sieu the captain, as the Métis now called Ephraim, whose acquisition of one of those modern marvels, a steam-boat, to ply the Big Lake was a seven days' wonder. M'sieu the captain danced divinely, played the fiddle to the very rhythm of the heart and had a way of smiling which put the years to flight.

There was none like him. Always must she see him as first he had dawned upon her sight. *Dieu Merci!* How like a young god he had seemed to her then, striding out from the dark forest with unforgettable grace! How quickly she had forgotten cold and hunger and the terrifying moans of her wounded brother lying on the pallet behind her. Only a moment before she had formed the desperate resolution to set fire to the hut that she and Isidore might perish quickly rather than starve, snowbound in a fury-ridden wilderness where no help was forthcoming. But the good God had sent him. *Oui*, he had sent him to her, singing! And he had kissed her gently, as one kisses a frightened child, chafing her numbed hands and face, and teasing her gaily about a burnt-wood complexion gone pale as withered dreams. No, there was none like m'sieu the captain. . . . Even poor Isidore had caught the infection of his cheerful courage and jested between smothered groans while his wounds were dressed. *Oui*, even after m'sieu had vanished into the night to fetch Baptiste and his dog team the comfort of his presence had seemed to linger behind to help them through the hours of waiting.

But that dawn——! Never, though she lived to be the great age of Black Crow her uncle, would she ever forget that journey down through the silent woods powdered in gleaming snow and hung in blue shadows. With a sliver of moon winking slyly at a steel-rimmed rising sun, and m'sieu's strong arm about her, his lips seeking her own. . . . No! M'sieu the captain could not kiss her like that and love the calm, reserved lady they called his wife. *Non*, it was a crime to condemn her passionate lover to the frigid embraces of a woman like that.

But the boldest dreams of Ephraim were destined to swift demise and eruptive ends. After installing Marie with every show of tenderness in the Boyen household he promptly forgot all about her. So it seemed, at least until a month or more later when she ran into his arms in the dark hotel corridor to be caught so closely and kissed so ardently she forgave him in one wild heartbeat and vowed never to doubt, much less upbraid him, by a single thought again. That was weeks past, and many a pale moon had

witnessed a like meeting since then. . . . Now the decorous wife she both pitied and despised was gone, and with her the sharp-eyed old madam, m'sieu's mother, whom she frankly feared and as heartily respected.

Oui, but she was glad they were gone, for sometimes a nervous terror, which almost obliterated her secret exultation, seized hold of her at the mere thought of those two clear-eyed women. It was easier now to dwell on her glorious conquest while she pursued her dull tasks, to relive those delightful moments when m'sieu had singled her out from admiring groups of young women—even grand company women whose eyes followed m'sieu the captain with sly, speculative glances. And most precious thought of all, Captain Marcusson had actually promised to take her to the last Bonnet Hop of the season. Never, in her most daring aspirations, had she conceived of the possibility of attending a real ball in Osborne Barracks, with Her Majesty's soldiers in scarlet and gold to dazzle one's sight! It was incredible really. Even now she would think it a dream but for the flame coloured dress that awaited her in m'sieu the captain's rooms.

Yesterday he had shown it to her. Yesterday, in the pale blue dusk he had taken her into the quiet room with its wide window facing the busy street, and there draped on madam's chair was the lovely shimmering thing. A caravan of dog teams had fled by with chiming silver bells, and the rumble of a Red River cart followed after, but these common sounds had reached her as from a great distance, muted and mellowed like the voice of a stream heard in the depths of a wood. And she had slipped into his arms to stand wrapped in wonder, feeding her beauty-loving soul on the marvellous gift that measured his thought of her.

Sweeter than music, more wooing than any stream, was the call of his heart beating beneath her smooth olive cheek. Thanks to the good God perhaps she was lovely as he had said when the folds of that dress enveloped her slim body. Her feet, she knew, had seemed like tiny red buds in those funny little slippers he had ordered all the way from the big American city. . . .

Stirred to an ecstasy which must find outlet, Marie laid down the garment she was mending for her mistress and caught little Veder, who leaned against her knees, to her agitated breast. Perhaps it was the first time deep passion touched him. Startled, his infant mouth curved for tears and, more startling to Marie, the look of fear was instantly wiped out by a shining rapture as the little creature flung his arms about her soft bare neck. That checked the madness in her blood—sobered and challenged something deeper. *Mon Dieu!* How starved for love the little one was! How lonely!

Closer she pressed him, kissing the silky brown curls at his pale temples, and the waxen cheeks as none had kissed him.

Like rivers of ice Oline's voice reached her. "You are excited, Marie. Put the child down. Put him down instantly I say!" She spoke with unwarranted harshness, for the little by-play had struck home sharply, and she had, moreover, a curious dread of this sloe-eyed girl with her ripe, tantalizing body and simple primitive reasoning. Indeed, there were times when she almost hated poor Marie for epitomizing those powers she despised in herself, thinking contemptuously the girl was as impassive and impersonal as a field yearning for harvest.

Marie, on the other hand, without divining the exact thought, was nevertheless acutely aware of her resentment and in just proportion afraid. So now she set the child down hastily, the blank look characteristic of aboriginal blood superseding the charming vivacity of a richer inheritance. "Oui, madam, it is exciting to think how soon we must go—make trails for the wilderness away from everything."

"Oh! But perhaps you would rather stay, Marie." Oline put the question with cautious hope. "It will be very dull out there—away from everything. Mr. Boyen might find you something here if you prefer."

Marie's dark eyes narrowed to hide an angry flash. Thought she: Neither madam, with her unnatural brooding ways, nor m'sieu her pompous husband, nor yet the austere Marcusson ladies should separate her from the love of m'sieu her captain. No, none but death should accomplish that!

A slow smile lightened the sombre fire of her eyes and a warm flush overspread the burnt-wood satin of neck and brow. "But madam knows better," she replied huskily. "How should I leave at such a time? For sure *le bon Dieu* would be very displeased! Madam needs me—that is enough. But it is exciting—the making of a little town that one day may be a big city like this. Me, I find it wonderful—like the little child in his mother's arms; one day he is a fine big man with bold thoughts and a will to make a new world."

"And a lust to destroy and cheat and betray!" Oline cried out bitterly, drawn against her will from the precarious peace of her brooding thoughts. "Wonderful! What is there wonderful for women in a man's world? A poor creature coveted for her body, betrayed into bondage, and destined to pain! The she-wolf knows more joy in her whelping and freedom of choice than a woman!" She broke off abruptly, annoyance and bitterness turned to laughter by the girl's horrified expression. "Come, come, Marie, I'm not bewitched." She smiled. "Here, give me your mending and go on with

packing. Be sure to put the roll of linen near the top. It may be wonderful to have a baby, but not comfortable on a prairie trail!”

CHAPTER V

FOR once Oline's darkest dread was not realized. John was amiably content to travel at a snail's pace, and the weather was most propitious. Then, too, Marie sang to keep their spirits high, and besides keeping little Veder happy, managed to raise a laugh from the master himself, who usually frowned upon her simple jokes. For thirty miles, over ruts and hummocks and steaming marshes behind the tireless oxen which John had wisely chosen, all went moderately well, and then without any particular onslaught of pain, Oline realized she must once again seek shelter by the roadside.

John was so manifestly vexed he sought to argue the point before her maidservant. Whereupon, the astonishing girl put off servitude with a bound and in scathing tones told him to mind his own business. "But yes, m'sieu knows nothing at all about such things, to talk like a fool. Why, it is to laugh!" said she, putting her arms about Oline protectively. "*Oui*, now you listen to Marie, m'sieu. About a mile from here is the house of Madam Gauthier; she is very kind—I know—I have been here before with Isidore following the fox lines—*Oui*, so now you take the horse which has been eating the back of the cart for thirty miles, and ride on and tell madam what to expect."

"My good girl, must I remind you——" John Boyen puffed a little with unctuous disapproval and was rudely cut short.

"*Mon, Dieu!* Remind me later, m'sieu. The baby, he will come on the road and madam die—go! Go, m'sieu! I can drive these black brutes as well as anyone. But yes, now is not the time for the grand manner!"

Too dazed for other course, John unhitched the sorrel mare he had purchased for almost nothing from an improvident soldier, and started down the trail in obedient haste. As for Marie, she demonstrated her ability to bedevil and force a pace from the oxen which set Oline laughing despite the nauseating spasms that racked her body with ominous regularity. Thus driven, the sweating brutes just managed to get Oline safely within Madam Gauthier's odorous hut before her second son made his hasty entrance into an unfriendly world.

Madam Gauthier, a full-blooded Indian, gave rise to grunting admiration of the white woman who conducted her natural obligations so sensibly. John, too, thawed swiftly when the troublesome business was ended and Marie thrust forward a squirming bundle which to his unbiased eyes appeared excellent proof that Oline's output was improving, even if her habits

continued lamentably erratic. Indeed, he melted to the point of expressing approval and hunting for a little gift. A magnanimity which won him no response. Oline, strange woman, shut her eyes and turned to the wall; froze at his approach and plainly indicated a preference for peace.

Oh, how she wanted peace! To sleep—to escape the grinning faces bearing down upon her from a difficult world. She could not sink too fast into the welcome oblivion which must be all too short. How she wished them all away—but no—Marie brought the baby. And John, offended by her involuntary shudder, smirked benignly. “But, my dear, you’ve not seen what a fine child he is.”

“I’ll see enough of him! Take him away—oh! take him away.”

Determination in every line of her vast bulk, Madam Gauthier waddled forward. “What for you upset the little mother? Sure, she makes bad milk and the papoose he die,” she grumbled, shoving John aside oblivious of his righteous dignity. But hardly were the words uttered than a strange expression leapt to her face and she snatched the child from Marie’s arms. “Little white one, *petit voyageur*—the long shadow falls early.” She crooned gutturally to the baby as she drove the two adults ahead of her into the murky lean-to that served for a kitchen. To John the crazy mutterings of a slovenly squaw meant less than nothing, but Marie, simple soul, crossed herself quickly.

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Left to herself Oline dismissed them from her mind; her husband with his heavy humour and heavy hands; foolish Marie of the yearning eyes and full-blown breasts; Veder, poor child, seal and symbol of useless sacrifice; and the second son wrung from her protesting flesh; all dismissed with a grateful sigh together with the rock-faced squaw whose small black eyes were strangely wise and big brown hands incredibly gentle. Delivered of her human burden she was suddenly, and with astonishing ease, relieved of all consciousness of time and space.

She was free! She was young! She was back in Sunholme, in the dear Norwegian mountains, before its green fields and lofty ridges had known John Boyen’s cold appraising Danish eyes. It was midsummer and she was on her way to church, singing for sheer joy of living. Such a foolish little song, somehow glorified in the morning sunshine that turned to silver mist the dew upon the hills.

How shall I know you, Love?
Aye, how shall I know you?
With trumpet or timbrel and dance
Seldom you come—
Thief that you are!
How shall I know you then,
Love, when you come?

Foolish little song! But the sun shone down with added brilliance on the calm green fields, on the sheep cropping the mottled slopes, and the tall, stern peaks beyond caught up the happy sound. A quiver, half ecstasy, half pain, passed through Oline's tired consciousness. Why was memory so persistent? Why must she hear again, so clearly, his dear voice catching her song from the clouds, and tossing the answer gaily and gallantly like a rose at her feet:

Oh! you will know me well,
Sweet, when I come!
Lightfoot, setting the dawn aflame,
Earth, and your heart the same—
Oh! you will know me well,
Sweet, when I come.

Yes, she had known him well. As he leaped down from the grey crags that converged on her trail, hill and heath and cobalt fiord had burst into white rapture. And his laughter, blithesome and free as an eagle, had lifted her timid heart from its slumberous calm into the flaming skies his magic created. . . .

With a song such as the stars sing together and the sure, exalted flight of eagles ascending the blue, so had love come to them.

Terrible as the march of dead planets through midnight space had come the end. . . .

Slow tears stole down Oline's pale cheeks. How intolerable to live only for visions that tormented and burned. How gladly would she die to escape the haunting scorn of Jaegar's eyes as they burned into her soul when she told him about John, lying stupidly to save him deeper regret. Oh! what did it matter. She was weak as always—a coward ten thousand years old—a hag with a fruitful body neither self-loathing nor hate could kill! Why could she not forget as others forgot—those countless millions of sheeplike women bartered in the marriage market upheld by church and state. It would be good to forget. Perhaps in the wilderness with its clean air and primal atmosphere she might find a measure of peace. Perhaps the dark forests of this strange hinterland might form a barricade against which unwelcome ghosts should not prevail.

Thin and shrill and indescribably pathetic, the wail of her newborn son shattered the cloud banks of her troubled dreams. Teeth fast on bloodless lips to keep back a protesting cry, Oline heard and shuddered. To what conceivably intelligent purpose was this life and life-bearing? This breeding like flies to die unknown and unknowing? Was it all merely biological chance? A shot in the dark that somehow lighted a conflagration to thunder down the centuries? Were ninety-nine sorrows the seeds of a single joy? Or was joy only an illusion, a shadow cast by a dancing death's-head on the smoke-screen of the senses? Was there no actual intelligence in the cruel exactitude of marching days and years?

Oh, but she was weary, and would fain be done with thinking. Dear God, once she had raised her prayers as lightly as a bird lifts his song at dawning. Now she was worn with the weariness of ages clinging like leeches to her scant twenty years—worn and afraid of the orderly cruelty of cause and effect. Afraid of the inscrutable Weaver of the Years—terribly afraid—and yet deep down in her consciousness, muted as the irresistible music of Jaegar's laughter, something wrestled with despair. "Dear God," she moaned, "let me sleep and forget—sleep and forget! And let me awake in a world divorced from the past!"

CHAPTER VI

SOME months later Oline thought of this prayer as she stood looking down at the tiny grave under the maple-trees stretching in stately array to the freshly ploughed field before her log dwelling. He was dead, the poor babe whose feeble wails had penetrated her tragic dreams. To what end had he lived at all? None loved him into being; none missed him.

John, at first gratified that his second son should give promise of hardihood never exhibited by Veder, lost interest as soon as the baby began failing. He was astonished, but not grieved, and in his usual claw-hammer conscientiousness inquired of Dr. Hartman—in her presence, of course—whether Oline’s youth and the closeness of her pregnancy had any bearing on the matter.

A rueful smile lighted the gravity of her face at the recollection of the doctor’s swift chagrin and honest dismay on her account. Amusing creatures, men! Amusing, too, in the light of his reply that John should obediently pack his bags for a business trip up the lakes.

He had been gone two months now, since when she had discovered the rugged beauty round about and come to recognize a rustic charm in the big log house which at first had seemed gloomy and uninviting. A substantial-looking house as became its master, “The Maples” was built with an eye to utility rather than comfort. The furnishings were of the simplest, for transportation was difficult. But, true to Danish foresight, John had procured the services of a Swedish cabinet maker to build those necessary household pieces for “The Maples”, and Captain Marcusson’s “Glen Haven”, which were too cumbersome and costly to resign to primitive packtrains.

The rooms were large and, for the times, exceedingly well lighted. John’s study and the living-room, with its six-foot fireplace, had already served as a welcome meeting place for the isolated settlers who depended upon the merchant for so much. Once when an itinerant preacher came down from lower Fort Garry to christen Illiana Petrovna’s granddaughter and marry a pair of rustic lovers suffering qualms of belated conscience. And again when her own small son lay dead. But on that sad occasion there was no minister. Oscar Beur, whose serious mien seemed to fit him for the task, read the Lutheran service and Isabella and Marie sang the litany.

To the desperately poor immigrants “The Maples” and “Glen Haven” represented the height of elegance and solid comfort. Envy seldom coloured their simple thoughts. For did they not enjoy a vicarious affluence in merely

recounting the marvels of these rich houses? Silverplate and glassware and fine linen for the broad tables fashioned from native maples were here for them to share on any visit. And there were lamps, too, hung with shades and crystal pendants that gave a lovely welcoming light. Curtains of dyed cotton shaded the windows, pictures adorned the walls, and books added the last note of refined culture.

To spend an hour in the comfort of the merchant's hospitable home where there was always an abundance of bread for the hungry made the struggling homesteader forget his irksome dependence and dream of better days to come. The old-world atmosphere and Oline's genuine courtesy made them forget how closely her husband controlled their destiny: how everything they had to sell, or must buy, passed through the hands of the two merchants whose monopoly of lake and road freighters made them veritable dictators.

True, there were occasional upstarts, who even thus early in the day, prophesied hard things of these men who exercised such arbitrary authority through the powers of inherited wealth. But their foolish babbling was quickly silenced by others who remembered what a harsh, unrelieved existence they had led before the coming of the energetic pair. To be sure they were overcharged for everything, but at least they might enjoy an occasional luxury impossible before. And at the present rate of expansion they were reasonably sure of a government highway in a year or two. Meanwhile they must abide by their leaders who, when all was said and done, had their general welfare at heart. Yes, indeed, many a settler had either John or Ephraim to thank for a cow or team of oxen obtained on long term payments. And it was they who imported from Dakota the big hounds which were such a help ridding the district of wolves and thieving coyotes.

But to-day Oline had none of this in mind as she mused beside her tiny son's grave. She was thinking of Marie's strange disappearance two weeks ago and equally strange reappearance this morning. Her glossy black hair in tangled disarray and her clothes torn and dirty, she had stumbled in over the threshold more dead than alive.

Iliana Petrovna frying doughnuts over a roaring fire was holding forth on the wickedness of kings. "From Saul to the Tzar, war and wickedness, poverty and vice have marked the rule of kings! From one source we come, little mother, and may I be cursed if I see why the few should be fat and the many lean as crows! . . . God bless us, what have we here? Why, Marie! Here, here, let me help you my girl."

But Marie had thrust them both away. She wanted no help. She had run a long way, that was all; and in the night a black bear had frightened her. She

would change her clothes and rest a little then go on with the coat she had been knitting for little Veder.

“God bless you, little sister, so you shall,” Illiana had soothed. “But first you must eat something, and tell little mistress how you came to go chasing bears and let her think you dead for so many days.”

“I had a message. Black Crow brought it when he fetched us the moosemeat—I had to go.”

“You had a message from up north, little sister?” Illiana Petrovna had pursued softly with sly persistence. “A message from the camps of the Red Hunters, I suppose?” At which Marie’s French blood had taken fire: “*Mon Dieu*, why not? For why should I not get a message from my people? What do you know to make you doubt it, Illiana Petrovna?”

“Tsk! Tsk! What should I know, little sister—a poor widow with a heartbroken son in the captain’s service? Bless us, what should I know but that the camps are rich in furs and other treasure.”

Which seemingly inoffensive rejoinder had sent the poor girl running from the room and up the stairs to the unfinished loft where, in a corner curtained off by canvas, was her bed.

Oline stirred uneasily as she tried to review calmly the astonishing dialogue which followed: “Now what did you mean by that Illiana Petrovna? I shall thank you to tell me the truth—yes, why did you mention Captain Marcusson?”

“God bless you, little mother! Who would tell the truth if not I? Would I not eat ashes from your hand to keep a roof over my little Greta’s head?”

“Well, speak it then, quickly. Just what do you know about the camp up north?”

“Little mother, I too had a message, not from Black Crow—from my son when he came to fetch the master away. In the camps is a brown woman, very beautiful, in her way—oh, tsk, tsk! You will perhaps guess the rest, little mother? You must know Captain Marcusson stops there to buy furs. . . .”

“Yes, yes, but what has that to do with poor Marie?”

“O-oh—what, indeed? What indeed! You are discreet, little mother, *very* discreet, as becomes a good woman.”

Oline leaned against the bole of the young maple whose whispering leaves shaded the tiny grave, and soul-sick, considered the ironic mission to which she was committed. Someone must acquaint Isabella with the disagreeable facts before public rumour and native vengeance found

occasion to destroy utterly her flowering happiness. A thankless task, more to the taste of Illiana than a woman whose heart cried out against needless pain.

Isabella had been so radiant those last few weeks in the city. From complete indifference Ephraim had developed an absorbing interest in his wife which showed itself in a thousand charming gestures. Unlike John, his capacity for happiness was spontaneous and inventive. Hardly a day passed but he thought of some delightful surprise to which the full force of his own gaiety added zest and grace. He discovered posts of interest and reeled off history with the gusto of an actor. He picked up quaint gifts and bestowed them in such ingenious fashion the giver merged with the magic of the gift and left no hint of obligation. Even the luxurious fur coat he had imported at scandalous cost carried with it none of John's heavy grandiloquence. No wonder Isabella, so long a beggar at the gates of her husband's affection, had suddenly bloomed into joyous life.

Strange destinies. Here was she finding temporary peace and healing in welcome neglect, rejoicing to be free of clock-work amours which every instinct of womanhood told her were basely immoral despite the sanction of stupid society. And there was Isabella living in a precarious paradise on the belated bounty of a gallant who scattered his favour with the lavish hand of a medieval prince. No understanding these things really. Neither justice nor virtue had any part in this tangled web of human destinies—curious diablerie of an inscrutable Weaver!

Oline passed a hand over her sea-blue eyes as if to brush away unclean mists, and almost simultaneously imagined a sympathetic reaction in the stirring woods about her. Strange, how the quaint notion seemed to endow the quiet grove with living beauty never divined before. Beautiful trees. Proudly triumphant in scarlet and gold they challenged the withering world. Winter winds might toss and torment their naked boles and quivering branches, but still there would cling about them the aureole of their triumphant souls.

Strange, these vagrant reflections should induce a swift poignant compassion for the dead child lying at her feet. Poor child, his welcome had been meagre, but his rest was glorified by the richest pageantry nature had at her command. Tears stung the mother's eyes, "Small Olaf, forgive me," she whispered. "Sleep well, little child, in your quiet bed."

A gentle wind stirring the bright, brittle leaves, brought a sudden feeling of vast relief as though the jealous spirit of Nature had understood and accepted her tardy regrets. She felt braver, cleaner, better able to cope with the difficult errand she was committed to perform.

CHAPTER VII

EVEN thus early "Glen Haven" gave promise of the distinctive charm it was destined to possess. Nicely proportioned, its peeled and stained logs displaying the joiner's art, with wide porches at front and rear, the house was more like a rich man's hunting-lodge than a homesteader's dwelling. It harmonized and sat at ease in the grand landscape.

At its back wide fields, still untouched by plough, raced eagerly toward the mysterious dark forests that blocked the western horizon. In front an oblong strip was planted in hardy vegetables and enclosed with a border of seedling poplars, silver birches and wild plum-trees. To the right, on the banks of Little River, which lay like a white scimitar on the mottled meadow, there stood the frameworks of a barn, storage shed and smokehouse, all apparently speeding towards rapid completion.

Oline marked these signs of careful occupancy and thrift with rising astonishment. Ephraim was seldom home, yet here were proofs of forethought and extraordinary talent for selecting expert labour to carry out his plans. It was impossible not to compare these neat buildings in their orderly placement with John's makeshift barns which cluttered up and destroyed the beauty of the lake front and would be utilized, she knew, until their initial cost was totally submerged in compounding profits. As for planting a garden—why take a man from tanning hides or curing fish to engage in such unnecessary endeavours when at least a dozen poverty-stricken settlers stood anxiously waiting to barter potatoes and onions and turnips for the required flour, sugar and salt?

Ah, well, she had her maple-trees and the shining mirror of the lake. Yes, and one day Veder would be old enough to help her plant the flowers she loved to remind her a little of the gardens of Sunholme. The solace sprang to mind so spontaneously and induced such unusual elation she failed to mark how, for the first time, Veder shared her thoughts as a possible ally, and beloved Sunholme became a pattern for the new home in Canada.

But now, as she crossed the lush meadow, a sudden whirring of wings brought her sharply back to the teeming present. How plentiful are the grouse, she mused, following the scattering birds with smiling eyes. And suddenly the cloudless sky, broad fields and stately trees seemed to give tongue proclaiming the inexhaustible riches, inimitable beauty and boundless generosity of this marvellous country. "Look at me," waved the forest. "In myself a potential source of wealth and power, what do I not hide

and nourish in my dark heart?” “At me,” stirred the fields, “my virgin breast and fertile loins waiting to fulfil the harvest?” “And at me,” sang Little River, “for mine is the power that maketh alive. I am the spirit of the wild land; I am the leaping, plunging, free running soul of the West!”

Never before had the new homeland so moved her; never before had her heart gone out to it. And in the midst of her spiritual elation the grey thread of smoke, spinning upward from the wide chimney of “Glen Haven” house, caught her eye and brought back with added force the thankless duty she must perform.

Olga Peterson, the hired girl, a bulky, sandy-haired spinster with a squint, was beating a mat in the yard. With many apologies for the state of the house, which was being cleaned for the master, she led Oline into the living-room, less spacious but vastly more colourful than her own, for Ephraim abominated the utilitarianism which dominated all John’s transactions.

Indian runners, provided with specially constructed sleds, had transported at considerable cost the few treasures which seemed indispensable to the master of “Glen Haven”. Objects of hand-wrought brass, strange ivories and pieces of novel wood-carving introduced a pleasing old-world note into the new-world home. She perceived, too, that gossip was right about the wine-coloured velvet drapes at doors and windows. They produced an extraordinary effect. Reflecting the glow of the firelight, they gave to the room that rare atmosphere of luminosity and warmth which the great Dutch painters loved to reproduce. Without a vestige of that ostentation peculiar to the Victorian period, “Glen Haven” suggested people of breeding to whom the business of life was the calm pursuit of happiness.

Before the open fireplace sat the Marcusson ladies—Halvor spinning and singing in a thin, sweet treble, Isabella sewing on a small garment, a look of quiet joy in her face which caused Oline a swift, painful contraction of the heart. So painful, indeed, she paused irresolute just within the door and caught at a chair-back, for her knees were like water and everything swirled before her eyes and grew bewilderingly indistinct—everything but Isabella’s radiant face and the significant garment she was fashioning with such obvious tender pride. “God help me!” Oline’s silent prayer was wrung from a heart only now awaking to the democracy of sorrow, the universality of grief. She must find strength to smile, to laugh, to forget the disastrous thing she had come to say. Nay, more, she must find a way to dismiss it for ever. Dear God, don’t let anything destroy that look in Isabella’s face. Just to

behold it was rapture. It was creative faith—the shining something, that perhaps justified suffering, deception and despair. . . .

Isabella's glad exclamation abridged her indecision. "Why, Oline, this is delightful!"

Halvor, gently cynical, drew up another chair to the fireside. "Mistress Boyen, you glide in like a ghost. Come be seated, you need expect no sensible overtures from my daughter-in-law. The poor romantic acts as though a child had never before been expected in this much over-populated world."

"Well, my child was never expected in the world before," Isabella retorted gaily.

"Idiot!" snapped the old lady, and addressed herself to Oline. "So John has gone to the city? And the Russian gas-bag and her grandchild are disturbing the peace of your home?"

"Illiana Petrovna is a good worker, Mrs. Marcusson, her babbling is harmless. As for baby Greta, she's no trouble to anyone and pretty as a picture. She and Veder tumble about the house happy as puppies."

Halvor made a gesture of dismissal—Illiana's gossip was anathema to her aristocratic spirit. "Ephraim tells me Anton Holmquist has the makings of a shrewd trader if his temper wasn't so peppery. Apparently it's disastrous to the prestige of white men to display such weakness before the natives. Anton is at once too friendly and irascible."

"I suppose that's true," Oline replied, tempted to raise a question anent the relative dangers of various masculine follies. Halvor's sophisticated complaisance aroused the human instinct to tilt with sharp words. She would have liked to shake the little autocrat to the roots of her being. Yes, to state boldly the reasons for Marie's flight to the teepee of Black Crow, her uncle, who was; something of a power in the north, despite his concourse with the white men. But for Isabella's sake she smiled instead, saying as casually as pent-up emotion permitted, "Trading is brisk I hear. Will Captain Marcusson be home before freeze-up, or is he too busy outfitting the hunters?"

"Not too busy to toast the ladies!" exclaimed a gay voice behind them, and there, like a figure in a well-timed play, stood Ephraim framed in the doorway.

Instinctively Isabella's hand flew to her scarred cheek, but her head was high and her eyes glorious. To Oline the swift transfiguration of this quiet, reserved woman into one whose being shone like a star with the released fires of spiritual beauty was a miracle to make one humble.

Ephraim, keenly sensitive to every phase of loveliness, stopped transfixed, contending emotions in swift succession revealed in his face—astonishment, incredulity touched with chagrin to be taken unaware and lastly joy—joy that sprang golden as flame to match the shining miracle of Isabella's eyes.

In the long moment he stood irresolute, Oline found opportunity to study the man as never before. Amazing she should not have seen before how much he was like the fabled heroes of Norse tradition! Why, the man might have been some pagan God come to life—a gracile surging triumph! Dressed in the colourful garb of the French Voyageur, he looked a prince masquerading for some high benefit; and like a prince adulation and admiration were his by right. Oline found herself actually believing this as she watched the lively flow of feeling in his mobile countenance. No wonder women followed him as the planets follow the sun! Something infinitely older than civilization looked out from those smouldering dark eyes, gleamed in the masses of his vital black hair, sang in the thews of his tall, straight figure.

It was a curious moment—one of those epochal points of time in which the plodding mind gives way to some higher perception and in a trice much that was complexing and imponderable grows amazingly clear. Thus Halvor, gazing at her spell-bound son, perceived under the veneer of sophistry and recklessness the sober, deep-hearted man she had prayed he might be. While Oline, despite prejudice and sometimes dislike, was forced to admit that here stood a man whose measure she had never rightly taken.

Only Isabella, with glory in her eyes and blushes on her cheek, saw no change in him. To her, he was still the same—perfect and unattainable. But she felt that never before had she loved him so much, feared him so much, or perceived so clearly that to possess him was as impossible as to chain the sea or bind the winds in the tree-tops. What she worshipped now, and must ever worship in him, was an indefinable quality of being radiant as sunshine and free as the air. Yet it was she who first spoke: "Ephraim. . . . Oh, my dear—you quite took us by surprise!"

Oline wished herself gone, ashamed to witness their meeting. A nice scruple sorely wasted since for all they knew she might have been in limbo. Ephraim sprang past her, blind as a gale, and completely lost in the sweet temper of the moment, caught Isabella to his heart.

Halvor rose from her chair and with a sign to Oline slipped out of the room, closing the door quietly behind them. In the shadowy hall they paused, smiled at each other mistily and, without other exchange of confidence, hurried out to the vast kitchen beyond. There every sign pointed

to unusual activity. The stove roared, pots, skillets and kettles steamed and bubbled merrily, sending out tantalizing odours. Olga was buzzing from cupboard to cupboard like a big persistent brown and white wasp, firing orders to poor fuddled Hans the chore boy. “Ja, Ja, Ja!” he groused, “I hear you, but one thing at a time! How can I fetch the cream when I’m cutting sausage? Ja, why don’t you hire twins!”

Appraising the little comedy with amusement, Halvor addressed the busy wasp. “So, we’re serving the fatted calf to-day, Olga? And judging by the multitude of pots, there must be others beside the master come for the feast!”

“Four gentlemen, ma’m,” Olga admitted. “Leastwise, two might pass for such. The others—tsk! You know what those snuff-coloured Frenchmen are like, ma’m—soft in their words and kind of lonesome-eyed. They’re watering the teams now, ma’m. I was wondering should I put them in the back room or above stairs?”

“They will be quite comfortable in the loft, Olga—and don’t let their lonesome eyes mislead you! Now let me see—don’t forget to make the sauce Mr. Marcusson prefers with his meat, and bring up a bottle of white wine. The best we have, Olga. And, yes, lay another place at table. Mrs. Boyen will stay for the evening.

“Of course you must!” she reiterated to Oline, who was all for hastening away, pleading fear of the early dusk and a dozen duties at home. “All you say is nonsense. Hans will see you home safely. And Illiana Petrovna, wretch though she be, is careful of children. You must stay, my dear. Joys such as this seldom knock twice at any door!”

CHAPTER VIII

STRANGE rumours now got abroad concerning "The Maples". A half-drunken fisherman claimed to have heard unearthly wails from the house one dark autumn night as he passed on his way to Gaston Prix, four miles up Little River. As a matter of fact, he had intended asking lodgings at "The Maples", but the cries were so eerie, and as he neared the place a ghastly white face appeared at an upper window. Well, naturally the four miles to the Prix's were a mere nothing after that!

Poor man, he was cruelly scoffed at until a second nocturnal traveller, famous for sobriety, swore to a similar experience. Then, too, a while later practical Mrs. Prix, approaching "The Maples" in broad daylight, was startled out of her wits by a repetition of sounds she mistook for a scalping yell and fled pell-mell into the house, only to find Mistress Boyen calmly boiling plum jelly!

Illiana Petrovna, talking sedition as usual, was churning butter, with little Greta and Veder assiduously licking the top of the churn. A more guileless picture of domesticity would be hard to imagine. But Mrs. Prix, twittering with not unpleasant terror now she was safely inside, orated dramatically: "But, madam, the sound raised the goose-flesh in me! You're as good as dead, I said to myself, and the hair of your head at a heathen's filthy belt. Only savages or devils set to plague the wicked could make such a noise. It sent me flying I can tell you!"

"Now hear that, my little robbers," laughed Illiana, nudging the children with a wooden spoon. "You have lungs the Little Father of all the Russians would prize in his Cossacks! You yell, my little pigs, and the poor lady thinks that devils are abroad. Shoo now! Away with you—you'll be pinching your fingers again and scaring more travellers, so bless me!"

Mrs. Prix drank the coffee pressed upon her and even swallowed a dose of Hoffman drops for her nerves. But, nevertheless, as she stoutly contended on the least provocation, she was not the sort of woman to discredit her own senses! Illiana Petrovna might fabricate to a Tzar's taste, but something was wrong at "The Maples".

That settled it. Before the week was up, everyone in Little River and Maple Bluffs knew that scandalous doings were rife at the merchant's house. Some were hopeful enough to suggest it might be the merchant himself sobering up from a drinking bout, or better still, succumbing to hereditary madness and that the tale of his sojourn in the city was a myth. Others

thought it some half-crazed victim of the Fur Company secreted at "The Maples" lest he seek redress of justice. Both assumptions found ardent supporters until a trapper from Red River declaimed upon the gospels he had drunk a toast to her most august Majesty Queen Victoria with John Boyen and the friendly factor at Lower Fort Garry. Yet the tales continued, slightly changed in treatment, but with John for the sinister central character round which the mystery revolved. And then, as if to justify gossip, Dr. Hartman and his young assistant began making regular visits to the house. "Ha, ha, wasn't I telling you!" triumphed Mrs. Prix. "That Illiana Petrovna is clever with her lies, but not clever enough to fool Sarah Josephine Prix!"

But, true to the ways of this world, when at last someone mentioned Marie Batoche and the instability of Indian blood the implied suggestion was laughed to scorn. Certainly Marie was a foolish little thing, but not mad, or of sufficient importance to warrant forced concealment. Besides at least a dozen persons stated on good authority that the girl had gone north to the camps of her people.

Meanwhile, Oline was struggling with a problem that taxed her utmost powers, and but for Illiana Petrovna's able support would have left her helpless indeed. On returning from her visit to the Marcussons she had found poor Marie in a raging fever. For days, Dr. Hartman had despaired of her life as he now despaired of her reason. Everything Oline dreaded to tell the doctor the luckless patient shrieked out in delirium. Heartrending bursts of wild confession and cruel judgment heaped upon herself and her indifferent lover, terrible to hear and impossible to forget. Now at last she lay sleeping quietly.

Herself spent and close to tears, Oline studied the tragic figure, wondering if in her own rebellion against inexorable destiny she had changed as much. But that was impossible. Hers had been a slow helpless resentment, Marie's a soul-destroying madness as violent in reaction as in its unqualified surrender to love. Poor child, she had at least dared greatly, suffered greatly and bore the marks of it for all to see. No longer was the bloom of her young cheek like the satin glow of cinnamon roses. Lustreless and yellow the dry skin sagged from bone to bone of her emaciated face. Gone, too, was the curving sweetness of the supple form once as responsive to the dictates of emotion as a budding tree to the winds of earth.

Dr. Hartman entered softly. Seeing that his patient was apparently sleeping normally, a smile of relief dispelled his anxious expression. That was good! Now the battle was won. Signalling victory he approached the bedside. Oline hazarded a whisper. "Doctor, how much of those troubled thoughts will she be likely to remember?" He had no time for reply. Marie's

eyes opened, fixing upon them a flame-pointed glance: "My hate! All my hate I remember!" She spoke in a thin icy voice that struck ominously to their hearts. "It is a fever m'sieu the doctor cannot cure, or madam talk out of me. My hate for m'sieu the captain and his filthy yellow squaw. . . ."

"My dear, my dear! You must try to forget—— Things always work out somehow, Marie."

"No! You are wrong, madam. Much I could forget—my shame, my sorrow, but to be laughed at by that yellow harlot kept by voyageurs—*Mon Dieu!* Not till the grey wolf howls above her bones will I forget that."

"Oh, Marie! You will be worse if you agitate yourself. I shall sit here close beside you if you'll try to be patient and sleep. . . ."

"Let her talk, Mrs. Boyen." The old doctor stayed her gruffly bobbing down for satchel and hat in his jack-in-box manner. "Let her talk and talk," said he, starting for the door. "And have the good sense not to interrupt her. I'll be back this evening or send Beaur. Little Nellie Prix has a boil to be lanced. Remember, escaping steam won't blow up the boiler."

Oline never forgot the following hour. In the quiet of the barren loft where huge packing-cases, barrels and kegs cast curious shadows, Marie's narrow curtained bed seemed an island in the midst of a vast sea. Strange unseen forces played about it—titanic forces jealous of their possession. And as the sun sank lower in the western sky, plunging the room into uniform grey shadow, she felt herself but an ineffectual ghost clinging foolishly to memories of outworn existence. A miserable creature obsessed by imaginary martyrdom! Ah, yes! In contrast to the broken girl before her, what had she suffered? And yet would she not wear as proudly a crown of thorns for an hour's perfect joy—for a day of life before the perpetual shadows closed around her? Well, who could say! Listening to Marie's tangled tale told to the accompaniment of a melancholy wind that moaned about the eaves, she questioned her courage for such desperate delight.

When the tale ended she stepped to the window and caught her breath sharply. Oh, here were no melancholy regrets for a day dead and gone! Row on row her flaming maple-trees marched into the sunset. And the wind rustling the brittle branches made haunting elfin harmonies to which the little leaves danced away in delicate swirls. What wonder men worshipped trees, thought she, and made of their leaves a symbol of healing for the nations.

Behind her in the deepening gloom Marie began to sob, pitifully, as a heartbroken child. "Oh, madam, I know what you see. But yes, it is the fires of Manitou burning in the wood. . . . What you hear, madam, the death song

of the hundred hopes of summer. Me, I hear it too. *Oui*, and more, much more, that your white ears may not hear. But yes, I will be quiet now, lie still and get strong. M'sieu the doctor is right. I shall need to be strong now. . . . And madam is right, too—it is best to forget for a while.”

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How soon prying curiosity would have solved the riddle of “The Maples” is impossible to say. For a more engrossing and widespread difficulty developed to claim public attention. An epidemic of virulent measles broke out in the community. Scarcely a household but had its victim and despite the combined efforts of the two doctors and several volunteer nurses, some deaths occurred, which not only cast a deep gloom over the isolated settlers, but accentuated the fears of the Indians who had every reason to dread the white man’s plagues.

This catastrophe, while disastrous to others, really proved a blessing in disguise to Oline. John was still away. The children contracted the illness in a very mild form and Illiana Petrovna took excellent care of them. Under the circumstances it was natural she should turn her energies and liberty to helping others. Sometimes she rode pillion behind Dr. Hartman, sometimes waded, booted and trousered, through mire and sloughs. More often in addition to serving the sick there was stock to be fed, wood and water to fetch, often from inconvenient distances, and always bread to bake and clothes to be washed. Difficult, ugly, depressing chores, yet Oline found herself coming alive to the manifold beauties of existence through the simple exercise of this oldest charity known to man.

Her home stood out in new light and significance. After long hours in some comfortless shack, the big brown house with its cheerful fireside cast a wholesome spell upon her. Hospitality and service spoke from these sheltering walls. If she had not love, at least she could disperse cheer and comfort to those less rich in material benefits. With John away she might continue serenely content. . . . Ah well, when he did return she must hug more closely these new interests. He would approve for business reasons. For he was beginning to fear Captain Marcusson’s growing popularity with the settlers. Oh yes, John would approve. Almost she could hear him hemming and hawing and, with a fine twirl of the watch-chain, conclude: “Well—perhaps you’re right, my dear. Anything for good will—anything in moderation, naturally.”

Completely absorbed in her onerous services, she saw nothing of the Marcussons. But she knew the epidemic had passed them by. A remarkable escape, for Ephraim had engaged a number of men to erect a grist mill near

his house, some of whom were known to have visited the homes of stricken relatives. One day, incautiously, Oline mentioned this singular exception to Marie Batoche, now considerably improved but still needing constant care. "I can't understand it," said she. "Others, cut off from their neighbours by miles of marsh and timber, come down with the disease, yet the Marcussons escape. A miracle, no less! And how fortunate considering Mrs. Marcusson's present state of health. . . ."

The words scarcely uttered, she realized their folly. The little colour drained from Marie's face and her thin body tensed with misery. Inexpressibly volcanic, her eyes fixed upon Oline with such burning intensity of mingled hate and despair she found herself trembling. Then, in whispers husky with pain, the girl began her terrible lament. "No, no, it cannot be true! The good God is not so cruel—he will not give m'sieu children of that frozen union when he denies the child of his love! Oh, madam, madam, surely you misrepresent? You say this to punish poor Marie who is foolish and sinful? But yes—it must be so! It must be so, or I kill that woman with her cold, scarred face. . . ."

"Marie, be just! To talk like that is madness. I can't sit here and permit it. My dear girl, aren't we all trying to help you? Are we not kind? And what has Mrs. Marcusson done to earn your dislike? Isn't it the other way round? After all, my poor Marie, you knew Captain Marcusson had a wife."

"*Mon Dieu*, who has not!" Marie exclaimed passionately, as if this were vindication and wisdom conjoined. "Madam, you understand nothing. In you everything is a winter of words! Me, I am not made that way. I have the red blood, and love and hate like my sister the she-wolf. Like the wolf you envy, madam, when your husband enters at the door smiling slyly because you are his—eyes, hair, bosom—all his, like the glossy pelts and fish he measures and weighs at the post!"

"Stop it, Marie! You'll only make yourself worse."

"But I will not stop. And you dare not stop me. M'sieu the doctor said let her talk. I will talk! *Oui*, I will tell madam what really troubles her. M'sieu Boyen, he comes home. That is not pleasant. It makes a bad taste in the soul. The way to m'sieu's good pleasure, it is not agreeable. And without it the foolish Marie will be turned outdoors to make more trouble! But reflect, I beseech you, if m'sieu the captain had not gone to that yellow wench there would be no trouble—me, I wanted only love. Nothing else matters. The baby? What is a baby to such as Marie! I should have loved him and—after a little, gone away like my mother before me. Oh, madam, can you not see? He loves me, I say to myself. I am the flame he cannot find in the wife. I am youth and spring. I am the sap rising in the tree and the lark singing at the

dawn. In a little he will forget, but the dream it is mine for always. Then comes that yellow woman to poison my joy and rouse the sneers of my kinsmen. Oh, but hear me to the end, madam! When I went to the camp, Black Crow says to me, ‘Marie, child of my sister, for the honour of our race you should not meekly see that white man take another woman before our faces, as his kind takes our lands and lakes and furs and buffaloes! It is most certain, your brother he kills him when he comes down with his catch!’ ”

Oline sat as one petrified, the most dire possibilities racing through her mind in rapid succession. Marie’s case called for extreme caution as well as sympathy. Her volatile temperament was capable of the most rash, even vicious measures. Some way must be found to circumvent her brooding revenge, some appeal made to her natural generosity. Yet words and ways were as far from Oline as her flying thoughts.

From below stairs drifted an old Slavonic melody, rich in pathos, stirring to the dullest heart. Whatever else she did not do, Illiana Petrovna sang with deep-throated grace. Softly, mingled with her sombre melody, a thread of fine silver in purple, came the laughter of infant voices. Queer, the mother reflected, she could not remember having heard Veder laugh so joyously before—so like bluebells chiming in a May wind.

The sound of hoofs rapidly approaching broke her troubled reverie and set her to the window. Thank Heaven! It was not John. Nor was it Dr. Hartman. He rarely drove his nag at such a pace. But now the horseman speeding out from the deep fringe of russet trees came in direct line of her vision. Why, it was Oscar Beur! Herr Beur, the cautious, riding a lathered beast with the crazy recklessness of an Indian, himself caked in mud and sprayed with sour slough water!

“Who comes, madam?” queried Marie, in a tense whisper, a faint flush of hope dawning in her face. “Who rides so fast?”

Oline pulled herself together, smiling as lightly as her rising fears permitted, and replied: “It is a stranger, Marie, I must go below and see to his wants. Illiana will come and sit with you when the children have been put to bed. Now there’s a good girl! Be patient and you’ll soon be yourself. Believe me, in the spring everything will seem different. You’ll come to laugh at these dark fears and exaggerated difficulties. Indeed you will! For remember this: no one shall turn you adrift helpless—I promise.”

But Marie turned her dark, sorrowful eyes on this well-meaning mistress with something verging on contempt lighting their sombre depths. “You are kind, madam. For that I thank you. You are right—but also very wrong. The spring changes everything! That is true. Yet it brings not joy to the dead. . . .

But, I will be patient. *Oui*, I am very well here in the shadows. I do not want Illiana, I am much better alone.”

Oline found the young doctor in the kitchen before the fireplace, his long, lean, awkward bulk sprawled in complete exhaustion. At her approach he glanced up heavily, mumbled an apology and relapsed into the leaden silence of utter fatigue. She was as solicitous as curious. “Dr. Beaur, judging by your looks you haven’t eaten for hours! You must have something at once. No matter what’s happened explanations must wait. . . . Illiana, the kettle is on, of course—good strong coffee is what the doctor needs. And let’s hope our supply of brandy hasn’t run out.”

“God bless us, little mother! Is the kettle ever cold in this house? Good black coffee and plenty of brandy, that’s what I prescribed myself. Ho! Many’s the time poor wretches, fleeing the filthy Cossacks back home, got new life through a moment’s stolen rest and a stiff nip of vodka. Depend on it the people who want us to live on buttermilk and prayer never met trouble bigger than a flea-bite! Now in Russia——”

“The coffee, Illiana, please! Surely you see that Dr. Beaur is in no mood for chatter?”

The incorrigible old gossip, nothing dismayed replied amiably, “Chatter, like the hum of bees, is soothing to him who doesn’t really listen. And now for the coffee—good strong coffee, touched up for a hero. Ha! There you are young man.”

Grimly obedient he tossed off the steaming brew, nearly choking in the process and at once launched into a tale so incredibly barbarous that even Illiana was faintly shocked.

“Mrs. Boyen, there’s trouble ahead for the Marcussons!” he began jerkily, his gaunt face grey with anxiety. “Serious trouble—of that I feel sure. Yet I hardly know where to begin. The whole thing seems so fantastic. It started with Isidore Batoche coming down to the camps in a violent temper. At first I laid it to drink. For I was busy with the sick and thought the general uproar just another Métis’s brawl. But there was something sinister about it from the start. The climax came about midnight. I was treating a child in an isolated tent when suddenly the most terrifying shrieks rang out.” Despite anxiety for her grandchild, the old squaw watching beside me motioned to the door. “Quick m’sieu! You must stop it. They will kill the woman—Isidore’s woman. They will kill her as the old law provides. But it must not be! The old laws anger the queen’s soldiers. It would make trouble for all my people. M’sieu, you must stop them!”

“Ho! A fine sight, I’ll wager,” crowed Illiana. “Here, take another sip. Tell us everything.”

Oscar frowned upon such levity, refused the brandy and resumed his tale. “The cries were not difficult to trace. Down on the lake front a huge fire leapt and crackled. There in savage concert Indians and half-breeds beat a frightful tom-tom round their victim. At first I couldn’t see anything clearly. But as I rushed forward shouting at the top of my lungs a break occurred in the circle and I saw Isidore brandishing a hunting knife over the head of a wretched woman crouched at his feet. Gott! What a business! What bloodthirsty brutes those drunken Métis are. The Indians weren’t so hard to handle. Their fear of the measles is such I had only to threaten to abandon them to the plague and they were ready to put a stop to the torture. Of course the woman was a wanton they said and deserved her fate. For, although betrothed to Isidore, she had brazenly beguiled m’sieu the captain, who, as everyone knew, had taken Isidore’s sister for his woman! Such conduct shaming the tribe merited death. And a devil’s own time I had persuading them otherwise!”

“God bless us, what a story! You perceive, little mother, how scrupulous men are of honour in women! But go on, young man. Such excellent logic surpasses comment.” Illiana was plainly enjoying the situation, foreseeing such delectable complications as might rival the villainies of a Tzarist court.

“There is little to add. They finally let her go. Of course, I was forced to promise redress of some sort. But although I spent the rest of the night beside my fire alert, as I thought, to every sound, the woman was nowhere to be found next morning. And I might as well have questioned the dead. No one knew anything. A wretch of a woman, beaten nearly insensible and weak from loss of blood, had escaped from under their noses and vanished like a wraith! Argument nor threats had any effect until yesterday when a note was tossed into my tent setting forth bluntly that Captain Marcusson, not I, must settle their dispute.”

“God bless us! So you came at once to give warning? But what can you hope to accomplish? Captain Marcusson walks the wilderness with the insolence of a Romanoff. What cares he for the ravings of crazy half-breeds? What indeed! When even poor Marie can’t reach the fine gentleman with her righteous plea——”

“Illiana, go back to your duties!” Oline spoke sharply, her delicate face flushed with shame. “How often must I ask you to withhold your gossip?”

“Well! well! What’s the good of shirking the truth, little mother? Babies will come whether we like it or not, and can’t be hid under pumpkins! Shall

I cut mutton or venison for Dr. Bear—or perhaps the liver sausage you cook to the taste of angels?”

“Oh, anything, anything at all!” Oscar put in impatiently. “I must hurry. I only stopped because I thought Mr. Boyen might be here to advise me. But I’m afraid Illiana is right. There’s no use evading facts. This ugly business is sure to bring suffering to many innocent people. Needless to say, Captain Marcusson’s skin is no concern of mine!”

“I know. I know,” Oline was in feverish distress. “These poor women! Oh, it’s cruel. You cannot know how cruel! After so much heartache, happiness seemed close at last. Something must be done, no matter what the cost.”

A shy, freckle-faced boy entered with an armful of wood. “I put the horse in the barn, Mrs. Boyen, he was so hot—ja, I fed and watered him too.”

“There now, God bless us! Why not do as well by yourself, Dr. Bear?” boomed Illiana, setting down the coffee-pot with an important clatter and drawing up a chair to the appetizing table. “As they say in Russia he who eats is twice a man.”

“Hush! What was that?” cried Oline in startled tones.

“Someone riding!” said the boy, running to the window. “Perhaps it’s master. Sounds close.” Excitedly he peered into the gathering dusk. The others sat stiffly erect, listening. “That’s queer! He’s gone—must have crossed the pasture.”

“In Russia I’d understand it!” grumbled Illiana, shoving the lad aside and peering out herself. “Well, man or ghost, he rode from the barn. To that I’d swear for my ears are sharp.”

Oscar sprang to his feet. “Then I’ll meet him at the crossroads!” He cut her short, curtly. “Now, Ole, fetch my horse—make sure he’s dry, poor brute—I must go at once!”

But that was easier said than done! Before he had donned his mud-spattered ulster the boy dashed in again, white and trembling: “Oh, doctor, it must have been a thief. That was him we heard! The horse ain’t nowhere at all!”

It was then, with their startled glances meeting like drawn swords, that the thought of Marie struck them simultaneously. Without a word Oline hurried from the room and ran up the stairs to the loft. Her sharp cry of dismay confirmed their worst suspicions. Marie was gone.

“But this is terrible!” Oline was almost in tears. “Why, the girl is scarcely able to stand! She’ll kill herself—and I shall feel responsible.”

Oscar had never looked so grim. Even Illiana checked the words on her oily tongue, awed by the white anger of this usually calm young man. “And I thought we should be free of vice and beastliness out here!” he exclaimed heatedly. “God, how human beings muck things up! How consistently we transplant our private hells, brutal passions and beastly little vanities! But talking won’t help that poor girl. Quick! Is there a short cut through the wood?”

“Yes, but you would need a guide. You’ll make better time by skirting the Big Slough and cutting through the ‘Glen Haven’ hayland. Ole can show you the way. I shall follow as soon as I get together a few things we may need before morning if our fears for Marie come true.”

CHAPTER IX

CAPTAIN MARCUSSON had had a good season on the lake. His genius for obtaining the confidence and best efforts of his men was really remarkable. They followed him gladly anywhere. Trappers, rivermen, and struggling homesteaders alike fell under his persuasive powers and more often than not felt richly rewarded by his patronage. He was acting for the Fur Company at this time, but retained a singularly free hand in most matters. For this the changing times were perhaps more responsible than Captain Marcusson realized. The power of the great company was already on the wane. Despotism and intolerance were no longer the order of the day. The rapidly increasing hordes of home-seekers everywhere encroaching on the ancient fur domains made some sort of compromise inevitable. And in Captain Marcusson the company recognized an excellent agent. Himself an aristocrat he sympathized with the old régime and yet understood to an amazing degree those home-hungry peasants whose persistent dream was a quiet hearth-fire and fertile acres safe from monarchical oppression. Indeed, on more than one occasion, officials of the company had been forced to listen to a fervent oration upon the potential values and excellent qualities of these stolid immigrants whose indifference to the glamour of the old order seemed to them nothing short of blasphemous! Why, the whole miserable lot of them wanted nothing so much as to see this hunter's paradise turned into pigsties and pastures!

True! True! Captain Marcusson agreed with the Factor up to a point. They were an unimaginative folk, these gleanings from the garrets and gutters of Europe. But he saw in them a source of profit destined to far outweigh the collective values of muskrat, wolf, fox and beaver.

These dogged trail breakers, hewers of timber and builders of humble homes were bending their backs—quite without knowledge of the stupendous task—to the burden of a new social order. Dull, poverty-bred creatures, condemned while yet in the womb to unremitting toil, to them was given the glory to shape a new Empire founded in liberty and mutual forbearance. Yea, much as he sometimes despised them, Ephraim Marcusson understood and loved these greatly-destined blunderers. Something ageless in him reacted with spontaneous pleasure to their rough humour, to their savage eating and drinking and pursuit of wenches. Their tragedies touched, but did not depress him. Like certain jovial sages he measured time in moments of pleasure. All else he thrust from him as irrelevant and of small account. The petty miseries of the plodding settlers were uninspiring and

sometimes disgusting spectacles. If he helped them, often it was less from pity than impatience to be done with the disagreeable.

Fascinating imbeciles! Their follies were as unaccountable as their virtues. Yet he liked them best when, at some friendly fireside, wine had warmed their sterile dreams and sold their austere piety to boisterous laughter and wild song. Their women, so quickly robbed of youth and grace, he found the more intriguing when fashioned boldly to meet so harsh a destiny. Strong, firm-breasted wenches with shy, seductive eyes that pleaded and yet betrayed; he alternately pitied, seduced, and forswore them!

Now he was home at last for a well-earned rest, and singularly happy. Almost hourly he discovered some novel amusement in the preoccupied activities of his women which reminded him of nesting swallows. Yet he dared not voice his amusement to Isabella. There was something sublime in her quiet, radiating happiness. But his mother he frankly teased, predicting an end to cheerful leisure when the object of all this preparation arrived.

For the moment domesticity charmed him. It was flatteringly agreeable after the rough and tumble labours of the preceding months to bask in the smiles of his adoring household. Yet how quickly these tender moments would have paled without the interest supplied by his newly-erected mill. Ah, that mill! No dream was ever more ardently desired. And what an ingenious structure it was, with its grain loft, storage bins, and racks for drying valuable furs. A project to be proud of, representing as it did the conquest of countless obstacles inseparable from a wilderness. This little mill would cement the friendship of his neighbours as well as supply his own table with bread. And, better still, it would be a perpetual thorn to John Boyen's middle-class consciousness! How fiercely he would resent an institution bound to further the popularity and power of a partner he secretly detested as an irresponsible rake!

Something of the sort drifted through Captain Marcusson's mind as he sauntered towards the mill that fateful evening. The air, pleasantly chill, was invigorating, and the pale blue sky seen through the ragged willows bordering Little River had an ephemeral ghostly grace, pleasing, yet faintly sad. But the master of "Glen Haven" was pleased with himself and his surroundings. He burst into song—a lilting air that died abruptly however as he thrust open the door of the room allotted to his men since the outbreak of the epidemic.

There was something ominous in the silence that greeted him. Never to his knowledge had sobriety thus chained his men! Seen through a haze of tobacco smoke the four of them had the grotesque appearance of crudely carved wooden effigies, so stiff was their attitude, so frozen their mien.

Inarticulate pieces, save for the eyes, craftily alert and almost glowing in the smoky dusk!

Treacherous rascals, he reflected, with impartial contempt, snapping the curious tension with a laugh. “So I’ve interrupted some juicy bit of villainy, eh? A nice little murder-plot, perhaps? Or why the graveyard peace over a poker game?”

For a moment no one stirred. Then, like so many birds brought down at a shot the cards fell to the table and swarthy Baptiste, with the eyes of a fox, retorted venomously, “We do not fool m’sieu the captain? Sure not! Look, my friends, m’sieu is very brave—he does not fear what we do.”

Certainly Captain Marcusson was no coward. But with four pairs of eyes fixed upon him in sudden, blazing hatred, he suffered a bad moment. Then, in a sudden rage, he barked, “What the devil is the meaning of this? If you have grievances speak plainly or get to hell out of here! I’ll have no——”

Some indefinable instinct of self-preservation checked him, drew his glance to the back of the room with its familiar clutter of bales and barrels. Yet, unerring and swift though his instant reaction, he barely escaped the gleaming knife that flashed from the dark like a shard of lightning. A shred of his sleeve was carried away! Ah, but now he felt better. Shorn of mystery danger held no real terrors for such as he. “So, my brave Isidore, it’s you!” he laughed, bracing himself to meet the infuriated man whose murderous attempt had so narrowly failed. “So it’s you, Brown Bear, who itch to kill me—yet lick my salt!” The taunt fell on deaf ears. Isidore, lost to cunning and reason, charged like a bull, and was met by a trick of agility old as the Viking-glima. He hit the floor with tremendous impact and for a deceptive moment lay still as the dead. Again that curious tingling of the nerves warned Ephraim of danger. But now he shrugged impatiently. There was nothing to fear. These half-breeds were all cowards when resolutely confronted. They howled like coyotes and struck in the dark. Unwisely he took a flippant tone. “Better luck next time, Batoche, but if you don’t mind—a less personal target!”

Isidore’s red-rimmed eyes played up and down Captain Marcusson’s sinewy frame and a curious gloating sound rumbled up from his deep chest. Ho! the good luck was his. M’sieu le capitaine was unarmed. “*Oui!* Better luck next time,” he mocked, lurching to his feet and drawing his gun. “The Devil, he will not desire a rival in hell. All the same you shall die, m’sieu the captain who cannot be fooled!”

An indescribable moment when life hung upon a madman’s finger, and God spoke in the timely thunder of approaching hoofs! For miraculously as

the First Commandment reft the darkness of Mount Sinai, those galloping hoof-beats shattered the murderous atmosphere, fetching sharp cries from the grim quartette at the table. Startled, Isidore wavered, cursed his companions and was lost. M'sieu the captain was upon him like a cat, and the gun, struck from his hand, fired in mid-air. A shower of glass and a shriek from without produced instant bedlam. Baptiste and Gerard made for the door, overturning chairs and a bucket of water in their flight. Thebo, the devout, crossed himself twice, seized his shivering friend, Jakes, by the shoulder, and thus fortified, stumbled forward.

But monsieur the captain had retrieved the gun. Smiling grimly, he confronted them, the still smoking weapon adding weight to his sharp command. "Thebo, watch that madman for me!" he ordered, pointing to Isidore, now slumped against the table and sobbing foolishly. "Watch him well, if you value your skin! And you, my bold Jakes, go after Gerard and Baptiste. If they leave my land the queen's soldiers shall hear of this."

But the runaways were quickly forgotten in the general astonishment inspired by the sight of the strange creature who now came crying in from the night—a shapeless caricature of a woman, whose wild appearance and wilder utterance bordered on insanity.

"*Mon Dieu!* You have killed him!" shriled this fantastic apparition in rising hysteria. "You have killed m'sieu the captain! For that dirty yellow wench you have killed m'sieu who once saved your life. Isidore Batoche, myself I will fetch the scarlet soldiers."

"Great Heavens, Marie!" Captain Marcusson, really bewildered and, strange paradox, thoroughly scandalized, spoke severely: "What on earth brings you here, in such a plight? Now, now, no hysterics! Pull yourself together. There's nothing to be alarmed about. Look there——" He pointed to the window where a jagged hole formed a purple bruise on the pane. "My gun went off accidentally, that's all. As for Isidore, he's just drunk! Better pack him off to his room. And stay there till you come to your senses!"

Poor hapless Marie! At the sound of that voice, will and resolution turned to water. Oh! what had she come for? Why was she here in this strange, unfriendly place? What meant this audience of dark, leering faces? Oh, why did they stare so cruelly? And what intolerable humiliation had reduced the fiery Isidore to tears? Overcome by weakness and shame, which suddenly made everything whirl indistinctly as in a thickening mist, she fixed terrified eyes on the one precious reality. M'sieu le capitaine, whose child stirred restlessly beneath her pounding heart.

But he was not smiling now. His glances, once so melting, measured her distress coldly: “Oh, m’sieu,” she moaned piteously, “I came only to warn you. For that only! Oh, I entreat you, be warned. There are others than Isidore who mean to avenge that—that woman!”

“So? Well, let them!” Ephraim rapped out impatiently. Somehow this wretched girl whose adoring eyes pleaded with him from a grief-stricken countenance, angered him more deeply than Isidore with his madness or those others with their miserable cowardice. “Let them strike, my good Marie! For every blow two shall fall. Remember that, all of you! You especially, my pious Thebo, with your pretty new wife who aspires to a house. And you, Jakes, with eyes on that job in my mill. Think it over—it’ll cool your heads!”

Stung by his utter indifference and scornful tones, Marie recovered a touch of former fire. “But you are the fool, m’sieu! You laugh, you think yourself a God! Puffed up with pride you say to yourself, ‘What could those stupid Métis and savage Red men in my pay do to hurt me?’ *Oui!* But what of the old mother? What of madam your wife? Have they, too, hearts of stone that cannot suffer?”

“Be still! You’re out of your head.” He dismissed her icily. Turning sharply away he bawled at Isidore, “Shake up the fire and fix a cot for your sister. I’ll send food from the house. The rest of you clear out! Take your blankets to the hayloft. And hold your tongues!”

Marie seemed to grow rigid, yet her nerves twitched as under torture and a flame leapt to her eyes. “But I will not hold my tongue, m’sieu. You shall not escape so easily. You shall hear me, for it is not now I am out of the head, but only when I believed that you loved me. Listen carefully, m’sieu le capitaine. You do not like to look at poor Marie now. It is not pretty what you have made of her—*non!* But the thing you made is yours, m’sieu. You cannot put it from you, now or ever!”

Armoured in terrible dignity Ephraim appeared not to hear her. Yet he was deeply moved. Irritated and shocked as ever by the cruel processes of nature, his whole being ached with compassion. His helplessness—man’s perpetual helplessness—made him cruel. With cold eyes he measured the wreckage of what once was so sweet, and reflected bitterly that all the base injustices of which man is capable were patterned on the impersonal brutality of Life itself. Poor Marie! How like a day in June, warm and beguiling, had been her coy smiles! How irresistible the lure of her warm kisses. Disturbing memories! But, after all, was he to blame for the bungling facts of biology? Women, the poor fools, were persistently driven to gamble

with loaded dice. And, quite illogically, they always wept on the inevitable day of reckoning.

Well, he, for one, was sick of the whole business! The mere sight of the girl's emaciated face and distorted figure increased his distaste and self-loathing. Another's discarded mistress thus sorely pressed might have aroused pity. But Marie! Ignoring her imploring glance and outstretched hands he strode by her coldly, only pausing on the threshold to add with deliberate finality, "I shall expect you to behave sensibly, Marie. At least try not to play the fool. Hans will bring you everything you'll need. To-morrow Isidore can take you wherever you wish to go."

"M'sieu! Oh, m'sieu, for the love of Our Lady, wait! Wait! Oh, I will be good! I will be so sensible it kills me! But one thing I must know. M'sieu, I implore you——"

But Ephraim had escaped. Breathing deeply the clean night air, he strode rapidly away, cursing her roundly but with lessening anger as the distance widened between them. "Little fool! What an abominable nuisance she made herself. To start that row up in the camps, and now to come here! Well, at least she had nerve, the little spitfire. And of course he must do something for her. Yes, certainly."

But the thought of her presence in "Glen Haven" at this time froze his blood with swift, unreasoning fear. Good Heavens! What might not happen if Isabella got wind of it. The possible consequences loomed up so gravely he broke into a run, anxious to assure himself that all was well at home. Yet in the midst of this haste and belated solicitude for a long neglected wife, the Marcusson humour reasserted itself. Laughing softly he wondered, ruefully, how much of his anxiety was real, how much a recurring tribal instinct. Was it Isabella, or her unborn child, deified by the Marcusson tradition to which it was legally begotten, that caused this swift and sweet alarm?

Small wonder that following such distressing incidents and subsequent confusion of thought, he should suffer genuine shock when, reaching the house, he instantly perceived that ill-tidings had outwinged him. His mother, alarmingly pale, was with difficulty maintaining self-control as she hung upon the words of a man whose face was hidden from him, but whose garments and air of fatigue spoke of arduous and hasty travel. "But what can we do?" Halvor was speaking breathlessly, yet with a touch of her son's arrogant impatience. "If you can't tell us their plans, how shall we circumvent them? After all, Dr. Beaur, I can't believe my son alone is guilty of making free with these wenches!" She smiled wryly, making a delicate gesture somehow eloquent of distaste, and concluded more calmly, "Perhaps

we are unduly alarmed. After all, isn't it customary, even amongst civilized society, to trade kisses for ribbands?"

To the serious-minded Oscar this savoured of obnoxious sophistry. Such bluntness in a lady whose conduct and courtesy had always seemed to epitomize old-world culture was disconcerting in the extreme. He stammered, grew red and, swept by the mortifying thought that his clumsy address had worked this havoc, hurried on anxiously, "Madam, I deeply regret to have startled you. But the situation is serious. What exactly the natives mean to do is impossible to foretell. But that they blame Captain Marcusson for those troubles in the camp, which they now believe will bring the wrath of the White Queen upon them, is quite certain. And in Isidore Batoche you have a sworn enemy."

"Good evening, Dr. Beaur!" Ephraim's deep voice cut the air like blue steel, nor was his smile less cold. "What an unexpected pleasure! And what Christian zeal—or am I wrong, mamma, in thinking the gentleman rode post haste to save our scalps?"

Halvor flushed. "This is hardly the time for levity, Ephraim. Dr. Beaur brings serious news. These Indians, unlike white men similarly outraged, have evidently decided to wring your neck, my dear."

"Sympathetic mamma!" he chid her, amusement and derision in the quick flash of his eyes. "And had you thought to supply the rope? No? But how careless of you, darling! Well then, suppose you leave me to settle the final details with Herr Beaur, to whom we are most grateful for so much zeal on my behalf."

Despite an equable, conscientious temperament, Oscar Beaur was capable of tremendous anger. Rage leapt in him now. Ephraim's half-contemptuous greeting and callous attitude stung him like a blow upon the cheek. Fine gratitude, this, for hours of mad riding! The man was a rogue and deserved to be hanged. "Captain Marcusson, I don't give a damn for your personal safety!" he said, slowly and deliberately, with terrible emphasis. "That should be plain enough," he continued, in the same grim manner, rising abruptly and swaying a little from weariness. "Yet in case it is not, I assure you that except for the ladies, what the natives plot against your household wouldn't cause me an hour's distress. But some defence, other than sneers, should be devised for their safety. What is more, under no condition should Mrs. Marcusson be permitted to leave the house."

"Ah!" Ephraim drew himself up with military precision, the colour ebbing under his coat of tan, his eyes dilating a little narrowed sharply. There spoke the gallant who so obviously hungered for Isabella's company

in town, thought he. The pious hypocrite! “Well, well!” His voice was brittle, and bright as a blade, “So Mrs. Marcusson should not be permitted to leave the house? Admirable, I might say ingenious advice! But no doubt you have perfected other plans for the continued safety of my charming wife?”

“Perhaps I have!” retorted Oscar hotly, “but much will depend on your treatment of the wretched girl who doubtless has by now sought you out at the mill.”

“Gentlemen, gentlemen!” Halvor interrupted sharply, “match spleen and sarcasm some other time. What’s to be done? That alone matters.”

They had no time to answer her. Hans, eyes popping from his bullet head, burst in shouting: “Fire! Fire! They’ve set fire to the mill, master. They’re dancing like demons! Oh, Lord! We’re lost for sure!”

Ephraim sprang to the mantel, took down his gun and buckled on a belt of cartridges. He was smiling now, in a sinister fashion which somehow reminded Oscar of a dark, deserted mere riven by sudden lightning. His movements, though swift, were unhurried and deliberate, his manner resolute and calm. Yet to Oscar, still smarting from anger, he seemed the more exasperating. As if divining the thought, Ephraim laughed dryly, saying as he strode to the door, “Here’s luck to the ladies! I leave them to your care! Under no condition leave the house!”

But Dame Marcusson held other views and had a stout will to enforce them. She literally shoved poor Oscar after her hot-headed son. “Get on! Get on! There’s nothing here for a man to do. We are quite safe, believe me,” she urged impatiently, adding with a dry little chuckle, “and if the need arose, I should shoot first and ask questions afterwards. Go now. Keep a sharp eye on that fool son of mine and may God help you both!”

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Ephraim overtook Hans at the log shanty that sheltered timber, tools, hunting-gear and sometimes served as bunk-house for transient woodsmen. “Call the men at the barn!” he shouted as he raced by soft-footed as an Indian, “If they aren’t drunk we can stop this. Bring the stock-pails and axes!”

“I’ve called them,” Hans sprinting after his long-legged master yelled through cupped hands; “they made for the river, howling something furious—can’t make sense of it, master. . . . Oh, look! Ain’t that fire shooting from the top story?”

Ephraim’s reply was lost in the uproar which broke about them as they emerged from the poplars that formed a windbreak for the house. Here, on a

level bit of field sloping towards the river-bank where stood the mill, bonfires burned like miniature infernos and devils in human shape leapt and shouted to a frightful rhythm.

“God save us!” gasped poor Hans, foreseeing a scalping and far from eager for a hero’s bed, “the government had ought to put a stop to these murderous doings. But, praise the Lord, they ain’t fired the mill.”

“Not yet!” Ephraim retorted grimly. “They want an audience first. But where the devil are Jakes and Thebo? Didn’t think they had courage to join such a pow-wow. . . . Ah! so you’ve come to see the fun, Herr Beaur?” he interrupted himself to grin at Oscar, who came running noiselessly, a look of almost comical fury on his broad face. “Fun! I could roast them, the murderous rats!” he retorted, brandishing a pitch-fork snatched from the shed.

“Bravo! I’d never doubt it in face of that,” Ephraim laughed, “but as you yourself said the savages have a lively sense of humour. There may be hidden spectators in that fringe of wood who might object—well, drastically, if we disturb the order of their play.”

Oscar longed to strike him. “To the devil with riddles! Don’t stand here quibbling. Do something.”

A long piercing wail startled them both. “My God! It’s Marie Batoche,” gasped Oscar, seized by ominous foreboding. “She’s mad. Oh, hear her! Captain Marcusson, we must get to her at once or she’ll do herself an injury.”

“Baying to the moon won’t kill her!” snapped the captain. “But you’re right. We must reach the mill. Hans, keep your eye on the river-bank and that clump of firs. You, Herr Beaur, follow close behind me. Hope you don’t mind shielding the sinner in such an excellent cause.”

“Go on! Go on! I’ll follow,” Oscar grinned, despite his dislike. The man was a knave, but at least his impertinent humour stood the test of danger. His steady tread and fearless greeting flung at the revellers as he strode towards them evinced no fear of treachery. “Well, what’s the row? Why the paint and feathers? Or if you must celebrate with fires, bear in mind it’s my wood you’re burning. It will cost you work to-morrow. And now that I’m here suppose you tell me what the friends you left ambushed near the river want with me?”

The shot told. A very old Indian impressively regal in spite of his Jim Crow hat, buckskin breeches and Hudson’s Bay blanket, lifted his hand for silence. Instantly the shuffling loose-jointed dance came to a halt and in the tense silence that followed his deep, sombre tones reverberated like the

receding vibrations of an African drum. Proudly erect, with the solemnity of a potentate issuing a decree, he said, "Indian no steal wood. To-morrow him cut more tree. White man not so wise. Him better bring back what he steal."

"Splendid! Moses dealt less justly with his enemies," Ephraim cut in unwisely, "now what has this wretch stolen—ah, my brave Isidore, so you've recovered? Come, explain this fresh foolishness quickly."

Isidore was primed for more than words. Given his way, a musket shot would have settled everything. But the mercenary Brunos (into whose clan he had been adopted because of that yellow harlot) and wily Black Crow thought otherwise. Their glittering eyes, like so many points of steel, restrained him; their ominous mutterings reminding him forcibly of the insupportable debt he owed them and which, somehow, m'sieu le capitaine must be made to pay. Thus placed he strove to speak lightly, as hypocritical white men speak. "M'sieu le capitaine, step into the council ring. You shall hear all my brothers have come to say. *Oui*, and there is nothing to fear. But if m'sieu the doctor he wishes to stand guard behind you——"

"Fear or no, a witness won't do any harm," Ephraim checked him sharply. "Come, Dr. Beaur, we are wanted at the bar of indulgences. Well, here we are, friends! Now just what do you want for choking that frail flower, my good Batoche?"

For once Ephraim's judgment of men was sadly amiss. Levity has no place in the councils of Redmen. Angry growls, the more ominous because inarticulate and toneless as the roll of surge upon a sandy shore, warned him too late. Isidore, spewn of this human fury, shot forward with the sudden force of a billow, the ever-present knife a fiery dart in the purple sky. "Hun, hun!" the Indian guttural was a thunder clap, Black Crow's interceptive leap a miracle of agility. "Let the wind rend its own belly!" was his contemptuous advice, uttered so calmly that Ephraim experienced an uncommon sense of shame. When he spoke he wisely ignored Isidore's violence and was done with flippancies. He would hear what the tribesmen had to say and consider their claims carefully, so he said. And he was remarkably patient with their tedious verbiage. Their demands, however, he found impossible of acceptance as they were unlikely to be of lasting satisfaction to anyone concerned.

The Brunos held out for a settlement in flour and tea. The quantity of which tempted Ephraim to suggest they somewhat over-estimated their lamented kinswoman's virtue. Isidore waived his lover's claim, refusing consolation in terms of merchandise. Yet these were relatively simple differences. Black Crow presented the real obstacle. With thunderous oratory that ancient of days informed Captain Marcusson how, centuries

before the coming of thieving traders, Black Crow's people had been a power in the land. A tribe strong and fearless and quick to avenge insult to its women long before the loose-moralled white man came out of the northern mists to steal their country and debauch their women. Even yet they held their women high. Marie Batoche was only an off-shoot—a frail creature tainted with white blood—but, none the less, they meant to see justice done her, justice to satisfy the Great Spirit!

Something in that last phrase struck chill to Oscar's heart. That scarecrow figure, gesticulating in the firelight, was about to deliver a judgment which, intuitively, he knew must bring tragedy to the woman he secretly loved. The judgments men rendered unto their Gods were generally rife with human misery!

Black Crow intoned impressively: M'sieu the captain was a big chief among his people and his power increasing. The tribe of Black Crow, through pestilence and the greed of the pale-face, was fast dying out. In the past they would have scorned the thought of giving the meanest of their kin to his people, but to-day they were forced to accept other views. There was but one just procedure—m'sieu the captain must adopt Marie's child into his household.

Oscar glanced at his still companion and discovered a complete stranger—an Ephraim shorn of humour, savage and cruel as any torturing native. His dark head was high, and the red glow of the dancing fires intensified the passion of his face; his eyes blazed with concentrated fury. Thought Oscar: Hell in a white man's heart violated the human countenance more than all the ghastly paints of the poor Redman. His villainy is as scarlet! Yet he sympathized with Captain Marcusson as never before. Those sanguinary faces staring out from the rim of firelight were as savage as a circle of wolves waiting to pounce upon their prey. Those horrible brutes, on whose faces cruelty and cunning marked the limits of intelligence, represented the sort of progeny Ephraim was asked to accept into his ancient line. Mein Gott! It was monstrous—so monstrous that Oscar felt as though the entire white race had suffered an intolerable affront.

In that queer reactionary moment all sympathy for poor Marie was completely wiped from mind. Indeed the girl herself was no longer an individual but an issue, obnoxious and deadly. All those qualities which formerly had singled her out for attention were instantly wiped from mind. Her naïve joyousness, wild-brier sweetness, and that delicacy of cheek and brow characteristic of a race whose gallantries were the secret envy of less sophisticated nations, counted as nothing. In face and form, disposition and temperament Marie might be French, but that could not alter the

disagreeable facts of dual ancestry. Endearing or not she was likewise the innocent and helpless repository of savage traits and instincts. Dark thoughts! Yet something darker must have inspired the awful laughter which broke from Ephraim's grim lips. Grim and terrible he wheeled on his enemies, now facing this man, now that: "You fools!" he shot at them. "You hair-brained cowards! Go on with your deviltry. Set fire to the mill and see what it gets you! Will the ruins feed you? And you, Isidore, so eager to kill me, how will that benefit your lousy tribe?"

"Now listen, all of you! My death would not only deprive the most of you of a living, but bring down the wrath of the great Company. White men, as well as savages, stand together in a pinch. Call off this foolishness and I'll forget the whole thing, make the settlement in flour and tea and no tales to the factor. Make up your minds quickly—and bear this in mind, my good Isidore, if these terms do not suit, you, at least shall precede me to hell!"

That hypnotic quality of innate and indisputable authority, peculiar to great military leaders, and most tyrants, saved Ephraim from instant death—provided a precious moment in which to gain the sheltering wall of the mill. Then bedlam broke loose. Such unearthly yells as now pierced their ears made the most hideous tales of Indian atrocities a forewarning of similar doom. Hail of burning brands broke about them as they ran. A blazing shard of pine struck Oscar on the cheek. "Gott!—" His flood of fierce German wrung a laugh from Ephraim. "But see here, get back, you idiot," said he, dodging a wicked missile and gaining the welcome barricade of empty barrels before the mill. "This is my funeral."

"So? Well, first we make another corpse," Oscar retorted, suiting action to word with startling effect. Too late now for caution! With a half-humorous glance at the quiet German gone berserk, Ephraim followed suit, their guns barking in deadly unison for a crazy interval. The ear-splitting noise, shrieks of pain and ever-increasing smoke made the night hideous; a dreadful nightmare in which wild figures leaped and threatened, drew close with a frightful purpose and vanished into veils of coiling smoke.

A seeming eternity yet a little span of fury only long enough to empty their weapons. Then came silence so heavy that the sudden wail of warning, and tinkle of breaking glass, from above quelled the two men more than all the preceding violence. "Hear me! hear! You, Isidore, my brother, and you, Black Crow!" It was Marie, weird phantom of tragedy leaning down from her shattered window, shards of glass glinting round her head and the red glow of the leaping fires giving strange forcefulness to her bloodless face. "Listen to me!" She beat upon the sill, indifferent to shale of glass and her voice, prophetic in its fierce earnestness, was the one living sound in the

midnight blackness. "Listen! One more shot and I leap from the window. Heed that, O Black Crow, wisest of my people, you will understand—I die and the queen's soldiers make big trouble—oh, my uncle, speak for peace—make the peace with m'sieu the captain and forget poor Marie."

Once again the old Indian lifted his hand in imperial fashion and the hush of death fell round them. Closer he drew, peering up through the smoky firelight at the tragic figure in the window. "Hun hun! So you would have him live?" he queried, each word sharp and clear, "you would have the faithless lover live; and to what end, little Moccasin Flower?"

Marie leant downward as though to catch sight of the man her answering words were to cut loose from her heart. "I would have him live, oh, my uncle, to suffer a thousand deaths. To live on and on with a ghost by his side and remorse gnawing at his mind! I would have him live to loathe himself as he now loathes me."

Black Crow straightened, moved yet a pace nearer, his small sharp eyes fixing like gimlets upon the taut figure of Captain Marcusson.

"What say you now, m'sieu the captain?" He spoke excellent English when the fancy moved him and Caesars might have envied the scornful timbre of his voice. "M'sieu the captain, my people have not the white man's patience, yet we will hear you."

"You have heard me! There is nothing more to be said."

"Hun! No bargain with Black Crow?"

"None that I have not mentioned!"

"And the woman?"

"She will be cared for—that, too, I have said."

"Hun hun! And the child?"

Ephraim's lightning reply shocked Oscar by its calculated cruelty and insult. "Whose child?" he raged, "who dares claim the child of a wanton? Child! child! You fool, have you called in all her lovers?"

"Captain Marcusson! I implore you——" Oscar's voice rang sharply yet his words were drowned in the agonized cry that spoke the end of hope for poor Marie. "Oh! monsieur—it is a lie? The Good God, He knows I loved but you. . . . Look at me, m'sieu. Just once more—see, I do not hate you. I do not wish you ill, m'sieu, but if you will not believe me living you shall believe me dead!"

Perhaps they did not hear her very clearly. Perhaps this stark display of primal passions paralyzed all thought. Like wooden images they gazed

upward, saw her climb to the sill, waver a fateful moment and with a piteous, inarticulate cry leap to destruction.

Despite his display of evil temper Ephraim was first to reach her, remorse swiftly replacing his anger. She was not dead. In the ironical way of this world her fall had been broken by a pile of nets spread to dry beneath the window. Death comes not easily.

But now she was no longer merely a bone of contention but a sacrifice, holding in her little hands the threads of peace. Very gently he lifted her, commanded a lamp to be lit in the mill and a bed prepared. Over his shoulder he called out, in a voice none dreamt of disobeying: "You, Black Crow, set the men to putting out the fires. See to the foundation timbers—some of your fireworks landed too close."

And now, as in a nicely timed play, figures were seen hurrying toward the building. A small group of men marching abreast, closely followed by three women, one of whom carried a lantern whose light winked in the darkness like a sly red eye. So Hans had raised a general alarm! And the neighbours, too late for support, arrived only to complicate a situation better dealt with privately. Well, Ephraim reflected bitterly, human aid, like all charity, was generally ineffectual and ill-starred.

With a low cry of pain Marie opened her stricken eyes. Dr. Beaur, accustomed though he was to suffering, shrank from the look in them. Not alone their anguish, so like the mute terror of a dying hind, would haunt him ever, but the ineffable joy that transfigured her woe when she perceived m'sieu le capitaine knelt in kindness beside her.

Something more than pity stirred in the young doctor's heart as he concluded his hasty examination and what aid the circumstances permitted. A new understanding, fatalistic in slant but highly illuminating, gave deeper meaning to this whole affair. Poor Marie, reaping such bitter misery through her prodigal devotion, made plain how, repeated from generation to generation, this painful experience eventually bred in the female that instinctive caution in love and tendency to sell at a price which characterized the wisest of the sex. Wise Fräulein Hauffman! He saw now how like a lamp unto her feet were the niggardly, mercenary principles which had governed her conduct.

But Marie, her cold cheek pressed against the rough sleeve of Ephraim's jacket, no longer cared for anything. True, some nagging instinct kept rising in waves from the sea of her brief content—a persistent urge towards some definite declaration. Oh, there was something she ought to do! But with the dim, ghostly room wheeling like a kite in a capricious wind how should she

steady her reeling senses sufficiently to respond? More than strange, the faces that now peered at her from the crowding gloom! Frightening faces! Especially one on whose ashen cheek ran a livid scar that burned its way into memory.

“M’sieu! M’sieu, I am afraid! Oh, do not leave me to madam, who must hate me.”

“I shall not leave you,” Ephraim assured her softly, his face gone grey and eyes humbly beseeching as they sought those of his unfortunate wife. But Isabella, although sick with shame and misery, found grace to smile. For which charity he would always love, however strangely he was sometimes to prove it. Gallant soul, she did more. To the matchless wonder of all present she knelt beside Marie and kissed her fevered cheek. Then with calm decision she addressed the others standing by helpless and confused. Hans had gone for Dr. Hartman, who had charge of Marie’s case and understood her so well. But much could be done before he arrived to facilitate his task. Under direction of Dr. Beur, Mother Marcusson and Olga could arrange the bed and prepare bandages and linen. Gerard and Baptiste might see to fuel and water. Plenty of hot water. This in quiet, unshaken tones, but now she faltered, lost in momentary confusion, and a little breathless concluded. “As for you, gentlemen—” she appealed to the German partners Hans had enlisted from the adjoining quarter section, “—I feel sure you understand. Hans overrated our danger. My husband is often called upon to settle serious disputes between the Métis who work for him.”

Extreme generosity is contagious. Baptiste and Gerard, though not above sneering at Marie earlier in the evening, now beheld her through the kindly medium of Isabella’s pity and felt for both unhappy women a surge of understanding sympathy. Madam’s trust, moreover, stirred to instant resolve the latent good in their natures. Never should she find them spreading the tale of her misery! Though so shortly before they were swayed by primitive emotions, there burned now within them an equally compelling instinct of devotion. They would have liked to kneel at her feet, after the fashion of their French forebears, to worship in her the maternal and divine. But something in her quiet strength and steady gaze restrained, and sent them away in silence. The two Germans, muttering jumbled apologies hastened after them.

That over, Isabella arose, and with the pathetic gesture of a small child terrified of its surroundings covered her face with hands whose trembling betrayed the extent of her mental anguish. With a smothered cry Oscar sprang forward, but was quietly intercepted by Halvor who caught her daughter-in-law in protective arms as she swayed on her feet. “There, there,

Isabella!" Mrs. Marcusson was purposely tart. "Be sensible. Now that everything is safely over why turn squeamish? Come, sit down like a good girl—oh, thank Heaven! There comes the doctor at last."

"Indeed, ma'm, it's himself, black bag and all," cried Olga, from the window and hastened to open the door.

But when the old doctor's slightly stooped figure, in its familiar disarray of antiquated garments, entered, bringing a tang of wintry air and cheerful sanity the tension snapped so abruptly that Oscar, now deprived of action to relieve his pent-up emotions and worn to breaking-point with days of exacting care, started laughing feebly, checked himself with an effort and in a strained unnatural voice asked his colleague what he wanted done.

Dr. Hartman paused in the act of pulling up his shirt sleeves, glanced sharply at the haggard young man and growled something about the imbecility of too much zeal. "Sterilize my instruments if you will——" he barked in conclusion, "and then clear out. I mean it! Get into the air for a bit, I may need you later."

How different was the scene that now confronted him as he left the mill. No sign nor sound of violence—only a vast quiet intermittently riven by a light wind wailing through the dying wood and, faint as a child's weeping, the muffled purling of Little River, shrunken in its autumnal bed. To the left, beyond the river, lay long, level fields like a purple sea, brooding and mysterious. Straight ahead loomed the square, high-pitched bulk of "Glen Haven" house, one small light glimmering in a bald window-pane. And to the right, stretching to the far horizon the plumed pines formed a solid flank of darkness, sinister as a prison wall.

Thought Oscar: What but tragedy could flourish here? What a fool he was—what fools they all were—to have thought otherwise! And suddenly he seemed to see Isabella alone against the world doomed to perpetual exile in this jealous unrelenting wilderness, without so much as a single comforting illusion to justify the sacrifice.

A shudder passed through him. Standing there under the frowning guard of the black forest he had caught a new sound. A thin, wavering thread of sound that by virtue of its feeble impertinence obliterated problems and perplexities and brought him swiftly back to the solid facts of earth. The most pitiful yet most potent of all living sound—the cry of a newborn soul!

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So much for this strange night. Of the stranger one which followed nothing was ever definitely known beyond the borders of "Glen Haven".

What the good folks of the district did learn, however, satisfied them both as to the justice and poetry of life, Captain Marcusson's new mill had barely escaped destruction by a band of drunken Indians who, doubtless, had reason for their spleen. But if it was distressing to consider how all this rioting, and savage threat to life and property, reacted upon poor Mrs. Marcusson it was in almost equal measure delightful to recount how fate consoled her by the gift of twins.

Small wonder Captain Marcusson rode head-high through the countryside bidding the settlers to the christening feast! For not only were these the first twins in the entire district, but the first white children born in Little River. Yes, indeed, the captain had reason to be proud with such a prize in the household!

Oline Boyen was far less optimistic when, at Halvor's behest, she entered the sick chamber to reason with her friend. "Reason with her Oline," the old lady had whispered in despair as she led her to the bedroom. "For her own sake she must be persuaded from this suicidal course. Ephraim was beginning to love her, but he'll never forgive this! I'm not sure I'd forgive her myself."

She had the queer feeling of crossing into some other world when she entered that quiet room. Just as Halvor had been impressed long ago so now Oline held back amazed by the tremendous spiritual force she discerned in the slight, still figure in the big four-poster bed before her. Like Halvor, she suddenly thought: why, Isabella is beautiful! The imperishable beauty of an indomitable spirit set her for ever apart. Love her? Why shouldn't Ephraim love her!

Isabella turned her head slowly, the faintest smile curving her bloodless lips, her eyes narrowed. "Oline dear, don't waste time trying to dissuade me. I can guess what you've been asked to say—but it's no use."

But jealous of happiness for the friend she had grown to cherish, Oline replied gently, "You're too ill to see things in right perspective now, Isabella. Remember that's what you said to me? Besides, you must realize that hurting yourself this way won't benefit anyone—least of all poor Marie. And—well, to put it bluntly, she got what she bargained for. But she must have been happy for a little. Aren't you entitled to as much—aren't all of us entitled to as much?"

"Of course. That's why I shall cling to my self-respect," said Isabella dispassionately. Then, with a little pleading gesture she added, "Would you like to see my babies?"

“I should like to see your baby,” Oline replied, and was instantly covered in confusion for Isabella’s accusing glance seemed to penetrate to the depths of her soul. But before she could justify herself the most moving incident in all this curious play occurred with suddenness that took her breath away.

Ephraim, his arm in a sling, but head high and eyes smiling, stepped into the room noiseless as a cat. His voice was careless, the glance he bent upon his wife an odd mixture of defiance and appeal. “Well met, Oline!” he laughed. “You’ve come to inspect our treasure, I see.”

Isabella answered for her. “She came to see our babies. I think we should ask her to stand godmother.”

Which of them she pitied the more Oline could not have said. Ephraim, wounded in pride and fighting for the ancient male supremacy, or Isabella straining for what she termed self-respect. But she discovered this: in her weakness and dependency, Isabella possessed a power her husband was helpless to combat. She never forgot him as he stood miserable and irresolute that nerve-racking moment, or the ironic smile that broke in his face as he stooped to the cradle and picked up one of the swaddled bundles. “Oline, let me introduce you to my son,” he said in tones suddenly very soft. “They tell me he’s quite human though to look at him is to doubt it. I have decided to call him Manfred.”

Isabella faced her friend with heightening colour and as determined a smile. “There have been only three Manfred Marcussons—all of them heroes. That should be auspicious! But our daughter—I shall call her Leatrice, it’s such a pretty name. Pick her up Oline, she has the sweetest brown eyes and a mouth exactly like her father.”

Captain Marcusson put down his son and left the room. After a difficult interval Oline hazarded timidly. “My dear, need you have said that?”

To which poor Isabella replied bitterly, “Perhaps not. If he had not done as he did!” Then huskily, “Oline, I’m sorry, but I’d much rather you left me now.”

BOOK TWO

CHAPTER I

WHERE life is simple any untoward event tends to loom large in retrospect. The folk of Little River and Maple Bluffs fell into the habit of reckoning time from the attack on the Marcusson mill and the subsequent burning of Ephraim's barn. For instance, Marie Batoche did not die of the measles late October such and such a year, but was taken suddenly the week the Indians stormed the mill. Nor did John Boyen open his new store with a dance and barbecue in December that same year, but in the same month the Marcusson barn was burned. Neither was dainty little Greta Holmquist lost for nearly a week in April the following year, but had her adventure in the timber the spring of the big rains, which, as all knew, was the spring following the barn burning. No one was ever heard to say that Isabella's twins nearly died of scarlet fever in their second year, it being thrice effective to point out how this additional trouble had beset the Marcusson household just one year after the loss of the barn.

And while on this subject of scarlet fever, it may be best to make clear how, though ten other children contracted the infamous malady, none but the Marcusson twins acquired fame therefrom. New settlers would hear the much worn account from tongues avidly fluent: how the twins, isolated as they were at lonely "Glen Haven" could have escaped the dread disease but for Captain Marcusson's philanthropy in offering hospitality to a lonely Swedish maid. A pretty thing, said to have been a children's governess in the old country, her delectable complexion was, to the vast concern of those interested, most unfortunately altered by the fever, apparently picked up by the wayside on her trip. It was understood with reservations, that Captain Marcusson's sole interest in and reason for befriending her revolved round his enthusiasm for her scholastic attributes and her ability to play the guitar! But that aside, the net result of his charity was this: after nursing the pretty guest back to guitar-strumming convalescence Isabella found herself with two very sick babies on her hands. At this crisis the charming little singer was purported to have offered to quiet the babes with her melody and got, for her amiable pains, an invitation to move on from Mother Marcusson. Clearest of all in local memories was the recollection of Captain Marcusson driving like mad through an angry snowstorm, his visitor nose-deep in furs beside him, whirling down the new post road in a cloud of flying snow to the tune of nascent bells. That was five years ago, but even yet, when the captain travelled fast some wag was sure to ask, "What, has the scarlet fever

broken out again at ‘Glen Haven’, and the master riding the wind to fetch a guitar?”

Despite their puerile quips and coarse innuendoes at his expense, however, the settlers preferred the reckless captain to his irreproachable partner. Ephraim Marcusson might be something of a rascal and at times a fool, but that made it easier to confess one’s own inefficiencies and failures. He could be vindictive in a telling way. He forced the men whom he suspected of sympathizing with the destroyers of his barn to rebuild it at half pay under threat of dismissal from his service. At that time the settlers of Little River and Maple Bluffs were dependent for vital necessities on the service of John Boyen and Ephraim Marcusson. Fishing, trapping, and transporting supplies, the main employments were in the hands of the partners.

It is true that by now a household here and there was self-sustaining, but for the most part all the homesteader could get from his land was his meagre daily bread. The promised railway had swung wide of their fertile fields, so that as yet neither timber nor land brought any satisfactory income. Captain Marcusson’s mill was a godsend and encouraged the people to cultivate land that otherwise would have remained idle. And though he insisted on a stipulated percentage of all the grain that passed through his mill, Ephraim was not always as exacting in reality as he was on paper. He had a happy faculty for forgetting a too difficult bargain. When Joseph Dupont boasted about the biggest yield of rye in the district, Captain Marcusson raised his rate for grinding to a scandalous figure—so scandalous that Mrs. Dupont came weeping to Isabella about it. Isabella could, of course, do nothing, beyond the bestowal of negative condolences and a gift of clothing for the latest Dupont offspring. But a week later, when the Duponts lost two ewes to the wolves, Ephraim sent them four out of his own flock.

John Boyen, on the other hand, prided himself on a dependable exactitude. He gave measure for measure and got pound for pound. But so far as was known, except for Oline’s restricted charities, very little escaped his itchy fingers.

At the present time, however, it was the question of schooling for their growing children that most troubled the isolated settlers. And of course, whenever that subject raised its horny head, up sprang the counter-demand for a church. Illiana Petrovna, living in a small log cottage near Boyen’s new store, was, as might be supposed, the chief agitator and champion for the desired school.

The Holmquist cottage, standing as it did by the side of the road, had become a popular stopping-place. Women left their babies with old Illiana

while they haggled with Anton, who had made himself invaluable to Boyen as a buffer between merchant and dissatisfied customer. Of an evening the one living-room, cluttered up with odds and ends of all description, would become a seething bedlam of fiery talk, cheap tobacco smoke, and wailing infants. In other words, Illiana Petrovna had come into her own. Here she could rail and hear others rail at the deviltries of existence, while, no matter how heated her discourse or lengthy her gossip over long emptied teacups, there was always food in the larder, and except for an occasional irritable word from the master nothing ever came of her voluble pessimism.

But this business of the school was something different. In this she was sincere. When she told her visitors it was only just that John Boyen, considering all he got out of them, should at least raise the building, it was no more than she had many times said to his face.

Perhaps this sincerity was partly inspired by her granddaughter. Little Greta, nearly seven, was a wild, fluffy-headed, star-eyed creature who ran about the place like a savage, and already possessed a repertoire of the most scandalous tricks. Young as she was she could dance with the grace of a butterfly to no better music than the rhythmic tapping of her grandmother's foot. But her artistic leanings were nicely balanced by decidedly mercenary instincts. She never danced gratis. "I'll dance for you, uncle," she would say to old Doctor Hartman when his gig stood at the gate. "I'll dance for you real pretty—if you'll take me for a ride." Illiana chuckled to herself when she thought about it. A sly one, that small Greta! She not only danced for the things that pleased her, but for anything negotiable. For instance, when big Sam, the fishing-fleet boss wanted a dance and a kiss to boot, Greta demanded a plug of tobacco, much to the big man's amusement. Oh, a wise one, that child! Illiana would never forget how the little trafficker rushed out of the house when the business was done to wash her burning face at the pump. And on the morrow she traded her tobacco for a piece of rock candy at the store!

Yes, Greta was too promising to grow up in total ignorance. To be sure, her father might teach her something if Illiana nagged him hard enough. Yet it was doubtful, for ever since that German family from Keewatin had come to Maple Bluffs, Anton spent his Sundays over there. Poor fool that he was, courting a fat wench like Tillie Hiner.

She said as much to Oscar Beaur one morning. Oscar rented the ten by twelve cubby-hole opening on the kitchen, tentatively called a bedroom.

"You would never believe," said she, poking at a disconsolate fire to encourage the tea-kettle, "never in this world believe that a man could be such an ass! Let me tell you, wives are expensive. Either they are too

delicate to bear children or else they are for ever in need of a midwife. Whichever way, the result is the same. Now an old woman, God be praised, is done with such nonsense. She's turned from being an animal into a human being that you can count on—the same to-day, to-morrow, and next year. I tell you if that fool goes on as he's started, all the talk about a store of his own will end in baby food and sick-bed mewling! God bless me, what's to become of Greta? Would you say she was a child to hand over to stepmothers—especially Tillie Hiner?"

Oscar, a little heavier in body and a shade less deliberate in mind, removed his pipe from between very white teeth, and laughed heartily.

"Now, mother, when it comes to that I'd pity Tillie. Poor Tillie's intellect isn't of the mightiest!"

Illiana watched the effervescent pot, her greying head thrust forward hawklike. "Well, never mind those idiots. What I'm thinking now is this: since no man seems bold enough, I've a good mind to tramp up and down the settlement myself, and get together a list of those, if any, who are heathenish enough to want a school. As for those who prefer a harp in the life to come to wisdom in this, let them pray in the schoolhouse! And what's more, I can tell you that poor Mrs. Marcusson thinks as I do."

Oscar did not doubt it, yet the reference drew a frown. Somehow he never could include Isabella Marcusson in the category of common folk. To him she was no ordinary backwoods wife immersed in mundane affairs and bickerings. "Well," he said, after a bit, thoughtfully stirring a cup of rather formidable looking tea, "I would have told you sooner, but I wanted to make sure first. As a matter of fact, you can give your adjectives a rest. This school business is practically settled. Captain Marcusson has donated an acre of land, as well as some standing timber for building, if the men want to cut and haul it. John Boyen won't approve, of course, but I rather suspect his wife will manage to get us a grant towards books and such materials."

"Hum! Poor mistress! Oh, she'll make him come through all right, the skinflint!" Illiana agreed expressively. "God bless us, why shouldn't she, with three children of her own to look out for. If I'm any prophet, that Josephine will take some handling. But since you know so much, perhaps you can tell me who's to do the teaching? When I told the master how successful Anton was in that line back home, he puffed up like the Grand Duke. Well—he knows what Anton's worth, and won't let him waste his time teaching the young ones!"

Oscar squirmed self-consciously. "Well, as a matter of fact, we've hit upon this idea: if the building end of it can be managed, I can muddle along

with the children until the settlement can afford a teacher.”

“Oh ho! So that’s the how of it! You, my poor lad, may God reward you; you haven’t a second shirt to your back, you are to spend your time for nothing when you might be earning an odd penny! What a pity the captain hasn’t another governess in line!”

With sudden irritation, Oscar got up and banged out of the house. Old Illiana watched him go with a strange smile on her face, a hard speculative glitter in her black eyes.

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The building of the schoolhouse was a great event. Once under way, even the most lackadaisical began to show signs of interest. And it must be admitted that this was mostly due to Illiana. She struggled over the roads tirelessly, inveigling, scolding this one and that one, representing now the glory of the work, now its social opportunities. It was she, too, who suggested making a festival of the bringing in of the first logs.

The young men had cut the timber. In due course it was to be brought out by the fathers of those children who would benefit first. Ephraim offered his oxen and a hired man. John, too, was prepared to be generous in like manner. But no, said Illiana, let it be done as in other parts and other countries. The ground logs should be hauled out by the men themselves. They should team up with shoulder straps and bring out the logs, singing! That would show some blood and fire! That would make the building reek of honest sweat and honest interest. And the women should boil great pots of tea and coffee in the open. The hot steam rising heavenward would represent their faith and willingness to share primeval burdens. After that the oxen could be put to work, and when the logs were all in, everyone should repair to the captain’s barn for a senselessly grand feed. The young folks could then dance to their hearts’ undoing, while the elders sat by grinning in their coffee. “God bless us!” Illiana cried, waving her hands like flags. “To be sure, that’s the only way to raise a proper schoolhouse!” And that is how it was done.

There was this variation, however. At the dance, where Isabella was moving about graciously, a slim, youthful figure still, arresting despite her plain pearl-grey old-fashioned silk, Ephraim must forsooth proceed to scandalize even his most worldly neighbours. It was all Tillie’s fault for bringing her city cousin—a wispy little creature—one of those smooth-limbed, wide-eyed feminine nonentities whose pretty legs and daring throatline justified the marked absence of more than rudimentary brains. Everyone called her Cora, and though her escapades were remembered for

years to come, no one ever troubled to tack on the Shultz. Her hair had a blowaway appearance that suggested the heads of Raphael's angels. Whatever one's topic she laughed in a running water, ripply sort of way that was contagious, and made one quite forget the wisdom of mere words.

Cora naturally danced like music incarnate, which was perhaps another good excuse for being. She had besides the added lure of silk petticoats that floated easily, to the edification of those whose passion centred in slim legs. The silk was inexpensive, it is true, but even cheap silk yields up the curves and warmth of the feminine body as even the finest wool could never do. Ephraim had given less than a passing thought to Cora, until her slippery, curving young body flowed like hot wine in his arms.

After that he refused to let her go. And being Cora, she could, of course, see no reason for insisting on negligence. Ephraim was not only her host and a rich and powerful man according to the standards of this backwoods colony, but would have been counted handsome in any gathering. He could, too, when it pleased him, deal handsomely in all those pretty gallantries even ignorant women recognize as the cream of social life. It pleased him now to play upon the soft nothingness of Cora as a potter plays upon yielding clay. Perhaps, if the truth were known, it eased an ancient hurt to read the flattering admiration in her sparkling eyes.

Perhaps because Isabella retained a perfect composure, going about her hospitable way with irreproachable cheerfulness, Ephraim drank more than was his rather continent habit, and so had not the grace to save his wife from public humiliation. At any rate, even his harshest critics mumblingly apologized to one another for him. Saying that no man in his right senses would kiss a vixen like Cora right under his wife's eyes and carry her bodily from the room!

At the shocking sight Illiana Petrovna fell dumb right in the midst of a colourful description of a Siberian incarceration. Oline hid her sympathetic blushes in the brown curls of her little daughter's head. Halvor shut her eyes, and for an awful moment everyone thought she would faint. No one moved. Speech and volition had come to an abrupt halt. Isabella stood by the refreshment-table, a pot of hot chocolate in her hands. She had been about to refill Mrs. Dupont's cup. Always pale, her calm face underwent no tell-tale change, but the quick dropping of her dark-fringed eye-lids was immeasurably moving. Men swore to themselves, and women, never generous to the fortunate of their kind, longed to show the pity that welled up in them. Which was exactly the one thing from which Isabella fervently prayed to be delivered.

It was an intolerable moment, saved from black disaster by Doctor Hartman's blustering entrance from the kitchen, whence, unobserved, he had witnessed the mad escapade. His studied cheerfulness had the desired effect.

"Well, you fiddle and fife," he bawled at the musicians, "where's that Mazurka you bragged about so loudly? Strike up, boys! Cook's orders! No work, no grub!"

To the end of her days Oline thought the strains of that galloping Mazurka sadder than a funeral march. Isabella could not be said to have heard it. To her it was nothing but a jumble of discord, beating rather futilely against the multiple clamour in her soul. But what she did hear very plainly after the noisy farewells were over and she stood alone in the empty doorway, was the silvery singing of Ephraim's fiddle, drifting up from the banks of Little River, where the yellow eyes of the mill windows winked at her secretively.

That night, for the first time, she condemned her husband to his mother. "To think that he could take her there!" was what she said.

Old Halvor, looking fragile and shrunken in her nainsook night-dress, shrugged disdainfully. "Fools are as God made them, Isabella. My dear girl, heat some milk, drink it and get right to bed. A wisdom infinitely more soothing than all the balderdash of a dissolute Solomon! Remember this," she added with a dry chuckle, as she swung her withered leaves of feet into bed, "The lordly male wouldn't be born in such numbers if women weren't such easy fools!"

Cora, as has been hinted, was no heavyweight mentally, nor any storehouse of courage. She was thoroughly frightened on the morrow, when the wintry sunlight searched her out with merciless insistence where she lay curled like a sleepy cat on the couch in Ephraim's mill office. There was no music now, no challenging laughter, nor shelter of pale, shadow-laced lamplight to inspire romantic excess. It quite terrorized her to discover Captain Marcusson at his desk writing furiously, his heavy brows knotted and an altogether forbidding expression on his dark face. It was so unloverlike and cruel!

She must have made some slight noise as she cautiously lifted herself to her elbow to get a better view of the strange surroundings. For all at once he looked up and stared at her coldly. Cora tossed back her curls and giggled nervously.

"Oh my!" said she, "it must be awfully late!"

Ephraim was caustic. "Quite! I could wish it earlier. Those thrifty kinsmen of yours rise with the dawn. I suppose you'd better have something

to eat before I take you back.”

Cora had the wit to fly at him for that—fly at him literally, edging her slim body into his lap, her arms around his neck.

“No! Oh, no! I daren’t. They’ll kill me! Tillie will have told uncle everything. Don’t take me there! But oh, I just couldn’t eat in the house with Mrs. Marcusson. She’s so—so terrible!”

Ephraim brushing her arms from his neck like so much cob-web, shook her soundly. “You little fool! Well, perhaps in that case you’ll tell me what the devil you want to do?”

“Oh, Ephraim!” Cora gulped, opening and shutting her morning glory eyes with marvellous effectiveness. “Why you—you hurt me!”

She was a silly little ass, certainly, but such a *little* ass! Ephraim felt vaguely ashamed. To prove it he kissed her, with astonishing success. The ready tears evaporated like dew, and, quite restored to normal, she clapped her hands jubilantly.

“I tell you what let’s do! But first you promise not to make me meet that _____”

“Careful, careful!” Ephraim’s voice was cold. “It’s safest always to avoid names!”

“I don’t understand!” Cora pouted. “I was just going to say—well, you know. I was thinking, wouldn’t it be thrilling if you took me to Winnipeg!”

“What would you do in Winnipeg, Miss Shultz? Join a band of mercy, or hunt trappers?”

Cora giggled. “Oh, you!” She dug into his ribs with a playful finger. “You’re so funny! But of course, I’d go to my sister. Leona is so smart, and *so* beautiful!”

“Oh,” said Ephraim, “smart *and* beautiful. How very extraordinary! I shall have to meet Leona!”

“Oh, would you?” squealed Cora. “Would you, really? That means you’ll take me, doesn’t it? Oh, I’m so thrilled! You see, Vilhelm is there, too.”

Ephraim began to take interest. “Oh, so Vilhelm is there, too? Who, pray, is Vilhelm?”

Cora blushed adorably. “Well, you see, Vilhelm and me—well, you know, it’s awfully silly, really, pa thought it wasn’t safe the way Vilhelm hung around, mama being gone, you know. Poor mama, she always thought she’d go sudden with her heart, but it was measles. Pa thought it queer too.

With her gone, he thought it best for me to come down here to Uncle Peter's. I cried and cried. It was so silly—of Pa I mean."

"Very silly," Ephraim agreed, adding with amusement: "So, all this considered, you think it best to go back. To convince papa, shall we say?"

"Well, not exactly. Papa will be off in the bush. But Leona has a good job, and the nicest room in the Leland Hotel. I know she'd *love* to have me!"

This cheerful planning was interrupted by Hans, who darted in to tell his master that breakfast was ready. That mistress wanted the girl to enter by the side door for her uncle had just arrived fighting-mad. "Ja, mistress said for her to go straight to the children's bedroom—the first door opening on the side hall." Hans poured out the words angrily, his face beet-red. "She's to stay there till the mistress calls. Then she's to bring Leatrice to the dining-room. Ja, that's what she said!" he finished, glaring at the now shivering wanton, and with a telling snort bolted from the room muttering anathemas.

Ephraim laughed, for which his departing servant cursed him roundly. Cora was not enheartened. There was something in Ephraim's expression that terrified her even more than the dreaded ordeal ahead. "Oh, oh!" she wailed. "What'll I do? I can't go in there—I mean, uncle is so bad tempered, he might beat me!"

"If you don't go at once, I shall beat you!" Ephraim told her gravely. "I most strongly advise you not only to go, but hurry!"

Cora fled. Watching her Ephraim cursed himself, as he always did. What on earth had made him take that silly creature? With Isabella looking on! How more than ever she must despise him! Milly had at least some charm—education, and a voice. While Marie—the longer the years, the brighter grew her memory. At this safe distance he sometimes wondered if he had not truly loved her. Poor little Marie! Except for his damnable pride, he might even now admit that Isabella had surmised rightly and done well when she defied him about Leatrice.

But this was no time for fruitless reflection. Isabella waited him at breakfast—Isabella and Peter Hiner!

He looked quite his carefree self when he entered the living-room. His greeting to wife and mother was properly commonplace. The ice was beginning to show signs of breaking, he said. Little River promised to run high in the spring. His surprise on discovering Peter was admirably simulated.

"Well, well! You travel early, neighbour. It tempts me to believe all the thrifty things I've heard about our German homesteaders. May I ask if you got the timber claim from the government?"

Peter was a little man. He had never known independence before. The atmosphere of the captain's house reminded him of the godly beings he had bowed and scraped before in Prussia. Especially old Mrs. Marcusson, who, though little and shrunken, confronted him now with the confidence and pride of the ancient régime. She was very affable—too affable. Her smile was like the lace that curled about her small white hands. It had a quality that cut him off from familiar moorings. Now, to young Mrs. Marcusson he might have come out bluntly. As, indeed, he had begun. But when Halvor Marcusson had drifted into the room remarking upon some commonplace, in her thin old voice, the mere lifting of her eyebrows had taken the wind right out of him. Now her son looked down at him from that lordly height, his black eyes disarmingly equable, yet at the same time curiously intimidating.

Peter swallowed with difficulty, stammered, turned brick red and with a last desperate plunge after departing righteousness replied: "You know why I've come, Captain Marcusson! You know it damn well! Excuse me, ma'am!" he turned to Halvor. "Excuse me, but your son here—not that I'm saying he hasn't good parts, Mrs. Marcusson, only there's limits to what you can stand, even from the gentry!"

Isabella's slow, calm voice broke in. "Did you say you had eaten or not, would you like tea or coffee?"

Peter crumbled. "No, thank you, ma'am. I mean, I thank you kindly. Coffee is always good!"

Ephraim grinned. His mother, fearing some fresh commitment to folly, came forward hastily. "Sit down, son, sit down! We have waited long enough as it is. Peter Hiner must be starved. Olga hates to have her griddle cakes grow cold."

With the same easy grace natural to Ephraim, she turned to her daughter-in-law, "By the way, where is Cora? Isn't she late with the children?"

Isabella was pouring the coffee. Only Ephraim noticed that her hand shook a little. "Leatrice may have been naughty. She is very difficult at times."

Peter felt as if he had been saved from sudden death. So that's how it was! All that wild talk of Tillie's was nothing but imagination. The captain had been enjoying a bit of a game, as men in authority often did. Himmel! How close he had been to making an ass of himself! With pathetic eagerness he smiled at his hostess, accepting a generous dish of steaming griddle cakes and a cup of coffee gratefully. He would have liked to justify himself somehow, but could think of nothing but to eat. He ate everything set before him, as if it were his last meal on earth. His eyes never left the safety of the

plate—not even when Cora, white and trembling, appeared in the doorway, clinging to little Leatrice for moral support.

Isabella pointed to the vacant chair beside her husband. “Sit down, Cora, and help yourself. Leatrice can’t eat porridge, so we give her bread and milk. This morning, by way of celebration, you may give her a griddle cake, too. Not much syrup. Was Manfred comfortable when you left him?”

Cora had neither the courage nor wit to rise to the play. Abjectly miserable, she sank into the seat farthest from Ephraim. For a moment, Halvor thought she would ruin them all by bursting into tears.

Little Leatrice saved the day. “Oh, papa,” she cried joyously, “mamma says we’re going to the great big city to take Manfred to the eye man! Cora’s to mind me so she can tend brother. Will I see the soldiers, papa, and the Fort, and the company stores. If I’m awfully good, will I?”

Startled, Ephraim glanced at his gravely self-possessed wife. He suddenly felt sick and leprous, yet longing as never before to find something vulnerable in her—some breach in the wall of her admirable common sense. Some way to make her cry out her hate of him and the hurt he inflicted upon her. Broken, he might comfort her, love her into forgiveness. If she had known what struggled behind the dark flash of his eyes, she might have withheld the smile that was to cost her so much. Smile she did, and Ephraim, strangely wounded, answered his daughter brightly.

“Of course you will see the soldiers, child, and the big stores, and the Fort. Everything else your mother has planned for you to see!”

Later, when Peter Hiner was gone, and Cora under the vigilant supervision of Halvor was packing a trunk in the attic, Ephraim entered his wife’s bedroom. Isabella was sewing by the window, the late winter sunlight bringing out the blue sheen of her hair and the madonna pallor of her skin. She was a woman who grew more beautiful with the years, for her beauty was of the mind and spirit. She spoke like a passionless saint, yet he had known the ineffable sweetness of her fine abandon. Of the many women whose conquest had amused him only the memory of her kisses alone returned to torment him. Surely she must have loved him that one short, unforgettable season.

As usual, she prevented tentative conversation by a straight-forward, frontal attack, delivered with deadly common sense. “I was expecting you, Ephraim. You have come to discuss my plans, haven’t you?”

He laughed unpleasantly. “Not to discuss them, exactly, my dear. To prevent them. You know perfectly well there’s nothing wrong with Manfred’s eyes!”

Isabella kept on sewing. Finishing a seam, she cut her thread, and with the scissors indicated a chair. "You may as well have a seat, Ephraim. As you say, there's nothing wrong with Manfred. Of course, I haven't the slightest intention of going anywhere myself."

He longed to shake her. "Then who *is* going, may I ask?"

"You, your mother, and Cora." She told him quietly.

That staggered him. "My mother? For Heaven's sake, Isabella, are you crazy? Have you thought what such a journey means to a woman of her age? Travel is not what you call luxurious here as yet."

Her soft laughter pricked him like a needle. "Your mother is far from decrepit, Ephraim. It is she needs reading glasses—in fact, many things. You must know how she longs for a taste of civilized society. A month in the city will do her a great deal of good."

"And Cora—have you figured everything as carefully for Cora?" he queried scornfully.

She played into his hands then. "Oh, no, Ephraim, I should never presume that far. I know she will be excellently cared for!"

"Oh, you do?" he cried, his temper slipping leash, all the pent-up fury of long resentment rushing out in cruel, senseless judgment. She was inhuman! So damnably righteous her mere presence drove a normal being to excess! No doubt she despised incontinent, blundering, humanity. No doubt she felt vastly superior to poor little Cora, whose heart ruled her head. . . .

Isabella went to the window, raising the blind a little higher, her face was very pale. To the deepening anguish of her eyes something of the nameless terror of a trapped animal was added.

Unfortunately Ephraim was far too angry to see. Her voice fell like cold rain on his wrath.

"No, Ephraim, you are wrong. If I thought of her at all, I should envy Cora. All Coras! I was not thinking of her, nor of myself, nor of you. I was thinking of the children. I might as well say it now as later. Ephraim—I can't have Leatrice growing up despising her father."

"Leatrice?" he repeated angrily. "Leatrice! Why Leatrice?"

"Because," said his wife, folding up her mending with hands that shook a little, "Leatrice sooner or later will discover the truth. Being a woman, she will condemn her mother, unless she finds good reason to be proud of the man who betrayed her. You see, unlike Manfred, she cannot fall back on the comforting hypocrisies of marriage!"

Ephraim turned abruptly, and left the room.

CHAPTER II

CAPTAIN MARCUSSON resolved to make the most of his journey, to justify in every particular his wife's worst suspicions. He succeeded at least in staying longer than even she had anticipated. So long, in fact, that John Boyen began bombarding him with letters of rebuke. Why, such waste of time bordered on lunacy. All for a silly chit like Cora!

There he was mistaken. So far as Ephraim was concerned, Cora no longer existed. Leona Shultz was the lively Phoenix which had risen from the ashes of her half-sister's cheap flirtation. Leona was not exactly pretty. She was gay, with a dash of cynicism to spice her gaiety. She was hard, unscrupulous and cheerfully ruthless. That Captain Marcusson chanced to be young and good-looking meant nothing. The moment Cora's story was intelligible, she decided here was the opportunity she had long awaited.

She was quite frank about it. To begin with, she drew attention to the significant fact that, although poor in worldly goods, the Shultz sisters were rich in male relatives who were seasoned to the brutal ways of the North. Life and death were of less consequence to them than the foolish idealism they nursed toward their women. They could be very troublesome. Very dangerous when provoked, said Leona.

Her brazen threat amused Ephraim vastly. Said he, smiling: "Leona Shultz, your formidable kinsmen do not scare me, but I'm agreeable to blackmail by a young lady with such heavenly eyes!"

She neither smiled nor winced. "Very well," she replied, "so much the better. Now what I want done is this: Cora must marry Vilhelm, which is easy to arrange. Papa's chief objection to the match was Vilhelm's inability to keep a job. You will find him a permanent place. That, however, is not what most concerns me. I loathe my present work. I always wanted to learn something worthwhile—to go to school. But first it was my own mother needed help and nursing, then Cora's. Whenever I put by a little money, some fresh disaster claimed it. No one ever understood what I wanted, men least of all."

Captain Marcusson was really interested now. Here was something novel and refreshing. In her sincere animation, Leona reminded him of the mad young women he had seen in Russia, young furies, yelping about tyranny, the divine rights of man, and equality of the sexes! He interrupted her with a blunt challenge.

"Well, do you know exactly what you want, Leona Shultz?"

“Yes!” she bit back at him, like a wolf-cub. “Yes, I want to learn all about figures. Look here, there isn’t a date in history, there isn’t a number of a house, or the price of anything—land, clothes, or food—once I’ve heard it that I ever forget. I want to learn about business. Oh, you can laugh! I know women haven’t been thought capable of it unless their useless husbands died! Just the same I mean it! I’m willing to pay any price for the experience, Captain Marcusson!”

That was the beginning of what was later known as the Little River mystery. Although at first there was nothing mysterious about it. Cora married Vilhelm, and went to live in a little house built for them on the shores of the lake, not far from John Boyen’s store. A pretty little house, the first of several model cottages to spring up in the new village now rapidly covering the townsite staked out by the foresighted partners. Maple Bluffs was thriving. John’s new two-story general store, pompously named the Boyen Emporium, testified to that. So also was Peter Hiner’s Stopping-Place convincing evidence of growing prosperity. The steady stream of settlers and improving roads had not only doubled business, but called into being this famous Fried Fish paradise where Ma Hiner presided with perspiring, red-faced benevolence. Ma Hiner, however, was perhaps only at her best in the kitchen. So what was more natural than that Leona, experienced in hotel management, should come down from the city to assist her relative? No, there was nothing the least odd in Leona’s coming to Maple Bluffs, or curious in her behaviour—until she began haunting Illiana’s cottage for no better reason than sitting at sums with Herr Beur. Now that was queer! For what could a personable young woman want with figures, anyway? To quote Illiana: “Was she going to forfeit keeping house for some nice fellow for the silly business of keeping books?”

Why, that was it! Leona leaped at the suggestion, actually kissing Illiana for the masterly solution to her problem. She would begin by keeping Captain Marcusson’s books! Instinctively, she knew that he was cheated right and left. That must end. No one should lie to her! For she had a memory photographic in accuracy and detail, and she knew how to drive a hard bargain. More to humour her than anything else, Ephraim handed over his miscellaneous papers, contracts, and notes. She was horrified. As naturally as the average woman takes to housekeeping, Leona set to work inventing a commendable filing system and a set of books. It was after that that he began taking her with him on his seasonal expeditions up the lakes in his new steamer, *The Lenore*. “Ho, ho! So *that* was the how of it?” croaked the town. To which Leona Shultz was sublimely indifferent, browbeat them most effectively, stood so coldly armoured against censure, no one was ever

quite satisfied of his judgment. There the case rested for several years. A tantalizing mystery!

CHAPTER III

MAPLE BLUFFS and Little River now entered upon a period of steady, unobtrusive growth. Ninety miles of government highway linked the settlements with the rapidly growing western capital. As yet the railway had not penetrated beyond Myrna, twenty miles to the south. But although John Boyen lamented the fact to his customers, a railway was the last thing he wanted. His present power and influence depended on a continued isolation, and his dream of an inland settlement almost entirely under his control had materialized by reason of it.

As Illiana Petrovna voiced it, the master of Maple Bluffs was more than a merchant. He was a trustee of souls. What he did not own outright he held under mortgage. The general store boasted his name in twelve-inch black letters, but the new warehouse where the fish lay piled in frozen tiers waiting a market was also his. So was the drug store, and the harness shop, and the old log shanty where a diminutive Chinese eked out a mean living washing for the bachelors. A row of little cottages flanking the new Lutheran Church was also his. It is more than certain he might have claimed quite honestly the board sidewalk which flanked Lake Avenue and ended at his private grounds, neatly fenced now as befitted his new house. A huge, impressive house with a tower pointing sternly to the blue and somehow giving a melancholy aspect to the whole structure. Other businesses if not outrightly his owed their inception to his enterprise and in many cases either the land or a mortgage on the building was in his name. He even owned the village forge and paid the blacksmith. Except for Doctor Hartman's incorrigible stubbornness, he would have owned him, too. But try as he could, John could not persuade the old medical man to accept a regular paid position as a Company doctor.

The doctor's methodical assistant was equally unreasonable. They were comfortable enough at Mother Illiana's, so they stoutly maintained. For ever since Anton married Tillie Hiner and set up housekeeping in the three rooms over the general store the two doctors had lived in agreeable disorder at Illiana Petrovna's. Declining John's offer the hundredth time Doctor Hartman exclaimed:

"My dear sir, your solicitude is overwhelming! Unfortunately, a nice regard for the necessities of existence affects me like the plague. Well, there you are. Order and efficiency and cream on my porridge would rob me of all enjoyment. To put it bluntly, we are vampires of different orders. The drama

of life and death, the battle-ground of a thousand contending emotions stripped of all sophistry, these are my meat. I do not envy you your storehouses, Herr Boyen, I ask to be left to my improvident hodge-podge—and, never fear, you shall have your rent next quarter!”

Illiana laughed heartily in recounting this impertinence. “Now that was telling him! Ah, but you should take care, Herr Doctor. Such sentiments are unhealthy. They are bad altogether. The little Tzar might fall dead in a fit! All great men are subject to them, as witness the blessed Paul himself. Where would you be then, Dr. Hartman? What would become of us? Who would buy our fish, hire out our daughters, and make lumberjacks of our sons? I ask you, who would lay the cornerstone of the next church? Of course there will be a next one! Already there is quarrelling as to how one should pray and sprinkle the new babies! To say nothing about curbing the sins of the rising generation!”

“Illiana,” the old doctor interrupted her, “where is Oscar now? He didn’t come to the shop for the liniment he promised to take out to the Prix’s.”

“Lord save us,” she sighed. “How should I know? He is always helping the new teacher, who, it seemed to me, might better be a milk-maid!”

They were startled by a shrill peal of laughter as the door burst open, and in dashed Greta like a flaming bit of autumn incarnate.

“Heigh ho! Deedle do!
I know, you know!
He knows, *they* know!—
Teacher *said* so!”

She shouted prancing about the room like the crazy young thing she was. Chameleon swift, she changed to simpering modesty, imitating to perfection the conscientious and affected college student who was trying her best to elevate the natives.

Illiana pretended to be properly shocked. “Lord save us, you wild Indian. Is it becoming to make sport of your betters? To pull a face like that on the teacher, God bless her. She picked and paid by the little Tzar! But since you’re so smart, perhaps you know where Herr Beaur is starving himself this whole day long?”

The young girl frowned, flung herself on the bench in the chimney corner. “Ho, you ask that, grandmother? As if you didn’t know! Wasn’t yesterday a holiday? And to-day is Saturday. Well, isn’t that fine for correcting papers? Isn’t Oscar always a regular wolf for papers?”

“God bless us, haven’t I told you to say Herr Beaur, you young heathen? Him a gentleman, and a doctor, and you not dry behind the ears! So he

corrects the papers? Well! Well! But how is your papa, my little rabbit? I see you've come from the store, for your pockets are stuffed with stolen prunes."

For answer Greta flung a moist pip at her grandmother's samovar. Grinning like a monkey, she began to empty her pockets in apparent glee, yet her strangely arresting eyes had a meditative, haunting quality in their sombre depths. Sly puss, thought the doctor, her real thoughts would never make easy reading. Nor her real desires either, for that matter. Illiana expressed her displeasure with an eloquent sniff, and set to peeling onions for supper.

Greta giggled. "You ask about papa? Ach, you should see him!" she imitated her stepmother's gutturals with impish glee; "Ach, yes! You should see what a nice, fat little man it is. With such a good wife to feed him pretzels, sausages, and sauerkraut, there's no telling what the end may be. Every time I go there Tillie's moving out another button somewhere on papa's clothes! To-day it was something else. Dear Stepmamma Tillie was helpless with rage. Ach, almost she had no appetite! For can you believe it, the captain is going to build a big store right across from the Boyen Emporium? A hardware store; but also it may have other things—furniture, musical instruments, even clothes! And that isn't all! The captain says the railway is bound to reach Maple Bluffs in a year or two which will change everything. The settlers will go in for bigger grain fields—oh, huge fields, like the ones in Russia—which will call for all sorts of machinery. Which in turn will mean a new way of living. An easy market to the city means independence for the settler, better houses, better roads, schools, everything. Oh, let me tell you, grandmamma, Tillie was good and mad to think about it!"

"God save us, there speaks the peasant!" Illiana raised her voice to a shriek. "So Tillie doesn't like it? She doesn't like for others to have enough sausage and sauerkraut and pretzels to make a paunch on a husband! She doesn't like to think what the little Tzar will do to Anton's pay when he has to sell things cheaper. She doesn't like to think that other merchants will come in with the railway. But your papa? What does your papa have to say to all this, I'm asking? Or has he no stomach left for anything but food since mating with that German sausage?"

Greta stretched herself like a cat. "Papa? Oh, papa just ate his pretzels! Tillie had more to say, grandmamma. She said never again would she mind Cora's little thieving devils, no matter how helpless she was. For Leona had had the sauce to tell her papa was a fathead. Yes, a beer drinking fathead!"

And that she meant to run Captain Marcusson's new store in such a way as to wipe the Boyen Emporium right off the map!"

"Oho!" Illiana met the doctor's amused eyes and shrugged. "Oho! So our Leona is coming to port is she? Well, God bless us, five years on the water should dampen any woman's ardour! None of which nonsense I asked for, little rabbit. I asked about my poor Oscar—if he comes home to eat my onion soup—and you shamelessly make fun of your papa, and unearth all this evil scandal!"

Greta jumped up, tossing back her copper-coloured hair, and joined the doctor at the dirty window. "Scandal? Scandal? What is scandal, doctor dear?" she sang at him, elfin face glowing, small mouth like a full-blown scarlet rose. "Doctor, do tell me, what's a scandal?"

"Tsk!" He pinched a pretty ear, grinning companionably. "You wilful changeling! Polite explanations are for nice little girls. You may take it, my little hornet, that scandal is nothing more than bold, bad, blighting truth. But truth, let me add, is always heartily unwelcome, and highly indigestible."

She swooped upon him, affectionate as a young puppy. "Old dear, how I love you! Watch out, or I'll eat you, wrinkles, twinkles, and all! Now listen, you two! Here's more scandal. Oscar—the Herr Doctor, I mean, won't want any onion soup to-night. He finished the papers hours ago. He finished them so fast because he's taking the teacher to 'Glen Haven' to try out the new piano Captain Marcusson bought for Leatrice!"

"God bless us, what are you grinning at, you little savage?" Illiana Petrovna snapped testily. Her genuine affection for Oscar Beaur made her resentful of the slightest infringement on his dignity.

Curiously enough, Greta's smile faded. "Poof!" she shrugged, "what indeed? Perhaps I was just imagining things. Grandmamma, you should go to church sometime and see how lovely Isabella Marcusson looks when singing."

"You chatter-box! Set the table. If you know what's good for you, leave such imaginings to fools!" Illiana was too irritated to notice the tears in her granddaughter's stormy eyes.

"Very well, grandmamma, I'll say no more about it," Greta replied in a queer voice, and fled from the room, disregarding alike the amazement she caused and the angry commands shouted after her.

"Well, God bless me!" Illiana Petrovna could think of nothing to express her feelings adequately except to kick the cat she quite foolishly adored.

CHAPTER IV

OLINE heard the door slam, and wondered if her senses were leaving her. Even Josephine dropped her eyes and forgot to giggle. Sarah, of course, was on the point of tears. With deliberate care John Boyen laid down his knife, the bread he had been buttering more carefully still. Sitting back heavily, he glared at his wife. Then, for the first time in his ordered existence, he banged his fist on the table.

“There, madam, that’s what comes of your listless mothering! It grieves me to say it, Oline—I admit it should not be said before your daughters—but something must be done! If you cannot inspire proper ambition in your children, as is a mother’s duty, I shall have to supply the need as best I can!”

He was very red, the veins in his neck swollen, his small eyes bristling with anger he, none the less, knew was his duty to suppress. Before children and gossiping servants certainly. Oline seemed little impressed. His heroic restraint and laboured justice apparently went unnoticed. Which was perhaps not quite true. Oline saw no reason to waste energy on what she knew was after all only a prelude to the real storm which would break in the privacy of their bedroom. Just now the sound of Veder’s footsteps racing up the hall engaged her thrilled attention. Veder the quiet, patient, self-effacing son had become a royal changeling before her eyes! Young Veder, on whom she had always looked as the incarnate symbol of her own cowardly submission, had suddenly shot forth flaming pinions of rebellion as miraculously as the dragon-fly puts forth its strong aspiring wings. Fierce as only a rebelling boy can be he had cursed his father’s stupidity, and all the humdrum hateful plans he had made for him. The sharp sound of the door closing on his proud young back was the sweetest music she had heard in all her married life. The thoroughly exasperating inattentiveness of her humility spurred John to continue:

“Oline, must I remind you before our children that it is my right to demand respect? You smile? Well, madam, for that I shall not dismiss them as I had intended. It is best we all come to a definite understanding. You, madam, will see that Veder recovers his common sense. I give him until Saturday to make up his mind. As for you, my little girls,” he modified his pomposity somewhat, while transfixing first one shrinking figure, then the other, with his cold grey eyes, “you must make this disagreeable scene serve as an object lesson. I am sure you will *never* be tempted to cross your papa’s wishes, which could only be for the best. Also, much though I deplore

having to say it, you must perceive that your dear mamma has not the strength of will to make her authority as dependable as a growing family demands. When mistaken affection might yield to folly it becomes my duty to intervene. Is that quite clear my dears?"

"Yes, papa." Josephine's singing voice chimed dutifully. "Oh, yes, indeed, papa."

Sarah struggled with the horrid lump in her throat, the hateful tears that threatened her precarious safety. She was a plain, gauche girl, with a rather hoarse voice. The kind of voice which often goes with an emotional nature, and not infrequently develops a singularly seductive quality at maturity. Her eyes, fixed now on her father with desperate boldness, were really fine. Deep grey and sensitively alive to every mood. Her strange behaviour annoyed him. Indeed, Sarah always annoyed him. "Well, well, Sarah." He tapped the table irritably. Quiet and meek—excellent virtues in a woman—he none the less had little affection for her. In all things medieval, John could not conceive of plain Sarah as anything but a perennial liability. Plain women always were. "Well, miss—have you anything to say?" He struck the table again sharply and for the second time that day his throne rocked.

Young Sarah clenched her little fists, braving courageously the ominous frown on the Jovian brow. Her eyes flashing sudden fire startled him as much as would a stockdove darting poisoned fangs.

"Oh, papa," she cried desperately, "you're wrong! You're almost always wrong about Veder and mamma! She has always taught us to mind you. Only Veder *won't* be a merchant! He's got brains, papa! That's what makes him so unhappy!" she finished wildly, innocent of humorous intent and swiftly overcome by the consciousness of the enormity of her presumptuous boldness. Josephine giggled. Whereupon John Boyen arose, every line of his heavy countenance replete with displeasure. A fine pass truly, if his daughters were to develop into controversial females—into contentious women abhorrent in the sight of God and obnoxious to man! Ignoring the girls completely, he addressed his wife.

"Oline, I strongly advise setting Sarah some task. Something to perform in the quiet of her room. Something womanly. I cannot—I may say I will not tolerate my daughters growing up vixens like that Greta Holmquist!"

When he was gone both girls ran to their mother. Sarah, putting eager arms about her in silent, deep affection. Josephine pecked at her cheek, and winsomely comic, pulled a long face.

"No, indeed, madam, we cannot have our daughters growing up into Gretas." She mimicked. "Greta says what she thinks, does what she pleases.

Greta shoots like a man, dances like leaves in the wind, and drives the boys crazy!”

Oline gave a slight start. Another door slammed in her consciousness. The realization that one by one her fledglings were escaping into the thorny wilderness of adolescence swept over her. With something of curiosity, tinged with nervous reluctance, she appraised her young daughter, now suddenly become a stranger. What she saw was the prettiest of her children. A small girl with wilful eyes and mouth, a tip-tilted little nose peppered with golden freckles, and a dainty figure already promising alluring grace. Vaguely disturbed, she marked these signs of future charm and found herself wondering what bitter mischief Fate had ordained for this pretty daughter.

Strange what tricks the mind played one! Now it was no longer Josephine who smiled back at her joyously, but the young girl she herself once was, singing innocently of love on the green hills of long lost Sunholme. Lest she see more for her heart's undoing, she shut her eyes, resting her head against Sarah's flat little chest, glad of her immaturity and the sweet possessiveness of her childish arms. Then she laughed.

“What bad girls we are, to be sure! To punish all of us, I order the mending basket out on the porch! Veder's shirts are always short of buttons, and we must have his clothes ready by Saturday,” she told them, smiling in an intimate fashion vastly different from the somewhat impersonal and slightly detached maternal kindness to which they were accustomed.

Josephine's delighted giggle was a spontaneous ripple of responding friendliness. “Mamma, I'd like to tell you something. I'd love to, oh, so much!”

“Well, then, you shall,” Oline replied, thinking how odd it was that years of dutiful solicitude had done less to draw her children close than an hour of joint rebellion. “You shall tell me whatever you wish, my dears, but get the mending first. It's much nicer sharing confidences in the open.”

Josephine danced away, and Sarah began to carry out the chairs. Through the window Oline watched her arranging the pillows in the rocking chair and carefully setting a footstool at the best possible angle. Poor, plain, little Sarah! Even now, she was sold to silent service—to the selfless ministry which seldom reaps any tangible reward. Dismissing the sombre reflection, Oline joined the children.

“Well, then, Josephine,” she urged brightly, when they were seated about the big mending basket. “What is it you want to tell me? Something about Greta, I suppose?”

“Yes and no, mamma. It’s really about Veder. Why he won’t go with Vilhelm Potts and that young Frenchman on the timber cruise for papa. Of course Greta’s mixed up in it. You see, it happened at the Prix’s barn raising last week. Oh, I know you were there, mamma, but nothing important happens in a house! Once the dance had started the boys were always running to the corn crib. Tony Prix has a terrier, and some rats that he let loose for the dog to catch. Well, Manfred Marcusson got awfully mad when he heard about it. Said it wasn’t sportsmanship, because the rats were scared to death, from being captured and everything. He said it should be stopped. When he ran out, I went with him, but we didn’t see the rats or the dog. We forgot all about it. For just as we got to the building, Greta came running from the bush with that Frenchman after her. Oh, he was frightful, mamma. Drunk and beastly, and even though Greta laughed and laughed, we could see she was awfully scared. I guess we were all scared. Then, before even Manfred knew what to do, Veder pitched into him! Into the Frenchman, I mean. Oh, you’d never believe how wild he was! You’d never dream Veder could fight like that! Greta yelled and whooped, and first thing you knew we were all jumping and yelling. The noise brought Dr. Beaur from the wagon shed where he was harnessing his horse. He stopped the fight of course. But no one dared tell what it was about, because Veder said he’d give us the same kind of medicine if we did. Even the Frenchman sneaked away without a word.”

Throughout the animated recital of these belligerent heroics Sarah sat stiff as a little ramrod, her eyes glowing with keen appreciation and fervent pride. Oline quietly stitching a jagged rent in Veder’s cambric shirt was aware of a quite unusual glow in herself. As John’s proper wife she ought to frown upon such primitive exhibitions, thoroughly scold both Josephine and Veder. Instead, she laughed. In quite giddy, mischievous fashion as though she herself were seventeen and the world full of delicious secret joys. For which she was instantly rewarded by a kittenish pounce of affectionate glee from Josephine.

“It *was* funny, mamma!” she giggled. “Veder’s nose was bleeding, and Greta mopped at him with her best scarf. I bet every single boy there was dying to get himself pounded up, too. I don’t know when I saw anything funnier! Dr. Beaur must have thought so too, for he looked as though he’d like to burst out laughing. But he was cross with Greta and made her come home with him.”

Oline was no longer surprised at budding sophistry and precocious wisdom in her child. The amusing certainty gave her a surprising sense of freedom. She gazed about her with an air of cheerful confidence which she

could by no means have explained in words. It was just a feeling, deep down within her, that suddenly put her in tune with the splendid land she no longer looked upon as foreign. The whole countryside seemed strongly alive with ripening joy. Indeed, there were many notable changes. Her maple-trees were much the same, but out beyond them, where once had stretched the wilderness, there now lay field after field of ripening grain. Level, productive fields, which, once an outlet was assured to the settler, must make him comparatively independent, and put an end to her husband's autocracy. Smiling, her eyes wandered to the new government road that followed the curving blue of the lake and plunged with determined vigour into the forest beyond. A very different highway from the one she had traversed those long years ago! Here was a grand artery, destined to transport men and merchandise to remote places by innumerable branching veins that radiated in all directions. Even at "Glen Haven" the forest no longer presented a real obstacle, nor played upon the imagination by reason of its sinister menace. The shining waters of Little River were more likely to engage the visitors' attention, for the gay little stream fed its silver water to the grain fields, and sang of victory under the summer stars. Only on the northern horizon was there any frowning front of spruce and pine and hemlock. Everywhere new roads pointed to yet other hinterlands waiting to challenge the courage of the venturesome. New worlds for the making!

Swiftly contrite, her wandering thoughts came back to her daughters. "Sorry to be woolgathering, honey," she apologized, patting Josephine's arm. "It's such a gorgeous day for dreaming. Now, about Veder. I'm glad you told me, Josephine. It makes me realize more fully how useless it is to urge him against his judgment. We must help him get away as he wants."

"How lovely!" cried Sarah. "He can have every cent in my bank!"

Josephine giggled. "Silly, much good that would do. I'll bet we haven't ten dollars between us. Papa's a regular pirate with his nickels."

"Hush, hush!" warned their mother. "Impertinence won't help much either. We must think of something concrete and practical. In the meantime we can at least get Veder's clothes ready. That will keep us more than busy till Saturday!"

"Mamma, are you really serious?" Josephine was still slightly sceptical. "Do you really mean you'll actually help Veder go against papa?"

Oline drew a sharp breath. Her hands trembled, and the blood mounted to her cheeks, so inordinately moved she was. Her eyes, feverishly bright, sought out the white headstone under the first row of maples where the little child Olaf lay buried. She was tempted to cry aloud that she had given

enough hostages to death and despair—her own radiant youth, all the dear hopes of womanhood, her right to love, and that poor little unwanted child.

“Oh, yes!” she cried in a voice they had never heard, “I mean it! Veder shall not be buried here! He has had the courage to say no. If he wanted to leap off a mountain top I should say to him: ‘Follow your heart, Veder! Follow whatever instinct was planted there! For you that *must* be right. It is so with every other creature in God’s world. Only man is constrained to accept the desires of others for his own.’ Veder must go wherever he wants to go!”

She checked herself abruptly. Josephine was making frantic signs to someone behind her. Thinking it was John, she turned defiantly.

“Well!” she exclaimed sharply, then was silent, covered in queer confusion. Veder stood in the doorway, his serious young face aglow with the intensity of his feelings. Tears sprang to her eyes. Oh, why had she been blind to the fineness of this quiet boy? Why had she not caught before the gleam of his Galahad spirit?

“Oh, mamma, I always knew you were wonderful!” he cried. Something in his expression turned back the clock of the years. With a stab of pain she recalled the rapture on his infant face that day when Marie had caught him to her warm romantic breast. She remembered with humility that what he said was true. From the first he had adored her.

“I shall never forget this, mamma!” he continued. “If you can only help me get away, I’ll be all right. I’m really very strong, even though I look skinny and good for nothing.”

Josephine giggled, “She knows that now. I told her about the fight!”

“Little cat! I suppose you’ve said a lot of nonsense about Greta!” he said, turning on her fiercely. Then to his mother, with rising colour: “Greta’s wonderful, mamma. But she’s different! No one in this dump seems to understand that!”

Laughing spontaneously, Oline ruffled his thick brown hair. “Calm yourself, young man! We’ll do our best for Greta. Don’t forget she was almost as much my baby as you. Now, suppose you tell me just exactly what you want to do.”

Without a moment’s hesitation the boy answered: “I want to study engineering! Some day I want to be able to go into a God-forsaken wilderness such as this and make it fit for human beings! I want to conduct waters where there are no waters, to build viaducts and bridges, to measure the rise and fall of rivers. Imagine what that would have meant here when Little River was always flooding the lowlands! I’ve thought it over carefully.

I tell you, mamma, this place is like a prison. For me, it will always be that way!”

“Yes, yes, Veder. What I meant was, where do you want to go to study these fine marvels?”

Again he was ready instantly. “To the States. Dr. Hartman has written to several colleges. It is cheaper to go to the States.”

Oline got to her feet. Never had she felt such burning anger towards her husband as at this moment. A rich man, yet he had reduced them all to the mental state of paupers! It was nearly twenty years since he had taken Sunholme. Let him now pay for Veder what he had gained selling that dear ancestral place! It would somewhat even the score between them! With an air of sudden grim determination not unmingled with pride she replied resolutely:

“Very well, Veder, ask Dr. Hartman to see me this evening. Say nothing to anyone else. I promise you shall leave for the United States on Saturday.”

CHAPTER V

BUT OLINE had yet to discover how little the years had really taught her concerning her husband. The many adjustments which had cost so much in personal happiness and continued repression had, after all, revealed little or nothing of the real John Boyen. Although she knew his habits and desires, and the exacting ministrations necessary to his personal comfort, he was still a stranger spiritually. Money was his God. This she knew, but not how jealous such a God may be.

At her first diplomatic suggestion that Veder might do better in the city, since, obviously, he had not the temperament for a trader, John merely laughed at her, and calmly went on with his writing. They were alone in their big bedroom, he seated at a secretary between the windows. His laughter had not, however, its usual effect. She was no longer on the defensive for some minor personal issue. She was roused as to battle for the resurrection of joy, of accomplishment and purpose, in the person of her son. To his utter amazement, she swept the papers from his hands with a violent, disdainful gesture, her pale face flushed, her blue eyes hard as jewels.

“Now listen to me, John Boyen. Your sacred accounts can wait. I’ve played my part in a miserable bargain long and patiently. I’ve been the silent, subjective female men like you demand. Your every desire has been gratified, all your selfishness accepted meekly. You’ve played the autocrat to your heart’s content. No one but Captain Marcusson dreamt of questioning your divine rights. And even he has been too busy pursuing his own amusing game to disillusion you. But there is an end, even to a cowed female’s patience. What you did to me no longer matters. What you intend doing to Veder is all important. For the first time in our married life, let me remind you of Sunholme!”

“Sunholme! Sunholme be damned!” he shouted, emerging from the coma of astonishment induced by her impertinence. “I would to Heaven I had never laid eyes on the poisonous place! Or on you, madam, with your perennial melodrama and air of martyrdom. A bad bargain indeed! Since when were husband and children and material security reckoned a bad bargain? You rave, madam! Let me warn you, I shall brook no interference with my son! Or stand for any more of this sort of nonsense!”

“He is my son too, John. He shall not be robbed of life as I was robbed,” she retorted with alarming emphasis.

“Now, now, try to be sensible, Oline!” he hastily changed his tactics. “Try to realize I must know what is best for the boy. Times are changing, my dear. With the prospect of the railway a near certainty our packtrains will be obsolete—freighting a lost occupation. Even a woman should grasp what that will mean to my business. Yes, and add to that the unscrupulous behaviour of Ephraim Marcusson with his competitive store, his steam-boat, and that female Shylock in charge of his accounts, and perhaps you’ll begin to see why it’s absolutely necessary for me to branch out into timber. It’s the one business Ephraim hasn’t yet got a stranglehold upon.”

Oline let him run on till breath failed him. It made no difference. Nothing he could say affected her decision the slightest. Somehow, Veder should realize his ambition. If his father refused to help him she would find some other means. This absolute certainty of purpose gave her strength to hear him out in silence—to see him depart without further protest, sure of his usual victory.

Left to herself, she faced the problem squarely. A rich man’s wife, she had no money, no private income, or assets of which she might dispose. Theoretically, she and the children owned some of the livestock, but it was doubtful whether she was legally free to sell them in the open market without her husband’s sanction. After much troubled debating, she decided to take council with Isabella.

She dressed very carefully. For some inexplicable reason she was displeased with her whole appearance—her hair, her skin, her dowdy clothes. No wonder the girls thought her old! Garbed like a deaconness, with her hair strained back from her ears, she looked a fright. Yet she was not yet forty! In fervid protest she chose her lightest dress and loosened the natural curls that used to blow about her face so winsomely when she sped from crag to crag of old. Just to feel their soft caress made her feel years younger. Much enheartened, she hurried below, and left careful instructions for John’s supper with the housemaid. The girls were still busy with the mending. Knowing all too well Josephine’s natural indolence, she decided to slip away quietly.

However, she had not left the maple grove before a gay voice hailed her, and the irresponsible mischief came dancing after her.

“I just had to come, mamma!” she panted, the perpetual giggle welling up like a spring. “It’s so sweet in the woods. I haven’t seen Leatrice since school closed. Oh, mamma, is that talk about adding a Fifth Form really true? And our getting a real professor from the United States?”

Oline was vexed. Insignificant though this small disregard of her wishes was, it revealed how unpleasantly like her father Josephine could be. Obviously to Josie the one end in life was to please herself regardless of others. A little startled, Oline wondered if the child had always displayed this disagreeable tendency: if her habitual good nature was merely the questionable result of continued indulgence? Perhaps John was justified up to a point in criticizing her attitude toward the children if she knew them all so little and understood their natures no better than Josephine's.

The carefree girl's exuberance was something amazing and a little overwhelming. Oline felt that to squelch such an exhibition of rapturous delight in mere animal existence was nothing short of criminal. Smiling despite herself, she answered:

"Why yes, I believe it has already been settled. Illiana Petrovna seems to think so, anyway. She was regaling the women with the flattering particulars last Sunday. I'm afraid I didn't listen closely. But that he is a university man I seem to remember. So let's hope you youngsters behave."

"To hear you talk you'd think we were babies! Why, Greta's eighteen. As old as you, when you were married, mamma."

"And what may that signify?" Oline countered, laughing lightly enough but far from comfortable.

Josephine giggled. "You *are* funny! As papa would say, madam, it signifies that your children are growing up. Oh, look! There's Manfred! He must be going to see Veder."

She was away to meet him like the wind, laughter floating after her like a bird's song. Oline watched the two with a quickened pulse. An exquisite rapture of the senses that was almost painful held her fascinated. Manfred leaned against a tree shouting nonsense in a voice that reminded her of a beautiful harp. To which dangerous music Josephine, little and golden and gay, danced as a butterfly on a mat of wooing sunlight. Surely the quenchless, instinctive urge towards happiness for ever manifested in youth, no matter what its station or circumstance, was proof enough of nature's benevolent purpose? Society, not nature, separated man from his inherent destiny. That was clear enough now, she thought. Yet to what end was such knowledge when it came too late? Too late, certainly, for her to whom nothing remained but the philosophic dust-heap of old age.

There was no time for morbid introspection. Manfred's banter captured her unwilling attention. A little dismayed, she listened to his easy flow of wit, perceived how dangerously he resembled his father in charm and fascination. The arrogant lift of the head, amazing good looks, and that

irresistible Marcusson smile, all were there—nothing of Isabella that she could distinguish, unless perhaps in the softer depths of the black eyes that met hers frankly. Her response might have been more generous if Josephine's adoration had been less obvious. The silly child gazed at him as though he were a God! Far from exhibiting the customary shyness generally associated with worship Josie hooked her slim arm in his and calmly notified her mother of a swift change of plans.

"I'll see Leatrice later," said she. "It's not often I get Manfred away from the girls!"

Manfred shook free of her, a little impatiently Oline thought, with rising amusement, not quite free of faint offence.

"Oh, she gets what she's after, all right! Don't believe all she says, Mrs. Boyen." He grinned. "Josie's a deep kid."

Josephine hooted gaily. "Oh, is she! Well, come on little boy. I'll race you to the slough!"

Like puppies they dashed away, almost tumbling over one another with the sheer exuberance of their spirits. A delicious little comedy, yet to the mother it brought a disturbing thought tinged with regret and pain.

"Silly child!" she mused. "I only hope she won't go imagining herself in love!"

CHAPTER VI

ISABELLA MARCUSSON smiled at her mother-in-law and laid down the delayed letter she was reading. "Ephraim writes here that he doesn't expect to be home for at least two weeks. But that he docks at Maple Bluffs Tuesday and leaves again in the morning. Let me see, according to that he will be in the village to-night."

Halvor shrugged, and her laughter a little more brittle than of old was not unlike the sound of Chinese bells tinkling in a light wind. The years had changed her hardly at all. Her eyes still snapped with lively intelligence and fire, and, despite an almost ethereal appearance, she was remarkably hale. Isabella loved her devotedly, and had brought up the children to respect her opinions and authority. For which reason, although this reference to her father brought a rush of colour to her face, Leatrice waited for her grandmother to speak.

The old lady flicked an imaginary particle from her skirt. "Would you say I should consider that as news, my dear?" she queried cynically.

"I'm afraid you should," Isabella smiled. "It's about all we got this time. Except a postcard about the teacher. His name is Von Barholme. He is supposedly quite distinguished, and accepts the post temporarily for reasons of health. That's all."

"Von Barholme!" Halvor gasped. "Isabella, surely I misheard you! Not Von Barholme?"

"That's what it says. Professor Von Barholme, to be exact."

"Well, God bless my soul!" ejaculated the old lady. "What a corner this is for derelicts. My dear, doesn't the name convey anything to you? Have you forgotten Sunholme, and Ryelands?"

Now it was Isabella's turn to cry out in astonishment. But catching sight of Leatrice's stormy face, she checked the words on her tongue, and said hastily, "Leatrice, please tell Olga not to bother baking anything extra since father won't be home."

Usually obedient, the girl flared up indignantly. "You needn't make any pretext to get rid of me, mamma. Your musty old scandals don't interest me!" she said, looking from one startled face to the other, belligerently. "Oh, honestly, you make me feel like committing murder sometimes! Why don't you both forget ancient history and wake up to what's going on in the present? This lie of papa's, for example. He'd have come home if he wanted

to! Oh, I'm so mortified when I think of what goes on in town and then have to listen to all this hypocrisy. Why don't you do something about it, mamma? Instead of helping him make us the laughing stock of the community by hypocritically pretending complete ignorance!"

Meeting the frank brown eyes of Marie's daughter, reading there youth's inevitable scorn of the elder generation's dearly bought caution, Isabella was tempted to laugh, rather than feel hurt. Dame Halvor resented the onslaught hotly.

"Just what would you advise, my dear young lady?" she demanded cuttingly. "So free with criticism, I suppose you have a ready cure for our feeble behaviour?"

"I should call his bluff!" the girl retorted, with equal asperity. "I'd march into the store and challenge a certain lady"—she grimaced over the word—"to come out here if she dared. I'll wager that would cramp his style!"

Isabella's amusement broke bounds in whole-hearted laughter. "Very well, Leatrice, we'll make it a party. Now, suppose you tell Olga to bake twice as much as she intended. Especially those dainties ladies enjoy." She emphasized the word mischievously. "Then you might tell Ole to have the buggy ready. I shall want it this afternoon."

Leatrice looked her doubt. "But, mamma," she began, "hadn't you—well—better just plan a little first? You're so—so old-fashioned, darling!"

"Old but determined!" Isabella laughed gaily. "Run along, young abess. I am quite seriously taken with your excellent suggestion. I shall expect you to behave very nicely to my visitor."

Olga, red of face, and dispersing an aroma of spices, collided with Leatrice in the doorway.

"Mrs. Boyen's coming through the meadow, ma'am, by herself—walking! It's to be hoped there's no new sickness broke out."

"It's to be hoped you have the sense enough to open the door for her!" snapped the old lady. Then, to her daughter-in-law almost as sharply: "Whatever happens, say nothing about the professor. Oline was completely idiotic about Von Barholme. Good Heavens, why do women fall in love, I wonder! All the poets to the contrary, they get nothing but misery out of it!"

"Well, poets are men, remember—with an added dash of madness. The few rhymers in petticoats daren't contradict them."

"Oh, get on with you!" Halvor chuckled. "You know we're both liars! A woman doesn't really love any man. She loves love. As for a man, he merely loves himself! Now where on earth is the sock I'm supposed to be knitting for that infamous son of mine? We might as well convey a scene of domestic

felicity. Lacking a baby, nothing so becomes a woman as a sock, or a mending basket!”

Oline had no eyes for the peaceful tableau they presented. She came out with her errand bluntly, making it very clear that without Isabella’s support her hope for Veder must come to nothing. John had flatly refused to advance her any money. The only alternative was to dispose of every head of stock she dared to claim. But unless Ephraim made the transaction for her, even this was impossible.

Isabella exchanged glances with her mother-in-law. She was plainly on the horns of a dilemma. How could she defy her husband, as Leatrice’s budding sense of justice demanded, and at the same time serve her friend?

As usual, Halvor’s sharp old mind jumped to the right conclusion. She laughed dryly. “Well, don’t look so sober, you two! Nothing is deadly but dullness. Isabella, my dear, I begin to see that your trip to town has singular possibilities. The lady we were talking about before Oline came will, no doubt, be glad to co-operate with us. Bargains are something she should appreciate.”

Oline flushed. “If there were any other way, I shouldn’t ask it of you, Isabella. I understand what it means. I think I’d do as much for Manfred if it were in my power.”

Isabella smiled. “Don’t be ridiculous, Oline! Besides, I’m not sure anything is ever really in our power. Sometimes I think we are nothing but pawns in a game much too big for our feeble comprehension.”

“Oh, tush!” Halvor interrupted sharply. “For goodness’ sake leave philosophizing to men! Theirs was the first lying interpretation of a commonplace act! You have both eaten sour apples. Pray have the good sense to say nothing about it! If I were you, Isabella, I’d put on that new wine-coloured dress. It really becomes you. And don’t flatten your hair like a dairymaid!”

“All right, mother,” Isabella laughed softly, “I’ll bedeck myself like the peacock and strut accordingly!”

For three years Leona Shultz had operated Captain Marcusson’s store in Maple Bluffs. Her success was the talk of the district. Whatever her moral imperfection, she was endowed with an indefinable quality that inspired confidence. In a hard-headed sense she was honest, and shrewd and unalterably true to her given word. She drove a hard bargain, but stuck to her promise, even if altered circumstances made fulfilment difficult. She was completely indifferent to the opinions of her own sex, and knowing well the foibles of men dismissed their wavering judgments with a shrug. It was

this characteristic of mind, so seldom found in woman, coupled with an amiable comradeship, which had held Captain Marcusson's interest throughout the years, despite numerous wandering fancies. She was a perennial source of entertainment, none of which reacted on conscience. He might inflict on her the worst of tempers, the glow of wit, the sporadic outbursts of a lover's passion without the least fear of tears or tantrums or insulted dignity. She dealt with each phase as the occasion demanded, with the same efficiency she applied to business. "Well, why not?" said she. "It was her business!"

A most sensible generality which never failed of its effect. To whatever emotional heights he had ascended, down he must plunge to chilly common sense. He might rage at her all he liked for a heartless devil with a seductive body and a Midas mania. She laughed at him! Cheerfully agreeing to the extent of pointing out with calm, incontrovertible logic how steadily and surely his prosperity was increasing.

"And you?" he quizzed her once. "What about your own part in this damnably important prosperity?"

Her answer came frankly. "I've done exceedingly well, thank you! I need five thousand more, however, before I can realize my pet ambition."

"Ah! So when you've cleaned up another nice little sum you mean to be quit of me? How sensible we are to be sure."

"Why, certainly. Did you really suppose I gave up ten years of my youth for the odd privilege of leading a monotonous old age in Maple Bluffs—reading the Psalms I suppose as befits a sinner? No, Captain Marcusson. I've kept to the letter of my law. I shall see to it you keep yours. When we part, we part for good. For *good*, mark that well captain—it means a lot, that little word."

But to-night Leona was in a mellow mood. She had just purchased a beautiful silver fox pelt from an old hunter who, some weeks prior, had sworn to see it burned rather than let her have it at the price she offered. Illness had reduced his choler. It flattered her vanity to remember his pathetic gratitude when he found her offer still held. Improvident old fool, she mused, quite without venom. If he drank less he might have been in a position to hold out against her, and all other haggling fur buyers.

A stir in the streets interrupted her thoughts. The usual crowd of boys who congregated before the store were seemingly clamouring to help some lady alight from a smart buggy drawn by dapple-grey horses. With a start Leona recognized the team. Good Heavens! This smiling woman obviously about to enter was Mrs. Marcusson. Incredible though it must seem, Isabella

had not set foot in the business section of the town since her husband's store was built. The two women had never actually met. Which is not to say gossip had not kept them fully informed one of the other.

"Good heavens!" muttered Leona, for once slightly flustered. On this night of all nights, with Captain Marcusson due to arrive in less than two hours!

With a word to her help, she hurried away to her private room at the back of the store, noted with satisfaction its agreeable comfort and order and sat down to wait for the unwelcome visitor.

Isabella entered with as much composure as though she had been a frequent and expected guest. She was faintly smiling, her manner entirely free of any bolstering pride, or condemnation of any sort.

Leona had long since guessed that Mrs. Marcusson was a remarkable character. None the less such an astonishing display of self-possession in a situation which she understood must have its secret sting surprised Leona out of her customary cautious discretion.

"Well, I must say I did not expect you to be quite like this!" She exclaimed, with tartness entirely due to a sudden attack of what was certainly nervousness.

Isabella had taken a chair. With candid amusement she met the other's searching, somewhat bitter glance. "That, my dear Miss Shultz, is merely because you were expecting a wife, not a woman!" she laughed. "With your kind permission, I'll lay aside my things. I could have done without a coat, and these straw hats are most uncomfortable," she explained cheerfully. When her nonplussed hostess had relieved her of these articles she continued: "Now may I confess a similar, and in my case at least, most agreeable astonishment? For I readily concede that for once Captain Marcusson's judgment was commendable."

Strangely enough Leona perceived no irony in this. Stranger still none was intended. Here, indeed, were two women of exceptional character who under happier circumstances might have been fast friends. Accustomed to quick appraisals Leona at once recognized in the other woman something she had failed to find heretofore and for which she was starved. Intelligent, disinterested companionship. Something silly Cora with her continual whimpering and listless child-bearing could not provide; nor yet Ephraim with his dominantly male preoccupation. So now, all suspicion at an end, she said, with whimsical emphasis "It is rather a pity we couldn't have met before. Things might have been very different for both of us."

Isabella nodded. "We should have been friends. Perhaps it isn't too late even now. . . . It would please me, Leona Shultz."

"I'm afraid I find that a little hard to believe, Mrs. Marcusson. After all you must have thought bitter things of me!" Leona sounded quite as remorseful as she felt.

"Of course!" Isabella was smiling oddly. "Still, if you'll forgive my saying so, the bitterness was perhaps less acute than you imagine. You see constant repetition deadens one's sensitivity."

Leona made a wry face. "Ah, you know how to strike, madam. But I deserve it. As you say, I was neither first nor last. Yet for my defence be it said I somewhat effectively halted the game."

Isabella put out her hand impulsively. "Miss Shultz—or may I not call you Leona? I am quite sincere in saying I came here to-day knowing well what you say in your defence is true. That because of it I long since ceased to hate you. And come now seeking your help, feeling certain you will give it when you understand my peculiar position."

"What do you mean? How could I help you?" Leona was instantly on the alert, dark suspicion stirring again. "What help could I possibly lend the admirable Mrs. Marcusson?"

Isabella did not break into recrimination or mournful tales of personal slights and suffering, as she feared. Briefly as possible she recounted Marie's pitiful story, ending a little abruptly with her own arbitrary adoption of the poor dead girl's baby.

"You see now," she concluded, "that I could not break faith with the child, naturally she thinks I am her mother, but that is not enough in her case. She must *believe* in me. With her tragic inheritance, I feel she requires a source of refuge in doubt normal children can do without. Perhaps I was wrong to undertake such a task—certainly I paid for it with my husband's love. But I thought, in my bitterness and disillusionment, that at least I might save Marie's little girl from some of the cruelties of existence. I was determined the child should have what the unhappy mother had lacked—respect, security, the feeling of equality we white folk seldom grant to persons of mixed blood. But perhaps more than all I felt it intolerable a child of Ephraim's should suffer needlessly. For you see I dearly loved, and still love my husband," she concluded, almost inaudibly.

"I could have guessed that!" Leona commented dryly. "Nor am I entirely insensible of the honour you pay me by your confidence. Yet I must confess I am still at loss as to how, or where, I come in as a possible help."

Isabella laughed. "Small wonder! It is far from clear even to me. But I rather think I expected inspiration from you. You see my foolish role of the good mother is being threatened. Young Leatrice accuses me of cowardice in not boldly out-bidding the fascinating Miss Shultz. The poor child is thoroughly ashamed of me."

"Ashamed of you! For pity's sake what's wrong with the girl?" Leona was righteously indignant, not the least aware of the amusing paradox of her hot resentment against the young offender who, she felt, ought to be soundly smacked.

Isabella laughed. "But you know she is right, Leona. I have been a coward, studiously evading the difficult. Now she has found out about her father and demands some sort of action. What I mean is——"

"I know what you mean!" Leona leaped up and began pacing about the room. "Ah, these impossible God-bitten youngsters! Well, go on! Go on!"

"There is nothing more—except to stress again Leatrice's point of view and need of faith. As I intimated, it is not so much her father as my hypocrisy that humiliates her. Blunt truth seems to be the God most worshipped by the new generation."

"The little fool! Fine reward for your sacrifice! Your son—how does he take all this, may I ask? That is *if* you know anything about your son. Few mothers do."

Isabella could not quite hide the start she gave. "Why, what is there to know about Manfred? He—well—he's just a normal boy."

"Exactly!" Leona laughed amusedly. "My dear lady, take the word of a woman familiar with the dangerous sex. A normal young male needs plenty watching! That son of yours is far too charming to trust to chance."

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand you." Isabella spoke coldly, for the first time exhibiting the chilling dignity which so often had hidden a deep wound.

Leona was not lightly repelled. "Perhaps not," she assented pleasantly. "But now we are on the subject of the troublesome generation, have you observed what a little beauty that Holmquist kid has become?"

"Not particularly. She was always an attractive child. Perhaps I fail to perceive how she affects my special problem."

Leona smiled, cryptically, "I rather think you do. Well—skip it. Only please bear in mind I warned you. Like father, like son! Now suppose we get down to cases. Just what do you want me to do?"

Isabella found it hard to reply. Like father, like son! The trite expression had lodged like an arrow in her heart. She seemed to be hearing again Halvor's bitter warning: "The Marcussons were always charming philanderers." No! no! She refused to believe it. Not of Manfred! After all, he was her son, too. With obvious effort she forced herself to speak calmly: "What I had in mind is quite simple, Leona. I should like you to come home with me as my guest—as *my friend*. The effect upon general gossip" (here a fleeting smile appeared) "is bound to be enheartening. I venture to predict a nicely puzzled tea-time assembly. Naturally, I am not suggesting our little farce should in any way alter your private life."

"Oh! It need not? Well, permit *me* to suggest that if that's the sort of inhumanly irreproachable logic you applied to your husband's behaviour no wonder he ran riot. Heavens, woman! Aren't you aware that nothing on earth so poisonously irks a mere man as absolute common sense? Oh, well, we shall skip that too—for the present."

Isabella was never averse to enjoying a laugh at her own expense. "Oh, I've been a fool, I know. But you've committed yourself to a promise by that last quip, Leona. You'll have to come to 'Glen Haven' to settle the argument. That being so, there still remains a final request. Leona, I'm terribly pressed for money. You simply must help me dispose of some stock at once."

Leona's exclamation of astonishment was lost in the shrill sound of a ship's siren. The women exchanged sharp glances. It was Leona who blanched.

"Your husband—he will be here any moment now," she gasped thoroughly uncomfortable for once in her callous life.

"I shall stay," Isabella was quite calm and entirely cheerful. "A cup of coffee would be gratifying. After all since I'm taking you home with me tonight it would be ridiculous to run away now. You really need a vacation, Leona. You look tired."

To say that Ephraim was astonished when he walked into the room falls far short of truth. He froze in his tracks, the ready smile fading from his face, and all colour with it. His startled eyes fixed on Isabella with the senseless alarm one attributes to victims of sudden hallucinations. For the moment he seemed to have lost completely all powers of volition, movement and speech.

Leona attempted to ease the situation and found her throat dry as dust, what she meant to say a meaningless jumble in her head. It was Isabella's beautiful, calm voice that broke the painful spell.

“I am truly sorry to upset you, Ephraim. There is nothing wrong. I only came to take Leona home with me. She really needs a rest, and I get frightfully dull sometimes in ‘Glen Haven’.”

That brought him quickly to his senses and with a vengeance. “What!” he cried, striding forward. Utterly oblivious of Leona he glared down at his wife, as though he could smite her for such cheerful insolence. “What? You dare stand there and calmly tell me you are taking Leona Shultz to ‘Glen Haven’? Home—to associate with yourself and the children. . . . You must be crazy!”

Isabella was much too generous to rejoice in another’s humiliation. “Crazy or not,” she interjected hastily, “I have so far managed fairly well to uphold the respectability of ‘Glen Haven’. Miss Shultz is my guest and will be treated as such. That is all I have to say, Ephraim.”

Unable to find a suitably smashing rejoinder, his anger blazed forth at Leona. “What new devilry is this? Aren’t you content with skinning me with the rapacity of Shylock? Must you fasten on my innocent family? Have you not robbed me as never a fool was robbed before? Of respect, devotion, money! Everything I was or might have been! For God’s sake, Leona, be human!”

Painfully distressed Isabella intervened quietly. Laying her hand on his arm she said softly: “Ephraim, let us all be human. Come home with us too. You see, dear, poor Leatrice has just discovered what an arrant coward I am. I really had to do something just to save my face.”

Leona’s strained patience broke bounds. “Bosh!” she exclaimed, leaping up like a firebrand. “*His* face, you mean Isabella, and much thanks you’ll get for it! Well, I might as well pack my bag. Which should give you time to sign a peace treaty, Captain Marcusson. If there’s that much sound sense left in you.”

At her departure Ephraim flung himself into a chair, his looks black and thunderous. An expression Isabella knew very well indeed. She pitied his misery, yet hesitated to speak.

“Oh, you must feel virtuous!” he broke out vehemently, as he knew he must. “Always doing the Christly thing so selfless and devoted. A charitable, stainless, cold-blooded saint of a wife!”

For the first time in their troubled life together she was stung to instant and hot resentment. “I’ll take no more in that vein, Ephraim. Virtue! My God, what virtue is there in loving a mad man, as I have loved you to the exclusion of common sense, decency and honour? For let me tell you, Ephraim, your mistress is less a fool, in my eyes, than I! Yet why should we

quarrel? What am I, what are you, or any of the older generation as compared to the young lives we gave to the world? Surely you must agree I am right at least to that extent?"

He looked at her in growing despair. "That's the hell of it!" said he. "You are always right, my dear. None the less, I can't see myself driving home just now, a modern bluebeard whisking two innocent lambs to the slaughter! If you think you can stand the strain, I might come out for dinner tomorrow." He laughed ruefully. "You know, Isabella, for a gentlewoman you're the very devil to worst!"

Neither Isabella nor Leona ever forgot the drive through the dusky, scented woods to "Glen Haven"; little was said on either side and that of no particular consequence. Yet with each lengthening mile, these two singular women felt drawn into a closer fellowship. Something bordering on rapture sang in their hearts, and peace wrapped them round. But not until the ruddy lights of "Glen Haven" winked at them through the violet dusk did either one attempt to put into words her curiously satisfying contentment.

Then it was Leona who spoke: "This is the sort of happiness I used to hope and long for," she sighed softly. "The companionate satisfaction I was once fool enough to expect from men. I know better now! There is no such thing as true companionship between men and women. Self-gratification, or to put it bluntly, the irrepressible tyrannies of sex interfere and utterly prevent any such happy condition. But ah, how I have longed to be accepted as an individual—not a biological factor!"

Isabella smiled. "I am more than qualified to understand what you mean. The chilly business life becomes with a man when sex is shut out; the constant turmoil of senses when it is included. . . . Oh, well, women like you, Leona, may eventually emancipate the rest of us. You have at least demonstrated that a female can execute other offices than that of wife and mother."

They were laughing like schoolgirls when they entered the house.

CHAPTER VII

NOT since the affair of the Swedish guitar player had Little River enjoyed anything to approximate the gossip which now swept the countryside. Mrs. Marcusson had taken Leona Shultz into her home! Either the woman was crazy, or else Ephraim was more brutal than anyone had ever dreamed. Yet, when they all came to the civic meeting which was hastily called at the schoolhouse to decide the new teacher's salary, no one remarked the slightest discomfort in Mrs. Marcusson. Leona was, perhaps, a trifle too gay and somewhat over-thoughtful of the old women, for whom she was for ever picking up some mislaid article. According to the younger matrons, it was nothing short of pitiful to see a woman of Leona's years and reputation obviously courting good will on one hand and doing her utmost to fascinate the guileless striplings, on the other. However, said striplings seemed only to square their young shoulders and puff with pride at the honour conferred on them!

Another peculiar and puzzling event was Mrs. Boyen's absence from the important meeting. A circumstance which seemed to prove the truth of whispered gossip that she had openly quarrelled with her husband over their son Veder; that as a consequence, the boy had been disinherited and ordered from the house! Thus ran the more charitable version of the supposed difficulty. Others hinted darkly. There was trouble brewing between the business partners, so they intimated, wagging wise heads. Bad trouble. The boy had undoubtedly been put to some unscrupulous uses and been subsequently surprised at it by the captain—or his hell-cat Leona. What else would account for a transfer of Mrs. Boyen's cattle to Captain Marcusson on the very day Veder left in such a hurry?

Of which vexatious whisperings Oline was blithely heedless. Her thought was all of Veder. Acting on Dr. Hartman's advice he had gone to St. Paul and was comfortably lodged with a German family the doctor had known in Berlin. His dear letters were so hopefully glowing, they more than made up to her for John's unqualified displeasure.

His new friends were awfully kind and interesting, he informed her in his latest message. Photography was their pleasant hobby, in proof of which he enclosed a snapshot. Oline thought it quite beautiful. Sedulously posed over a volume that suspiciously resembled a postcard album, Veder looked very poetic, she thought. The trickle of water in the background was Minnehaha Falls, he explained, a spot with a colourful history, and as such

should interest Greta, who ate up historic detail—details forthcoming if she wrote him! Would mamma please notify the young lady to that effect?

With this artless request in mind, Oline set out for the Holmquist cottage on a Tuesday afternoon as was her weekly habit. Illiana Petrovna saw her coming, and fell upon the disorder of her house with characteristic fury. Unwashed pots and pans were whisked into the pantry, scattered garments into the clothes press. The privileged cat, sleeping in the best chair, awoke to find himself already flying before the telling persuasion of a busy broom. Greta, industriously reading in the little cubby-hole the two doctors called their office, lifted her tawny head at the sudden racket.

“Ho, there, grandma!” she called. “What’s the row, darling? Did Joseph get into the cream again?”

“God bless me!” Illiana crossed to the door, and resting on her broom, glowered at the young girl. “So that’s where you are? Didn’t I overhear your papa asking you to come and help Tillie this morning? Heavens save us! Are you still at that book about bones and blood? Haven’t I said there’s no sense in such reading for a girl? Put it away quickly! Little Mother is down the road a piece, coming here certainly. It would kill me to have her see you nosing into such stuff. Greta! Do you hear me? Put away the book and get the tea things ready! And sit at the table like a lady!”

Young Greta had no taste just then for sitting demurely at a tea-table. When Oline arrived, she found the bright madcap whirling her angry grandmother about the room in a wild gypsy dance, impervious alike to groans and entreaties. At sight of her former mistress laughing in the doorway, Illiana Petrovna adroitly assumed an injured air.

“Come in, Little Mother, the house is yours, even if poor, I am not at liberty to welcome the honoured guest. Ah, perhaps you now perceive what I must put up with in my old age? The saints themselves must surely enjoy mischief since mischief-makers flourish like the green bay-tree—here especially. Now that is what comes of having no middle course. In Canada all is freedom and no law. In Russia it was all law, and no freedom. But sit down, mistress, sit down! You look seedy. Don’t tell me you are sick, Little Mother?”

Oline sat down beside a window full of flowering plants. “Oh no, Illiana, I am not at all unwell, far from it. Although it may be quite true that thinking disagrees with our poor sex and me in particular.”

“Ho! Now what dyspeptic priest said that, I wonder?” snapped the old woman, tying on a clean apron and glancing hopefully at the humming kettle. “At least it doesn’t disagree so violently as to lead us into wholesale

slaughter as is the case with men—especially those queer animals called diplomats. But, there you are! Men either kiss us or kill us. All the Gods and all the Commandments were made by them to the one end they should rule us and wreck the world. Now I ask you, is it any wonder a poor female has recourse to lying and the bag of tricks her body? Greta, you imp, did I not tell you to set out cups? But I forget myself, Little Mother—I meant to ask if the little problem concerns Master Veder?”

“Not exactly, Illiana. As a matter of fact no actual problem exists I suppose. What worries me every mother must face sooner or later. It’s silly, really to let anything so inevitable frighten one. You see Illiana, I have just discovered my babies are all grown. I won’t pretend to you, old friend. You know how I resented their coming. Yet, oddly I resent quite as bitterly their sudden escape from me. Illiana, it is as though I had lost them in a strange country to which I cannot penetrate, nor ever hope to understand.”

It was young Greta who answered her, a little breathlessly, a shy smile lighting her animated face. “Oh, but that’s just it, Mrs. Boyen! What would be the use of being born at all if you remained exactly like everyone before you? A strange country! Why, that explains it perfectly. Why—ah——” she broke off, catching her grandmother’s doubtful eye, and mischief quickly replacing the serious vein, she concluded, laughing, “Ah, yes, indeed, that explains perfectly why grandmamma never understands the simplest things I say or do!”

Illiana Petrovna flipped the tea-towel at her. “The arch demon himself would find it difficult to understand you, my good-for-nothing! But who asked you to interrupt the Little Mother with such rubbish?”

Oline laughed. “Let her be, Illiana. She is absolutely right. Youth is always right, I think. Because we learn that too late, we grumble and scold, whitewash our failures with cheap platitudes. Besides, I really came only to give Greta this picture of Veder. He insists she must have it.”

Greta studied the picture without embarrassment. “Why, how disappointing!” she exclaimed, “I thought Minnehaha Falls were immense!”

“Veder looks well, don’t you think?” ventured the mother.

“Why, yes, I suppose so. Now, wouldn’t you think they’d do something to keep the falls from shrinking that way?” Greta pursued, and was all set to propose a remedy when a knock at the door of the doctor’s tiny consulting-room sent her flying to interview the possible patient. A moment later the women heard the door slam as the girl disappeared with a talkative and, judging from his tone of voice, a highly excited male visitor.

Illiana Petrovna shook her head as she prepared to pour tea. “Now that’s what I can’t understand, Little Mother! Like as not, there goes some good-for-nothing who has found fine duck shooting, and wants Greta to bag the game. I ask you, what can you do with a girl who shoots as well as a cossack?”

Oline had really never given serious thought to John’s oft-repeated criticism of Greta’s erratic conduct. Now it began to trouble her. A girl so pretty ought not to run the woods with unprincipled young men! To Illiana, however, she replied enhearteningly: “Oh, she was always a little dynamo of activity, Illiana. A girl like that is cut out for something splendid. The right outlet is all she needs!”

Illiana grunted. “Herr Beaur wants to make a nurse out of her. Little Mother, just to see the stuff she reads turns my blood cold! The way she jumps to help him with those murderous little knives makes me shiver with disgust. God bless us, the thing passes belief in a pretty baggage like Greta. In a young girl with such a talent for dancing that in any other country it would put her on the stage, and find her a rich old husband besides! Well, what can you do, mistress? Here are neither ballets, nor rich old men with artistic leanings. Yet, for nursing, what else do you get but sour looks and sore feet? That’s how I worry, night and day, mistress, and then I say to myself: ‘Maybe the new professor will put sensible ideas into her head!’”

“Yes, it will be a relief for all of us, Illiana. Although, to tell the truth, I’ve been so occupied with Veder’s little affairs that the marvellous creature has quite slipped my mind. Of course the girls are chattering about him continually, and, now I come to think of it, I suppose he is due to arrive very shortly.”

“Why, he is coming to-morrow, mistress! And it’s myself will give the gentleman his dinner. Real gentry, too, or so I gather from his name—Von Barholme.”

Bewilderment, which fast changed to panic, gripped Oline. Hands clasped in sudden despair, she gasped out something Illiana couldn’t quite understand.

“God save us!” shrilled the old woman, taking her hands in a vigorous grasp. “What ails you, Little Mother? You’re white as death! Come, come, Dear One, get hold of yourself! Sip a bit of tea and let old Illiana rub your poor head for you!”

“His name? His name?” gasped Oline. “I—I must have that right!”

“Now, now, Little Mother, so you shall! But is that any reason to scare me to death? Von Barholme, I said. Herr Jaegar Von Barholme.”

“O my God! It is death!” shuddered poor Oline, pitching senseless into Illiana’s arms.

When she recovered consciousness, she was lying on a cot in the doctor’s quiet little office, with Greta beside her. A strangely gentle Greta, whose eyes were soft golden jewels.

“That’s better!” smiled the girl, “you gave poor grandma a nasty turn, you know, keeling over like that! Lucky the doc. and I were here!”

Oscar Bear came forward quietly, a big, comforting presence, and beamed impartially at them both.

“Sure you must not take to such habits, Mrs. Boyen! My chief assistant may not always be near, you know. But now you run along, Miss Greta! I shall try to manage without you. Manfred Marcusson was at the store when I left. If he’s still there, I’m sure he will be more than glad to drive Mrs. Boyen home.”

All the way home Oline was oppressed by the same intolerable thoughts, like those dreary creatures one imagines chained to their evil deeds, and relentlessly pursued by them in some dismal hereafter. Through Manfred’s light-hearted chatter she kept hearing again the scathing words Jaegar had flung at her when she had finally convinced him of her determination to sacrifice personal happiness for filial duty. As clearly now as then, she seemed to see his dear face grow dark with anger, all its youthful buoyancy wiped out—the lover of her heart killed by the cruel thing she said! What manner of man had he become, she wondered, with an agony of pain at her heart. What had that early madness done to him—those sad indiscretions, for which she felt to blame? How had the long years recompensed him? Had he, perhaps, forgotten everything?

Young Manfred chattered on. His voice, rich and deep in quality like his father’s, vaguely annoyed her. His vitality grated on her. The proud turn of his head, each movement of his strong, expressive hands shouted vitality—a hungry eagerness to test and taste the joys of life.

“Now, don’t you think so?” he was repeating smilingly; “I think it’s jolly fine, myself!”

“I’m sorry, Manfred,” she apologized, “I’m afraid I wasn’t listening very closely.”

His laughter rang out good-naturedly. “Oh, that’s all right. I was just saying it’s lucky for us this professor chap had a breakdown. Otherwise he’d have never left the university where he was teaching to come to this hole!”

“Breakdown? You—you mean he isn’t well?” She could scarcely frame the words.

“Threatened with ‘T.B.’, I guess,” Manfred replied, with the easy acceptance of ill fate for others characteristic of thoughtless youth. “He’s really a scientist, you know. Probably, as dad says, he preferred the laboratory to fresh air. But his doctor finally scared him into going somewhere for a year or two where he’d have to behave like a human being!”

“Strange he should come here!” Oline ventured faintly.

“Much stranger than you imagine!” he laughed. “Dad says it was through the advertising Mr. Boyen did in the newspapers. You know—all that bunk about Nature’s miles and miles of healing balsam here at the lake. Professor Von Barholme’s doctor noticed it, and decided this was exactly the place his patient needed. Including the school, to keep him from dying of boredom.”

Oline covered her eyes. So that was it! John again! Always John to snatch away any promise of contentment! What dark chains held them, that they must continue this destruction of one another?

Preoccupied with her thoughts, she paid scant attention to what the boy said. Dimly, as from far away, she heard him saying how he hoped to specialize in something-or-other, and that his father was debating sending him to Europe to complete his education. His grandmother insisted on Heidelberg, where several generations of Marcussons had dealt with knowledge in their own genial fashion. Manfred wasn’t sure just what he meant to do eventually—except that the sea had no appeal whatever. On that score, at least, grandma need never worry.

“Well, that’s something!” Oline tried to sound interested and enthusiastic. “If I remember rightly, your father tried to run away when he was seven. Hid in a salt pork barrel on a fishing schooner!”

“That’s too slow for me!” laughed Manfred. “Besides, romance and adventure died with the sailing ships. I’d as soon run a train as one of those steel greyhounds, tied hard and fast to schedule. But if ever they make anything of flying—why, I’d give my soul to try it!”

“I sincerely hope you’ll have better sense!” said Oline. “I can’t imagine why anyone should want to risk his neck clowning for crowds!”

A queer expression stole over the boy’s face. What was the use of telling one’s aspirations to older people? Even the simpler facts of a changing world seemed so foreign to them. If Mrs. Boyen could conceive of no grander prospect in flying than the thrilling of circus crowds, like the balloonists grandma had seen in Germany, it was hopeless to imagine he could change her mind.

He said instead: “Mrs. Boyen, I’d like to ask you something. The Seniors are planning a masquerade party by way of welcome to the professor. I’d like to take Josephine, if you don’t mind.”

For no sensible reason she wanted to cry.

“Oh, so now I know why my daughter has been lounging about the house in admirable imitation of Egypt’s dusky queen! Of course you may take her, Anthony!”

CHAPTER VIII

OLINE spent a very miserable week prior to that eventful masquerade. From morning till night the girls talked of little else save their costumes. John had packed his bag and, without explanation of any sort, departed for the city, ostensibly on political matters, but, in reality, taking this means of showing his displeasure with Oline for supporting Veder against his wishes. It was almost more than she could bear to hear Josephine weaving fantastic romances around the man who had been her lover. Yet she dared not stem an obviously innocent pastime lest she forfeit her daughter's newly-won confidence.

Still, like the majority of mothers found curiously unprepared for the inevitable changes in the rising generation, she kept torturing herself with foolish comparisons. Surely the girls of her generation had not been so forward? So unblushingly precocious! Why, she recalled distinctly how difficult it was to get up any kind of a concert at Sunholme Parish because the children were so shy. From out the bevy of her girlhood friends she could remember no Greta, boldly defying the established conventions, nor yet a Josephine pulling faces at sanctified tradition. No, but honesty compelled her to admit that even those decorous maidens had speculated considerably in the possibilities of love—that covert glances, modest blushes, and romantic sighing had proved a most effective language. However, all that was innocent—or so she thought now—and could not be classed with the mad escapades of Greta Holmquist, who thought nothing of spending hours tracking game in the bush with a man! Even this fever for emulating the erotic queens of antiquity augured an unhealthy interest in sex. She hinted as much, and was promptly told she had simply forgotten what it meant to be young!

Moreover, Josephine did not hesitate to remind her mother that she had been away from the centre of civilization so long she no longer believed in the existence of circumstances and events described in books by eminent writers. Yet such things must be true, and, until she got away from Maple Bluffs, Josephine meant to make the most of her imitative faculty.

Oline found this high-handed classification of herself and the community delightfully naïve, until the thought struck her that she was not even acquainted with Josephine's reading. The source of her surprisingly venturesome theories could hardly be John's old-fashioned library.

“What are these marvellous books you find so stimulating?” she asked one morning, as they sat stitching coloured beads on Cleopatra’s cheesecloth robe of state.

Josephine fidgeted. “Oh, you wouldn’t understand them, mother. Captain Marcusson buys them for Leona. You know, she’s not half bad! Manfred thinks she’s rather decent—she lent him the books for me. French translations. Oh, why was I born in this poky old hole! If papa had any sense, he’d move to a real city. Even a city in Canada would be better than nothing!”

“Josephine! You are talking about your father, and your native country! Try to be just a little respectful!”

“Well, who could forget it?” giggled the incorrigible. “For gosh sakes, why must you and papa always fall back on that respect stuff whenever the truth hits home? If there were anything to respect, I’d respect it all right! So would we all.”

The situation was saved by the arrival of Manfred and Leatrice, who were to stay for dinner and complete the details of the programme for the entertainment. Everything was forgotten in the wild excitement that followed Manfred’s announcement of his father’s generosity. Captain Marcusson was donating the dance hall, and had ordered a real dance orchestra from Winnipeg.

“And all the refreshments!” Leatrice added proudly. “Papa said we might as well show Professor Von Barholme our best efforts at the start, as he’d see our worse ones later on!”

“Are we so terrible?” queried Sarah, obviously distressed by the constant belittling of all she knew and loved. “Most everybody is friendly, and—and—it’s beautiful on the lake!”

“Oh, go drown in it, Sarah!” Manfred shouted with laughter. “There speaks the fisherman’s daughter!

‘So that the good sea cover me,
What finer raiment shall my soul require?’

Eh, Sarah?” he teased.

“And that’s beautiful too!” she retorted, in one of her rare bursts of defiance. “I don’t see anything smart in making fun of everything the way you all do. I think it’s cheap!”

“Oh, get out!” Josephine threw a spool at her. “You’re altogether too much like dear papa when you take that line. It’s frightfully middle class to puff up with virtue.”

Seeing the helpless tears dangerously near, Oline rescued her youngest. "Come, Sarah, we may as well wash the greens for the salad. These worldly-wise young people can settle the business in hand without us!" she said.

As a matter of fact, she was quite as eager to escape as her daughter. For such was her confusion and distress of mind since the certainty of Jaegar's arrival was clear that she had the greatest difficulty in retaining a hold on herself, to say nothing of maintaining order and efficiency in her house. Following so closely on her own rejuvenation through the closer attachment she felt for her children since Veder's rebellion, it seemed to annihilate the years between. Even while she strove to modify the amazing vehemence of Josephine, it was difficult not to believe that here was herself, young again, beautiful, and virgin, waiting for the lover of her dreams. Dangerous proxy! For always something alien in the young girl brought her back sharply to the cruel truth and the bitter pangs of undiminished regret.

Josephine was John's daughter. If much of her own fair beauty was reincarnated in her, so, too, was John's insatiable acquisitiveness. Whatever she wanted she must have. Nothing less would satisfy Josephine. Times were changing, and with them the status of women. So much Oline gathered from the occasional periodicals she read. But would life ever permit the female of the species to subscribe utterly to selfish desire? Granted, she had the same right to the pursuit of personal gratification as man, would such practice ultimately benefit the human race, for whose safety, when all was said and done, she was primarily responsible?

Round and round her thoughts revolved incessantly, arriving at no conclusion. Despite the hardest attempt to see things in their right proportion—that, after all, both she and Jaegar were middle-aged, mellowed by experience, and not likely to behave like characters out of melodrama—the more terrified she grew at the prospect of having to face him after all these years. Stealthily when the household was long asleep, she would steal from her bed to study herself in the mirror. Her one prayer was a voiceless imploration to the inscrutable weaver of destiny that Jaegar might still trace something of the girl he had adored in the dull stranger she had certainly become. . . .

At last the eventful day dawned. Given a free hand with the festivities, the young people had outstripped anything heretofore attempted at Maple Bluffs. The little village was converted from peaceful mediocrity to the garish splendours of a fair, overnight. Bright blue and white bunting, crêpe streamers, and innumerable little flags bedecked the windows of the principal stores, and from the flagpole on the consolidated schoolhouse a new Union Jack unfurled its gallant colours to a clear, auspicious sky.

The dance pavilion, Ephraim Marcusson's splendid gift to the town, was a sight not quickly to be forgotten. Here Leona, in happiest collaboration with Isabella Marcusson, had supervised the complicated colour schemes and decorations. Many little booths, representing various national groups, lined the walls. One of these represented a Viking ship, where a warrior maiden with breastplate of gilded cardboard was to offer—for a coin—the eternal golden mead (in this case, good Scandinavian coffee) in the Marcusson ancestral tankards! Little Sarah, shyest of all the girls, but gifted with the thick flaxen hair indispensable to the conventional idea of Valkyrie, was chosen for the important post, and cried all the previous night from sheer terror.

Leatrice elected to sell artificial apple blossom in a booth representing Normandy. Greta refused to take a booth, but offered to dance instead.

"But how will that bring in money?" Josephine demanded. "You know we hope to raise enough to buy our books, so that no one needs to stay away on that score."

"I'll dance to the hat!" the shameless Greta explained gaily. "To the clink of coins—which is the only way to dance a Russian solo anyway. I'll bet you a waltz with Manfred I'll get at least a dozen history books!"

There were handicraft booths, cookery booths, and a booth devoted to fortune-telling where Illiana promised to lay the cards, and no cheating!

Surpassing all else was the flower-walled dance enclosure, with its raised platform canopied in blue cotton pierced with stars for the city orchestra. Here, under a rainbow of paper streamers illuminated by lanterns in amber shades, the young people were to dance to the strains of the very latest music.

John Boyen arrived home in the morning, and hearing him pooh-pooh these elaborate preparations and criticize the girls for their fantastic costumes helped Oline fight her own trepidation. In defending the children and finding logical excuses for so much expenditure, she lost sight, for the moment, of her own problem.

John threw water on everything. The whole scheme, said he, was just a publicity stunt by which Ephraim would benefit. Had it not occurred to any of them that this was the official opening of Marcusson's Dance Hall? With all this hullabaloo it would get into the papers, and Ephraim would get the credit for everything.

Josephine exhibited a new and startling phase of her temperament. After listening to her father with exemplary humility, she suddenly flew at him, all pouting tenderness.

“Darling papa!” she cooed, “it’s true! It’s really a shame how Captain Marcusson grabs off all the honours for doing nothing, while my dearest papa, who works so hard, stays in the shade!”

This was so gratifying, so unexpected and incredible, that he instantly lost the thread of his displeasure and, almost timidly, patted Josephine’s golden head. With amazing judgment she followed up her opportunity.

“Papa, you’ll make a marvellous Caesar! And of course you have to make the welcoming speech!”

“Nonsense!” John puffed a little, and fell back on his watch-chain for moral support.

“But you would, papa! What’s more, I ordered the Caesar costume for you when we sent for Manfred’s and the Prix boys’. And, naturally, when the programme was drafted, you were put down for the welcoming address. After all, you’re the reeve of Maple Bluffs, papa, and if we ever get a government grant for a real high school, it will be you that gets it for us.”

“Well! Well! You thought out all that by yourself, Little Josephine? In that case—unless the dress is too ridiculous—I’ll have to suit myself to your whims. But you should have told me about the address sooner, my foolish little girl!” he ended mildly and, with a pleased smile, padded off to his study to become deeply engrossed in the nice choice of adjectives. Ha! Von Barholme should see that here was no unlettered rustic mumbling inanities that passed for wit and bucolic wisdom.

When the door closed on his stocky form, Sarah fixed an accusing eye on her smirking sister.

“How could you tell such lies, Josephine? You never even thought of papa the whole time the plans were under way!”

“What of it? He won’t bother anyone the rest of the day. His speech will keep him gentle as a lamb and dead as a dead ox! That’s worth a little lying, isn’t it?”

“But how will you fix it? About the speech, I mean, and the costume?”

“Oh, that’s simple! While he was raving away, I remembered Dr. Beaur had some Roman costumes from that school play we put on two years ago for the opening of the school. Papa won’t know the difference. The speech is nothing to worry about. Manfred has charge of the programme. He’ll do as I say. You’re much too serious and silly, Sarah. You’ll never get anywhere by being such a fool! After all, papa *is* the richest man in Maple Bluffs, don’t forget. And let me tell you, I mean to work the moths out of his wallet!”

Little Sarah grew pink. “Maybe I’m not very clever, Josie, but I know that you get all these smart ideas from Leona’s paperbound novels! Mamma

wouldn't like it either, if she knew."

"Well, she needn't, unless you go tattling, darling angel!"

"You know that I don't tattle!" said Sarah, blinking miserably. "Now give me that cape. I'll finish the hooks and eyes."

By seven o'clock the whole village was congregated along the water front, waiting for the *Lenore*, which was bringing the orchestra. And when she came steaming round the green knoll of Beggar's Island a wild cheer went up. Never had Captain Marcusson's steamer stood more proudly to the breeze, or gladdened a more expectant gathering. To perfect the performance, she slid into the dock to the strains of martial music.

Illiana Petrovna wiped a moist eye. "God bless us, how we carry on!" she opined. "Now Greta, my duckling, behave yourself! Fine music and fine feathers dazzle the senses, but musicians are a shiftless lot. You'll not be dancing in the veils, I hope!"

"Of course not, grandma!" Greta flushed, and her amber eyes flashed impatiently. "You know I'm doing a Cossack solo! Oh, here they come—in uniform, grandma!"

Illiana frowned. Her granddaughter's growing, sparkling beauty was an increasing source of alarm. How long would she be safe from the greedy desires of predatory males? Such delectable charms were a curse to a girl trapped in a place like this. If only Tillie were less stingy Anton might see the wisdom of sending her to the city to be fitted for a wider life.

But now the boys, in blue, silver-braided coats, were marching up the shore, laughing and joking with the natives—nice, pleasant-faced boys, with nothing dissipated or ominous about them.

When someone shouted for the National Anthem a tubby fellow with twinkling blue eyes raised his cornet to rosy, hairless lips and commenced to blare forth in long, mournful quavering notes an excessively unhappy version of "Home, Sweet Home".

Behind him, his companions, with derisive shouts, drowned him out with a contagious jog trot, and soon all the youngsters fell in line, shouting and singing.

It was impossible to nurse misgivings in such an atmosphere of naïve gaiety. Illiana, still possessed of a clear, lusty voice, sang above the rest and, as the line swung past Boyen's Emporium, she caught hold of old Peter Hiner, parked there with Cora's youngest, and dragged him along.

Once in the dance hall the excitement subsided, swallowed in overwhelming wonderment. The young people were bursting with pride, their elders faintly distrustful, yet secretly pleased. Tired old women

immediately recalled similar, but vastly more delightful, exhibitions in the old country. In the dear lands where youth had painted everything in roseate colours, or so they now believed.

John Boyen outdid himself in the welcoming oration. So fluent and refined an address no one remembered hearing since the bishop's last visit ten years before. And, with fitting dignity, Ephraim Marcusson, very handsome indeed in his ancient evening apparel, ushered in the professor.

Jaegar Von Barholme met the situation with calm assurance. Far back in the crowded hall Oline steadied herself on a bench rail. There he was at last! Jaegar! Tears stung her eyes. Across the centuries of time that smile would still be familiar! Tall, thin, with a pallor that inspired instant concern, he was, nevertheless, all she had dreamed. Distinguished, gentle, wooing the crude people with that kindly wit characteristic of generous minds.

After that she listened to the sound of his voice without hearing a word. Listened as to music that bathed her whole being in ineffable peace. He was here! He was unchanged! Neither his early bitterness, nor the fine success of later years had changed him. Nothing else mattered.

The programme ended, people bustled hither and yon, joking with the girls now busy crying their wares in their booths. Neighbours gossiped and lovers flirted. John, centre of a little circle of business men, was engaging the professor in heavy conversation. But Oline sat quietly hidden in the flowers of Leatrice's booth. In a little while the young folk would scurry away to dress for the masquerade, and the work of preparing the supper would fall to the elders.

Old Mrs. Marcusson, very lovely in black satin and seed pearls, found her presently. Gently, the old lady touched her shoulder.

"You look charming, Oline! That shade of green brings out the yellow lustre of your hair. With that rapt expression my dear, the years are cheated!"

Oline felt deeply grateful. Trust mother Marcusson to know what troubled one's foolish heart. Halvor sat down, picked a nosegay, and stuck it in her belt.

"Has it ever occurred to you, Oline, that quite possibly evil has its use in the world—like the coarse buckram on which we weave our finest pieces? Perhaps the majesty of a human soul can only be measured by its conquest of sorrows and tribulation."

Oline caught her breath sharply. "If only one could believe that!" she sighed.

Halvor's dry little laugh was oddly bracing. "You have eyes to convince you of it, Oline. But here comes that slave-driver, my daughter-in-law. No

doubt, she means to drag you off to the kitchen!”

Oline read in this further friendly helpfulness. The Marcusson women were enleagued to help her through a difficult situation. Profoundly touched, she stepped away with Isabella to the cheerful din of the kitchen.

Meanwhile, the musicians began tuning up. The benches were piled away, the new polished floor freely sprinkled with wax, and the amber-coloured lanterns lighted under the rainbow canopy. Soon gales of laughter, clapping, and cheers sounded the triumphant entry of the masqueraders. In a trice everything was transformed into a fairyland of unreality.

Josephine bubbled with gaiety—never so fair an Egypt’s queen as she! Manfred twitted her mercilessly on her un-Egyptian yellow hair.

“But Cleopatra was a Greek!” Josephine defended herself. “And you’re not such a hot Anthony either! Oscar says he was short and stubby, like papa! Oh, just look at Leona! Isn’t she marvellous!”

Manfred shrugged. “Catherine of Russia is well chosen!” Ephraim’s son retorted, with dryness reminiscent of his grandmother. “Let’s hope she elects no executions for to-night!”

“And there’s Esme Prix. What on earth does she represent? A cabbage?”

“My dear young lady, how can you speak that way of such divine curves? She’s a jolly armful, let me tell you. Holy!—there’s Greta!”

So it was: Greta, floating about the dance floor like a golden lily stirred by celestial music. Cuddle close as she dared, Josephine could not stem her partner’s elated interest in the marvellous vision. With rising pique she followed his straying glances. How on earth had Illiana’s granddaughter come by that gorgeous dress? Why, even her slippers were amber-coloured satin!

When the music stopped Manfred dragged her, hot and unwilling, into the crowd surrounding Greta. Josephine was stung to cattiness.

“Isn’t a mask a little silly, with everyone shouting your name?” said she pertly.

“It is, Josephine,” Greta assented, her cherry lips a tantalizing bow of mirth. “But it’s very becoming to yellow hair and a peach complexion!”

“That should hold you, Josie!” the Prix boys hooted, and before she could find an answer Tony had whirled her away in a maddening two step. Throughout the number his flattery fell on deaf ears. Did she guess how cute she was? Such a cuddly little queen! So adorable, and sweet smelling as thyme. He was mad about her, really. Reacting swiftly enough to the pressure of his arms, Josephine fidgeted nervously.

“Don’t, Tony! You hurt!” she giggled. “I’ll not dance with you again unless you behave, silly!”

“Come outside then,” he whispered. “It’s a grand night for a ride, and my buggy’s all set!”

To escape she promised, “All right, but first I’ll get my coat.”

Away she went through the excited crowd to the welcome dimness of the little dressing-room. Here, in childish temper, she burst into tears. Oh, she knew Manfred! That he had brought her meant nothing now. She might sit, a wallflower, for the rest of the night, for all he cared! Papa was right, too. Greta was a horrid, forward creature!

Softly as shadows move in the moonlight, Sarah stole into the room and went to her sister.

“Oh, Josie, I’m sorry!” said she, in mistaken kindness. “I couldn’t help seeing. I’m awfully sorry!”

“Aw, shut up!” Josephine bridled unreasonably. “You’re always seeing something wrong. My God, Sarah, mind your own business!”

“But, Josie, I only meant—I—I meant, it was horrid of Manfred.”

A ringing slap in the face stopped her. “For heaven’s sake leave me alone! No wonder papa detests you! You’d drive a saint crazy!” Josephine raged at the quiet, stricken figure staring at her, hand to burning cheek.

“Aw, get out! Get out and do your bawling somewhere else, can’t you!” she shrieked, ashamed of her temper, and angrier for it.

Little Sarah stiffened, brushed back her hair in a queerly proud gesture, and slipped away silently.

Josephine cried herself red-eyed. But when the spasm passed her mind was fixed in noble resignation. Like the slighted heroines in Leona’s pot boilers she would brave the world, head high. Yes, in the very face of fickle Manfred she’d laugh and joke, though her heart was broken! Greatly taken with this heroic vision, she washed her hot face, powdered carefully and, with what she thought tragic courage, re-entered the hall.

Instead of curious eyes to meet bravely, no one seemed to have missed her. Even Tony was dancing as before, whispering the self-same flatteries to a little German girl dressed in Holland blue.

Somewhat dashed, despite a lifting of spirit, Josephine slipped into a seat at the end of the hall, where, under a bower of twined bunting and paper roses, she could keep a sharp eye on the door and the moonlit yard beyond.

Suddenly a quiet, grave voice was speaking.

“Why sits Egypt’s queen, so pensive and alone?”

“Why, professor—I—but how nice of you to notice!”

His laughter was intimate and friendly. “I’m supposed to know my history, though, to tell the truth, I never suspected Anthony of good taste before! May I sit down?”

“Please do!” Josephine made room for him with a dainty flutter of filmy petticoats. In place of the slighted heroine, she saw herself now as the inaccessible princess, possessed of youth, beauty, wealth, and power, secretly desired by an elderly gentleman willing to die in her service. It was extremely flattering, and induced a flood of innocent rapture that quite captured the lonely man. Something about the spirited little figure pulled on the strings of memory, reviving a long lost image.

In no time at all they were chatting like old friends, Josephine confiding her thirst for travel, for books, for the life he had known, and Jaegar Von Barholme promising to retail his experiences in foreign countries in the near future.

“When my little house is set in order, and my books arrive from the States, you shall browse among them to your heart’s content!” he promised.

How delightful! Josephine tossed her head proudly. Manfred should see that to a man of refinement it was she, not noisy Greta, who appealed. And she would fit herself by assiduous reading and grave deportment to inspire and console the professor in his isolation and ill health.

This the delightful undertow of her thoughts. Outwardly, she was just a normal young girl of quite normal affectations, preening in the sunshine of adult attention. With pleasing frankness she delineated the characters of the important people of the village. That ruddy-faced gentleman with the walrus moustachios was Peter Hiner, whose Stopping-Place was famous for its fried fish and beer. The enormously fat lady in blue bombazine was his wife. That faded wisp of a woman with the six stepladder babies was his niece, Cora. Once she was a beauty, and—well, Josephine giggled into a scrap of lace handkerchief—once Cora had actually captured Captain Marcusson! Captain Marcusson was awfully handsome, didn’t he think?

Jaegar Von Barholme smilingly agreed that he was. Thus encouraged, she rattled on. The Marcussons were really somebody. Old Mrs. Marcusson came of a titled family, but the late captain was only the son of a frightfully rich mercantile house. Manfred said he must have been incurably romantic, not at all suited to trade. Manfred was the last of the male line, and awfully conceited!

Von Barholme had a pleasant laugh which made Josephine feel decidedly entertaining and important.

But everyone thought Leatrice was really much more attractive than her brother, she fabricated, taking this sweet revenge on her fickle idol, and enjoying it immensely. Leatrice was the dark-complexioned girl by the flower booth. She was always quiet, loved music and babies, and was ever so clever with needlework. The two most handsome women in the room—not counting mamma, of course—were Leona Shultz and Mrs. Marcusson. Poor Mrs. Marcusson was always terribly retiring, because she never forgot that queer scar on her cheek. Yet it didn't really look so awful, did he think?

Jaegar had not even noticed it, he said, politely omitting to confess that time had hardly permitted a detailed inspection of these people. But, he amended, to her decided annoyance, that he had found old Mrs. Holmquist and her granddaughter delightfully entertaining, and that he felt grateful for such a friendly home until his tiny cabin was ready for him.

Josephine giggled. "Ah, but you mustn't believe everything Illiana Petrovna tells you, professor. She's—well—awfully talkative. She used to be our nurse, but papa thought it better to help her some other way, so he built her that little house. Her son married Tillie Hiner. She's the stout lady in black with the yellow braids pinned round her head. Greta's mother died when she was born. I guess she got her looks from her. But is she really so pretty?" she asked anxiously, and flushed to meet his amused glance.

"To be frank, no. An artist would find the word feeble. But fortunately I'm only a sober old schoolmaster, and may content myself with thinking her charming. Indeed, my dear," he concluded, rising to make way for a young couple who looked hot and tired, "I've seldom seen so many pretty girls in one small place!"

Which kindly comment set Josephine's silly little heart singing, convinced that, after all, life was bound to be perfectly thrilling, and she herself beautiful as any story-book maid. When Manfred came to ask her for a belated waltz, she meant to cut him properly. But, as usual, his smile went to her head, and she slid into his arms with a giggling little sigh instead.

All the while Oline had remained out of sight, finding in innumerable little tasks the courage she needed for the inevitable meeting. It would be easier, she thought, to accustom herself to Jaegar's presence at the table, where the clatter of dishes, hearty consumption of favourite foods, and the helpful chatter of friends would hide her confusion. But, as so often happens, the inevitable came about quite differently, and had none of the anticipated terrors she dreaded.

The banquet table, which now replaced the home baking and candy booths, was almost fully set. It groaned with the finest products of Maple

Bluffs cookery, and gave off a tantalizing odour of roasted ham, creamed chicken, hot biscuits, and spicy cakes. Flowers, and candles in tall, old-fashioned holders lent grace to the board. Oline, who took quiet pride in all this, had stolen out to make sure that the real silver flatware was at the places to be occupied by Jaegar and the town dignitaries. A screen of fragrant evergreens hid the table from the dance floor, and here, where she had expected safe seclusion, she met him.

She saw him standing, gravely smiling in the diffused light of swaying lanterns, as quietly at ease as her own shadow. Jaegar stood there, under the green fan of a Canadian cedar, and looked at her in this strange, calm way, with the same grey eyes that had flayed her with scornful anger that summer morning, twenty years ago.

“O God!” was her first thought, “he doesn’t even know me!”

For an instant a trembling, as of ague, seized her. But then—ah, miracle of goodness!—his dear, worn face wrinkled in the funny way she knew so well, and his voice, which all the eternity of years separating them had not silenced in memory, dismissed the foolish doubt.

Said Jaegar: “You could not hide for ever, Oline, for I came here to see you!”

With the same half-nervous, airy movements he remembered, she came to him, hands outstretched, and a look on her face he would never forget.

“O Jaegar! I thought you didn’t recognize me! I thought—but what does it matter what I thought now! We have a moment before supper. Tell me about yourself—how you have fared, what you mean to do with yourself.” She smiled mistily and sat down, overcome with joyous relief to find speech so easy. “But even if you were to withhold your confidence, it wouldn’t matter.”

Which was true in a quite heavenly fashion. Nothing now seemed to matter. That life had cheated them, youth passed them by, and that each was burdened with obligations not to be slighted faded from cognizance. That strange force which once had drawn their young hearts together they now knew had never for a moment renounced its power. Nature is not forgiving to those who frustrate her purpose, yet to the penitent compensation comes with understanding. Pitiful and mean were the gods on whose altar their love was sacrificed. Yet the certainty that each knew and was humbled before the miracle of surviving embers created a warmth of happiness not unlike the effect of a spiritual benediction.

In the midst of laughter and somewhat strident music they sat on a stiff bench under drooping boughs of festooned greens as much apart as though

they were on a desert island. Gravely they exchanged conventional answers in quiet, controlled voices, and what they said was entirely irrelevant. Each drank in the other with hungry eagerness, and found at last a curious, inexplicable peace.

Just to hear his voice was a miracle of resurrection—a joy such as only the sisters of Bethany knew when Lazarus was returned to them. To see him again after the death of twenty years, and find him all her heart desired, was compensation for a thousand indignities. Joy such as she had never thought to taste again flooded her being and filled her with quiet pride as she had listened to the things he had done—marvellous achievements hastily recounted with the endearing shyness of a boy. But eclipsing all was fervent gratitude that the suffering she had caused him had, as Halvor wisely pointed out, only served to enrich the depths of his character. Pride wounded had provoked healthy ambition, and not, as John had led her to believe, destroyed him!

Thus her thoughts. But he, talking against time and caring little for the fruits of his long labour, found her tragically changed. Her eyes alone were the same, ran the undertow of his thoughts. Blue as the blue fiord waters, deeply spiritual, but confused as those of a child under stress. Her lovely hair had still the same sheen of warm sunshine about it. But for the rest—good God, how she must have suffered! What hideous nightmare had stolen from her sweet face the animation and birdlike alertness he could never forget? How tired she looked! How dearly he would like to lay her dear head on his breast, and let the tears wash out the stigma of disillusionment and pain.

The music ended, and from beyond the screening evergreens Captain Marcusson's cheerful voice announced supper. Oline got up hastily, but Jaegar took her hands in a firm clasp. Their eyes clung, and dropped over mutual confession and mutual understanding, the colour stole up to Oline's pale brow.

“You will let me see you sometime,” he said, with quiet emphasis. “There is nothing to fear, Oline. What has always been mine I will not forfeit now.”

“You will be welcome at ‘The Maples’,” she replied, a little stiffly, conscious that aproned figures were rushing forward from the kitchen, and must see and hear her. “Most welcome, Professor Von Barholme,” she amended, and with a smile was lost in milling women carrying jugs of coffee and platters of steaming food.

The details of the banquet were never very clear to Oline. It was a cheerful medley of pleasurable incidents to be remembered in the dull days to come with an enheartening glow. When everyone was fed the customary speeches followed, old Dr. Hartman, delighting the company with his pertinent wit, acting as chairman. Captain Marcusson, whose marked attention to his wife on this occasion had rendered everyone more susceptible to his singular fascination, was particularly amusing, painting ludicrous pitfalls that awaited any lonely bachelor—especially a guileless man of learning. Peter Hiner, greatly flattered and equally flustered, extended the welcome to Professor Von Barholme on behalf of the German settlers. Papa Prix, with sputtering eloquence and somewhat alarming gestures, did the honours for the French neighbours, concluding almost in tears:

“It is the big pleasure to give monsieur the professor my six daughters!—to finish, you comprehend!” he shouted above the laughter.

Anton Holmquist, stimulated by the general humour, and possibly reminded of his own fleeting dreams of scholastic ambition, astonished everyone by the graceful toast he gave. Greta quite frankly stared at him with her strange golden eyes as though he were a complete stranger.

Illiana Petrovna sighed, and salted her coffee by mistake.

It was all very agreeable. Maple Bluffs felt proud of itself, the inhabitants for once inclined to see only the good in each other. Women who had seldom exchanged more than a business greeting with Leona were suddenly impressed by her good nature, her helpfulness, and undisputed cleverness.

After all, if Mrs. Marcusson had really taken her into her home, all that gossip must have been largely exaggeration.

“But yes!” Mrs. Prix was emphatic. “It was those other—ah—little affairs. They make everybody suspicious. But Miss Shultz—she is the new woman. She works with a man at business. But yes! Madam could not otherwise be so friendly!”

For friendly they were, as everyone could see. And for the first time in years Captain Marcusson danced with no one but his wife!

Undoubtedly the highlight of the evening was reached when John Boyen rose to his feet, and with ponderous dignity thanked everyone for his share in the celebration—especially the ladies who had toiled over the hot stoves, etc. All helping to cement friendlier feelings and a sense of mutual helpfulness. A splendid preparation for the great destiny which he now felt safe in prophesying for them. Here he cleared his throat, apologized for a

show of emotion and, with pardonable elation at the surprise he must occasion, had the honour to inform them that the railway was now a certainty! The surveyors were already on their way. By next fall the actual work would be in full progress.

After that, such was the general feeling of jubilation and good will, the noisiest demonstration passed uncriticized. Even when Greta danced her Cossack number, decked out in rather scandalizing garments, she was received with tolerant smiles from the virtuous, and whole-hearted, thunderous applause from the more worldly. As may be imagined, when she returned for her encore, rehabited in her soft frilly dress, exactly the colour of marigolds in early spring, her hair a burnished copper cloud of curls about her broad white brow, and eyes like golden stars, the approval of the male element broke out uproariously.

Very gratifying to Greta, who loved to dance as whole-heartedly as a bird devotes itself to song. But when she could be reached through the throng of dotting swains, Manfred swept down on her like a cold gale and whisked her out into the moonlight.

Never before had he looked more attractive, spoken with such soft inflection, or had a more perfectly detached air as he treaded his way to the door. Once outside, however, Greta was actually startled by the concentrated rage she saw in his face. His fingers cut into the soft flesh of her bare arm as he almost shook her in his fury.

“No wonder you get yourself talked about!” he hissed, dragging her under the sheltering wall of the carriage shed. “Haven’t you better sense than to make a show of yourself for these—these country clowns? These filthy-minded hayseeds! I could kill you, Greta Holmquist! And you’d deserve it!”

Somewhat recovered from her amazement, Greta tried to be casual. “Don’t be silly. You remind me of Josephine with her story-book situations. Why shouldn’t I dance? If I had my say, I’d dance for a living!”

“For a decent audience. That would be different,” the boy retorted fiercely. “In a respectable theatre where people go to enjoy a performance. But here! Gosh, Greta, the way some of those men talked—the way they looked at—at your beautiful legs was horrible!” he finished, with such sincere and small-boy concern that it brought a quite unfamiliar flush to her rather hard little face.

“O Manfred, you are being silly! But I like it! You’re horrid and bossy, conceited and fickle,” she enumerated cheerfully, detaching his fingers and

rubbing her arm, “you’re what grandma calls an incurable, bred-in-the-bone snob—and yet, you’re a dear!”

She meant to elude him, as she had a thousand times before in their skirmishing boy and girl affair, but he was too quick for her. Something about the way he held her, so closely and guardedly, without any mawkish attempt to kiss her, brought a curious elation of the senses that half frightened her. In a small voice she begged:

“Manfred, please let me go! I’d rather you did. It’s silly behaving like this.”

“Is it?” His voice, strangely altered, sang through her being in a queer, breath-taking way. When he laughed Greta knew, as all those other now shadowy loves of other shadowy Marcusson lovers had known, that, young though she was, her destiny was fixed this hour.

“Is it?” he repeated, ever so softly. “Oh, you know it isn’t. You know it’s beautiful and sweet, and stronger than anything we can name. You know you belong to me, Greta! You always have, and always will!” he asserted, letting her go with a satisfied and incredibly musical laugh.

Greta, darting away, felt a rush of tears and a feeling of helpless anger. Grandma was right. There was something poisonous about some people! Some poisonous quality of attraction before which one’s defences were absolutely helpless. She was no fool like Josephine, but even with the wisdom of a Solomon she knew that she was helpless. No matter what she did, no matter what he did, Manfred had this hold on her for ever.

CHAPTER IX

WITH the passing of time, John Boyen did not forgive Oline her unseemly share in Veder's rebellion. That he refrained from recrimination may be attributed to his fixed ideas of behaviour becoming a gentleman. Yet to suppose his displeasure was mitigated in the least by occasional good reports of the boy is to thoroughly misunderstand his character. Or to suppose he had not a thousand subtle means of keeping fresh in Oline's mind his undiminished displeasure is vastly to underrate his mental processes. When, for instance, he spoke cheerfully, even proudly, to his customers of the small red depot swiftly nearing completion, and its ultimate significance, she understood the implied inference as addressed to herself. That where others would benefit, he must lose, and that to this loss she had deliberately added by depriving him of the helpful services of his own son. That he had, with customary foresight, already largely offset these possibilities by new schemes, of which she learned from others, had no effect upon his case against her. She had disobeyed him, Veder had disobeyed him and, to the end of time, whatever they did must rest under the cloud of his fine displeasure.

This was pressed home none too agreeably the day she proudly announced at dinner Veder's winning of a scholarship. Nothing big, it was true, but to her delightfully indicative of the boy's serious purpose.

John asked for a helping of peas, smiling amiably.

"I am glad to hear it," said he. "A hundred dollars sounds a good sum—until you begin balancing accounts. It should cover the clothes you spoke of some time ago."

So he had overheard her speaking to the girls of Veder's needing a new overcoat! And this was his polite refusal, given in advance, to any possible demand she might venture to make. With slightly heightened colour she answered promptly:

"Fortunately, I have still my emeralds. They will see Veder through very nicely!"

"Your emeralds?" No mistaking the shock in his heavy voice. "Madam, you surely do not intimate selling the emeralds which your mother gave you on your wedding, for no better reason than supporting a young man in idleness!"

"There could be no better use for them," she actually smiled. "Leona Shultz, who as you know drives a good bargain even for a man, has agreed

to take them to a firm in Chicago that handles such things.”

“Leona Shultz! Chicago!” he gasped.

“You had not heard?”

Oline had acquired a maddening composure of late, he reflected. A quite lamentable ability to raise his ire while remaining ironically cool and—yes—damnably impertinent! No, he had not heard.

“Well, you see,” she went on to explain, dishing up the dessert, “since Miss Shultz sold those lots of hers to the railway at such profit, she has decided to travel for a while. If the price isn’t right in Chicago she will take the stones to New York. They are really quite rare, as you remember.”

“And what of Josephine?” he demanded, more sharply than he knew. “Has it not occurred to you that your mother would have wished them to come to her?”

She was saved from making the bitter retort that sprang to her mind. Josephine leaped into the breach with what seemed to Oline an alarming show of guile.

“Dear papa, would I be likely to care about the old set with you to look after me! But I do think it’s too bad mamma should have to sell the emeralds this way. Miss Shultz is sure to brag about her deal and people will talk. You know, dearest papa, a rising politician can’t afford to have even common, ignorant folk think him skimpy with his own family. Naturally, we can’t explain that it’s the principle of it, not money, that enters into this horrid affair of Veder’s.”

Sweet child! John refused a helping of cherry float, and smiled on his daughter. What a remarkable understanding she displayed for a young girl. How like himself she was, the dear, winsome creature! And she was foresighted too, the little minx. It certainly would have a decided effect upon his career, if he resolved upon it, to be accused, even though falsely, of miserly treatment in his own home.

With gravity becoming a kingly beneficence, he said slowly: “The child is right, Oline. We must find a better solution of Veder’s—ah—specific problem. On the whole, it might have a healthy influence upon the boy to be granted, say, a loan to complete his course.”

The anger Oline felt rising in her with tidal menace was swiftly changed into an almost overwhelming desire to shriek with laughter when Josephine, still gazing at her father with palpable adoration, gave her a sharp kick under the table. Poor John! What a curious harvest his conscientious guardianship was reaping. Herself indifferent, curiously healed of susceptibility to his rule. Veder gloriously free, and Josephine, his idol, laughing at the ease with

which she used him. It was an ironic joke! At which point her natural generosity interfered, and she frowned. Josie was much too forward—too impudent. She must speak to her.

In her quiet voice, Sarah spoke up suddenly: “Professor Von Barholme told the class about Veder’s scholarship, mamma. He said it was considered a very high honour, not at all to be counted in terms of money!”

“Well!” John regarded the solemn Sarah with something bordering on actual hostility. “How thoughtful of you to explain all this, my child. The marvels of science are perhaps a little beyond my comprehension!”

That evening, when they were alone—John having gone to a school-board meeting, and Josephine to the professor’s house, where she gambolled rather like a kitten, through his books—Sarah said to her mother, with a sudden rush of tears:

“Mamma, sometimes I just want to die, everything seems so horrid!”

“You must not take offence at papa’s manner of speaking,” Oline spoke soothingly. “One is often curt for quite other reasons than are obvious, Sarah. Your father has difficulties you cannot now appreciate, and it makes him a little sharp unknowingly.”

“Not unknowingly, mamma,” Sarah was oddly grim. “When it comes to Josephine it applies, but not to me, or Veder, or even you! But it’s not only that. Papa doesn’t like me because I’m plain, and can’t express myself like Josie. I don’t mind, really but it’s having everything fail at once! The things one believed in—love, and devotion, and loyalty.” The blundering, wounded voice went on, tearing Oline’s heart-strings.

“You see, until lately, I used to pity Leatrice because her home was—queer. It seemed as if nothing could be worse than having those horrid things whispered and whispered about one’s father. But now I—ah, mamma, you’ll not understand—but it’s as if I wished Captain Marcusson were my father! That’s how changed everything is!”

Poor little Sarah! “Perhaps I do understand, child,” her mother asserted gently. “Changing one’s values is sometimes very upsetting. Still, it’s better than blind faith, my dear, which always comes to ruin. What you wanted to believe was beautiful—perhaps it exists somewhere. But I think it must be fought for—bought at any price—great price—like almost everything else, and that nothing is deadlier than unquestioning devotion.”

Sarah caught her breath like a runner. Her grey eyes were marvellously soft. “Please, mamma, may I ask a question, and not be thought impertinent? It’s quite important, really.”

“Yes, child, of course!”

“I’ve sometimes thought, since hearing you and the professor talk over so many things—lovely things I want to believe in—that somehow you couldn’t—just couldn’t have loved papa!”

Oline felt a strange, bitter-sweet relief under this childish yearning judgment.

“You are no longer a little child, Sarah, and thoughts are difficult to control,” she said, quite simply. “When I spoke of blind, unquestioning devotion, I was thinking of my parents—my good parents,” she repeated with emphasis. “It was to please them that I married your father!”

The warm, enclosing sweetness of Sarah’s embrace, the little, sharply-repressed sob, and shower of kisses were sweet atonement.

“Dearest! Dearest! I knew it! That makes everything right. Oh, I’ve prayed and prayed to God just to let me keep my beautiful mother! For you are beautiful, mamma!” she went on, so passionately that Oline trembled for this serious, worshipful daughter. “I’ve noticed it all this year. There’s a light in your face, mamma, that scares me sometimes. It’s like a sunset made of beautiful dreams!”

Because it was so true, as regarded her secret solace and source of strength, Oline was as close to tears as her daughter. To evade the danger, she skilfully shifted the subject to Leatrice’s forthcoming birthday party. The girls were buying her a bracelet ordered from the city, and now the business of new dresses loomed joyously ahead. Sarah was satisfied with new muslin, but Josephine had coaxed her father for blue silk, and the burning question of style was a delicious worry. Over fashion sheets and catalogues depressing thoughts dispersed and, when later in the evening, as often happened, Dr. Hartman put in an appearance, he found mother and daughter cheerfully occupied.

Sarah loved the old physician. It was a standing joke between them that she had beaten him to their engagement when she was born.

“And a less sporting victory I’ve seldom seen!” he always contended. “You literally howled in my face, Miss Sarah, which I thought extremely bad taste, considering the haste I made to keep the appointment!”

To-night he had rare news. Young Manfred had gleefully confided in him that now he was sure of being sent abroad. His grandmother had come into a considerable fortune, inherited from an only brother, and was bequeathing it to him on the stipulation that he attend the university of her choosing. Captain Marcusson disapproved, having reached the conclusion that an American institution would be more in keeping with democratic ideals and the trend of the times. Halvor, who had never quite forgiven him

for walking out in his second year, was immovable in the matter. Isabella, apparently, remained sensibly neutral although the doctor suspected her opinions coincided with Ephraim's. He also divined that, because of her sensible attitude, her mother-in-law would stoutly support her desire to have Leatrice sent to Holy Cross convent in Winnipeg.

"Oh, mamma!" The cry was involuntarily torn from the depths of Sarah's passionate heart. The old doctor and Oline exchanged sympathetic glances as the girl, flushing, hastily went on:

"Won't that be marvellous? Leatrice does so want to study social science. I—I think, if she dared, she'd like to be a nun!"

Ephraim's daughter a nun! The mere thought would have been laughable except for its faint suggestion of an underlying power whose control of human destiny was indisputable, and whose retributive justice was a perfect balance of life's small affairs.

Although neither said a word, Oline knew the old doctor was carried back to that awful night in Ephraim's mill; that Marie, broken on the wheel of passion, was strangely resurrected in this seemingly odd, yet perhaps quite natural desire in her daughter. Leatrice, loved and shielded by Isabella, had, none the less, from earliest childhood, been abnormally analytical, given to moods and serious reflection. It was as though the child had inherited the full force of Marie's last misery and struggling mental processes. Leatrice could never accept anything unquestioned, or condone anything unexplored. She must always know the reason behind each action. Once knowing them, she could be merciful and kind to a fault. On the whole, thought Oline, perhaps no young girl was ever better fitted for a sensible execution of those offices in life rather foolishly called charitable.

That Dr. Hartman had been following a similar train of thought was evident, for he suddenly said: "The most beautiful creature I ever saw in my life was a young abbess in Austria. To look at her was to believe that God walked the earth again."

Nothing more was said in that vein until after the doctor's departure. Then, going quietly to Sarah, who was dutifully clearing away the tea service, Oline said:

"You would very much like to go with Leatrice, wouldn't you, dear?"

Sarah's face grew almost fierce. "Yes! Yes! But not like Josephine, to play at this and that, and lark over clothes and flirt! I'd work so hard to learn—oh—just everything. There's such an awful lot of things to discover in the world. But I *could* make good in music!"

CHAPTER X

OLINE had never supposed she might learn to look upon John's inordinate self-satisfaction with something like gratitude. Yet her feelings at times approached that. Jaegar had now been in town over two years, and was a frequent visitor at "The Maples". As Sarah had said, the result was a rebirth of spiritual grace that illumined all her days. Just to have him in the same room with her, talking of uneventful things, or better still, reading from some precious volume in his beautiful, cultured voice, was enough to set her heart singing for days. She realized that this joy, although in itself innocent of anything the world might condemn, would have been impossible except for her husband's extreme egotism.

John was above jealousy because it simply could not occur to him that a woman honoured by his devotion would so much as glance at another. In greatest good humour he had spoken of Jaegar on the night of his arrival, laughing heartily that an advertisement of his should have attracted the notice of her childhood flame. Watching him suspiciously, Oline had quickly discerned his absolute sincerity. Apparently he had quite forgotten Jaegar's wild misery, and its resultant indiscretion which ended in his loss of Ryelands. All that wretchedness no longer existed for John. Quite gaily he had informed her of Jaegar's greying hair, his feeble health, poor devil! With mild admiration he had recounted his scholastic honours.

"Fine chap!" he had concluded cheerfully. "We must do all we can for him, Oline. It's a mighty lonesome business fighting ill health without family or friends."

That he had meant it she had every reason to believe. Jaegar was always welcome, and more than once, she knew, John had ordered small luxuries from the city to be sent to the professor's house. This attitude of John's, although rooted in nothing nobler than egotism, would in itself have held her fast to the obligations of wife and mother, even if her own high sense of duty had not prevailed. Yet this new-found philosophic contentment, so welcome after years of emptiness, was now and then shot through with dread. It was not, she told herself bravely, the knowledge that each month which added to Jaegar's strength, by just so much hastened his inevitable departure. What one knew as inevitable was exempt from the chaotic misery attendant on sometimes trivial disasters. She knew he must return to the larger life his courageous struggle against poverty, ill health, and prejudice had fitted him for. She would not have wished, now or ever, to hold him back. No! No! But

everything was changing so fast it sometimes terrified her. She would be left to an utterly altered, and perhaps entirely empty existence. Her husband was as a creature of another world, so little they had in common now the children were no longer small enough to be a mutual care. It was no longer possible to console herself with nursery joys and the homely business of discussing the possible merits of cod liver oil, barley broth, and lime water for the babies. Such things John had considered proper, legitimate conversation for a fond mother, to which a dutiful husband listened, if not with rapt attention, at least with absolute sincerity.

But a good woman should not even attempt to regulate or even advise in matters quite beyond her. It was for a man accustomed to the ways of the world, and wise to its pitfalls, to decide for his grown children what manner of life they must lead. That he refused even to listen to any proposal she made for her girls sprang from a righteous resolve to do his paternal best to avert any such disagreeable rupture as Veder's behaviour had occasioned. John honestly believed, as myriads of other gentlemen of the Victorian order believed, that the female of the species discharged her only valuable function in the marriage bed and nursery. It would have shocked him profoundly to be accused of any shade of smug superiority, or faintest desire to be tyrannical. He merely believed God had so ordered existence, and that nothing short of a Heavenly decree might alter it.

That even now this blessed order was disintegrating, and about to be dissolved in a holocaust of mad socialism and sensation hunting he could never have perceived.

To Oline, awakened to finer perceptions through intercourse with Jaegar, there were innumerable and alarming indications on every hand. The restlessness of her daughters, Leatrice's fearless criticism of the conduct of her elders, and Greta's sometimes crazy escapades were such as could, by any stretch of charity, be characterized as the customary turbulence of youth. True enough, even in her day, girls had dreamed ridiculous things and behaved fantastically at times, adopting one pose or another, and boys had defied their parents with reasonable assurance of impunity, but never in the high-handed manner of these youngsters who blithely laughed at conventions and pooh-poohed paternal advice.

So far as she could see, neither the church nor the home was regarded as anything other than a momentary utility to be cast aside without regret. She was not so ignorant a woman as to suppose this state of affairs necessarily presaged moral ruin, but something warned her that readjustments more painful than any she had known yawned before these madcap adventurers in

self-expression, independence, and so-called freedom. Human instincts, like plants, suffer during periods of violent transplanting.

Jaegar, who had lived in a world of books and pursued the onrushing principles of science, laughed at her sometimes. A world without progress was divorced from life, he said, for the principle of life was an eternal going on from one plane of evolution to another. Man was merely one of many expressions of the Divine Life Principle. He too must change, advance, dare to experiment, or die.

Well, that was comfort enough for a philosopher. A mother's heart needed something more tangible to stay her fears. On more than one occasion of late Oline had attempted to sound Josephine's mind, to discover what her thoughts and desires really were. She was met with good-natured amusement, and quite obvious patience! The books she read scandalized Oline just a little, and her conversation seemed curiously inane, sometimes odiously affected, often immodest.

"But, my dear," she had once said, almost apologetically, "ought you to be reading *Madame Bovary*—can it possibly amuse you?"

Josephine shrieked. "Mamma, you're rich! What's wrong with poor old *Bovary*? It's supposed to be a classic, you know—like the Bible, which is also full of filthy rot, if you trouble to be truthful!"

"Josephine! I must ask you not to speak that way!"

"Very well, mamma. Then please don't ask silly questions! It's bad enough to be buried in a country town with hardly a respectable person to talk to without having to confine one's reading to Mother Goose and the Beatitudes!" she asserted heatedly.

Oline hardly knew whether to be angry or amused with this pretty child, who had suffered nothing, or even faintly realized the actual cruelties of existence. She said:

"It seems to me you children enjoy rather a happy life. Not every young girl enjoys so many jaunts to the city, and has so indulgent a father."

"I can thank myself for that!" Josephine informed her. "If I hadn't wheedled and pouted and flattered and lied, I'd be as ignorant and stupid as a squaw, for all papa cared!"

"But, Josie, what do you want? What do any of you want?"

"Heavens, mamma! Have you listened to Professor Von Barholme describing life in Vienna and Paris, and the great cities in the United States, and yet ask me that? In a few months Manfred goes to Heidelberg, Leatrice to Winnipeg, and I'm to be happy just romping on the lawn, or shooting rabbits with kids, like Greta? After all, I'm not a little nun like Sarah!"

Between the sisters—on Josie’s side, at least—there was so little understanding that Josephine mistook Sarah’s hardly acquired calm for stolid satisfaction. Oline mentioned this curious incompatibility of temperament to old Illiana one day, when she paid the old woman the long-established weekly visit.

“God bless us, Little Mother!” Illiana grinned, “you might better ask oil and water to mix than little Sarah and Josie to understand each other. Far be it from me to suggest it, but sometimes I wonder, do mothers know anything of their own children? Now, a grandmother—it is perhaps not so strange that she should be at sea in the matter.”

“But Greta is not a problem like Josephine, with her affectations, and ridiculous hunger for the crazy things she reads in books!” Oline burst out, knowing well that nothing was hidden from old Illiana Petrovna’s sharp eyes.

“You think not? Is it then not a problem to be poor, Little Mother, with a swan of a girl on your hands? A girl as full of fire as an Italian volcano, and already besieged by young men?”

“Young men?” Oline’s voice was a little shaky. She was suddenly seeing Josephine as she had stood that morning before the mirror, slim and dainty, with a shock of soft, shiny hair falling down white, dimpled shoulders, and, where the lacy little gown opened, a lovely little breast that rose and fell like a white flower on a stream to the tide of her youthful emotions. “Surely, Illiana, there’s nothing serious? These children? Why, we know every one since the cradle!” she finished foolishly.

“Casanova doubtless had his cradle, his colic, and his pacifier!” retorted the shrewd old Russian. “Greta’s a good girl, Little Mother. So are they all. But the fever of young blood is something neither pills nor piety will cure. Now that boy Manfred—God bless us! I wonder sometimes if I’m so old myself when I watch him with my granddaughter. Let me tell you, Little Mother, I welcome the day he sails for Europe!”

To which Oline could say nothing, despite an impulse of quite unusual sort towards the irrepressible old gossip. Poor Greta! If she really cared. With an odd contraction of the heart she realized for the first time that the lovely little derelict was now as old as she herself had been when Jaegar first met her on the grey crags of Sunholme. But this was America, where differences of station meant little. These were changing times, she told herself, taking heart from what so often terrified her. Oh, surely life was not merely a whirligig of useless, repeated agonies of heart? Surely young Greta, with her brilliance and courage, would wrest something better from

the world? For something better than the transplanting of old-world cruelties, they had come to this open-hearted country, where the wide charity and tolerance of God challenged one from the golden prairie's flowering breast, and the towering, primal forest. Thus her heart reasoned, protested, cried, and for answer seemed to see old Halvor smiling cryptically. Halvor Marcusson, whose forebears were knightly men, powerful and terrible, while yet the only sounds to disturb the quiet of these pleasant western lands were the clamours of savage people, feasting, fighting, beating their little drums, and moaning above the dead. For almost a thousand years a certain type of man had mated with a certain type of woman, passing on the fine flame of their accumulated riches of being, to end one day in a tall, beautiful, human creature called Manfred.

Oh, poor Greta! Poor, pretty, hot-hearted Greta! Oline's eyes misted suddenly, so surely she foresaw disaster, howsoever one reasoned against it.

Illiana Petrovna was deeply wise, despite the clutter of diverse theories strewn about her mind as a multiplicity of objects were strewn about her house. As she could always magically lay hands on anything she wanted of the material clutter, so she could also reach down, now and then, for a seemingly occult truth.

“Little Mother, there is a covenant with promise of which I sometimes think:

“‘The Lord shall confound the mighty with the wisdom of fools, and raise up the weak to be a witness unto His almighty power.’

“Old orders pass, Little Mother. Who are we to say how God shall make his new creatures!”

CHAPTER XI

IT was not long after this that John came home one evening in a highly related frame of mind. A number of men, considered influential in the district by reason of small businesses and more prosperous farms, had approached him to stand for parliament. Naturally he must give the matter serious thought, said he, almost purring with pleasure, caressing the ever-present watch-chain that decorated his generous paunch. Yes, naturally it was something to which he must give very serious thought, entailing as it did onerous duties, long absence from his already suffering business and his precious home life.

Oline, who knew quite well that this was the end he had had in mind for some years, smiled, and with wifely decorum, suggested that possibly Anton Holmquist would manage the Emporium not too badly, since he had served something like eighteen years apprenticeship under John's able guidance.

Well, it was true, he agreed. A young man had seldom been better trained, and since his marriage to Tillie, Anton had ceased showing those earlier lamentable signs of instability. There was something else disturbing John—something Von Barholme had laughingly suggested and Dr. Beaur seriously supported. They thought he should build a private sanatorium on the east quarter of his estate, on the pine-clad slope bordering on the lake. The professor had so obviously benefited from the climate he was sure others would fare similarly. Sanatoriums of all sorts were quite the fad with the well-to-do—not exactly sick people always, just tired, unstrung folk facing nervous breakdown, and needing quiet, good, plain food, and restful supervision.

Oline thought it sounded quite sensible, and Josephine, coming in at the moment on her way somewhere with Manfred, very pretty in a new party dress, struck quite the correct note. Stopping dead, her hands prayerfully clasped, blue eyes worshipfully adoring, she gasped:

“Papa, how marvellous you are! No wonder the people of the district look up to you, dearest. They know you're an angel, always planning beautiful things for others. Imagine! Who else would have given a thought to the sick? Certainly not Captain Marcusson!”

“My pet,” beamed John, “you look very pretty, making nice speeches to papa, but isn't that the same dress you had on last month to the Duponts' silver wedding?”

Josephine cast a single, long, impish look at her disapproving mother, and pouted sweetly.

“It may have been, dearest papa. It will do nicely, though to be sure it’s not half as smart as the dress Greta got for her birthday from Dr. Beur.”

John frowned. “It seems to me Miss Greta oversteps herself. A girl with her living to make should concentrate on something besides clothes! Come here, my sweet. Listen to papa. To-morrow you must have the dressmaker see to it that my little girl is better prepared for the next occasion. Who knows, it may be a political party for her old father!”

Oline broke in with ill-concealed vexation: “Josephine is quite well provided with clothes of all sorts, John. I am not in favour of encouraging vanity.”

“Madam, must I come to you for permission to give my children some small delight? I regret to say it, Oline, but I have often thought I discerned a singular lack of sympathy in your attitude towards dear Josie’s quite innocent little vagaries.”

Josephine hastily kissed her father. “Don’t worry, dearest, I’ll manage!” said she, dancing from the room in a cascade of ruffles.

Her mother rose angrily. “I only hope your blind partiality may be kindly rewarded. To me, Josephine seems much too occupied with attaining her own selfish desires. It has not occurred to you to notice what Sarah wears, or how long!”

He laughed genially. “What a ruffled little mother it is, to be sure!” he said, not unkindly. “If Sarah has eyes for anything besides mathematics and music, by all means get her what she wants. I am not aware, my dear, that neglect of my family is a fault of which I might be accused.”

It was hopeless! As hopeless to try to open John’s eyes to Josephine’s constant petty deceptions as to expect he should evince the slightest interest in Veder’s steady advancement.

The boy had taken several honours, and was in his last year now. It was amazingly beautiful to Oline that her shy, self-effacing son should be attracting the interested attention of his professors—that he should be a full-fledged civil engineer with a promising future such as he had silently dreamed of before him. John merely nodded politely when she read his letters, commenting, in a half-deprecatory vein, that it was interesting, very interesting indeed, and he trusted these high hopes were not altogether unfounded.

Once, at the Marcussons, Oline aired her vexation with almost comical vehemence. It was so maddening, she said, to stand by utterly helpless while

the children, like chips on a tossing stream, went gaily into she knew not what rapids! Indeed, that was the intolerable part of it, this never knowing or seeing to what ends or purposes all one's striving tended. Here they were, Isabella, Halvor, and herself, representing three distinct hereditary channels, none of them having lived a life of her own choosing, none of them having shirked duty, and what did it all amount to? Europe was seething with dangerous unrest. Only God knew what further terrors faced mankind. For what, then, was all the sacrifice of individual desires, if even the ancient countries, where subjection to duty and religious concept had long prevailed, found themselves incapable of promoting reasonable security for their patient peoples?

Returning to themselves, had they not expected miracles of liberty in America, in return for almost miracles of effort? Yet what was the result? Cities, rife with the worst greed and vices of Europe, sprang up overnight. The combined forces of science had waved a wand over the new world a thousand times more effective than all the miracles of scripture. Waste lands grew fertile, the wilderness was inhabited with strange people all bent on sudden wealth; magnificent buildings lined former ox trails, and the simple, home-hungry pioneer had given way to speculators, promoters, and outright exploiters of God-given resources!

Not for this had they come from lands in which the fibres of being were sunk as deep as the dim centuries. Not that the old follies and evils of civilization might flower in new, exotic forms and destroy the souls of their children! She had got to the point of despair when she wondered if Josephine even had a soul, or any perception of ethics whatever. The girl thought of nothing but pleasure—the universe began and ended in herself!

Halvor's dry, chuckling laugh brought instant relief. "But, my dear Oline, were you not just raving at the futilities of the centuries-long sacrifice of individual liberty and happiness? Perhaps our madcap rainbow chasers will fare less ignobly than we? The trouble with you, like most women, is lack of humour. Now I find it delightfully amusing to watch the youngsters defying all the bogies that terrified my girlhood. Manfred brings Leatrice a picture of Jagganath, a three-headed Hindu deity called 'Lord of the World' and 'Remover of Sin,' to prove to the poor child, who has a singular religious bent, that the Christian Trinity is evolved from some such primitive idol. Not satisfied, he must set her crying by trotting out at least a dozen World Saviours, all born of virgins, and said to have died for sinful humanity. Greta Holmquist, without the least embarrassment, affirms that women are fools to have babies if they don't want them. To which your daughter Josie quite calmly replies that Romantic Love is impossible

without freedom of the sexes! Oh, you needn't be so horrified! Unless memory fails me, you uttered a few curious statements yourself in the old days of your pious and plastic young womanhood!" Halvor trembled like a dry leaf in the soft gale of her irritating amusement.

"This brave talk means no more, and will come to as little as your poor spent storms, my dear," she went on, "I have had ample time for thought since coming here. After somewhat adjusting myself to a primitive existence, it struck me quite forcibly that only superficial changes occur in any of us, even under radical alterations of life, and sometimes actual suffering.

"It makes little difference to Nature whether we obey her dictates under the pious blanket of matrimony, or dance her jig and call it Romantic Love. I should not have cared to admit that twenty years ago, but age makes us philosophic, if not actually tolerant. With all their talk of emancipation, these poor silly girls are faced with exactly the same handicaps to equality with men as we were. Husbands, homes, babies, and the eternal trivialities of domestic life will for ever rise up to destroy a woman's individual liberty. I quite agree with Leatrice, negative though the attitude may seem, that, except in the Roman Catholic Church, no office exists to which a woman may whole-heartedly apply herself!"

Isabella's luminous smile had a quality of mischief in it. "Very well put, mother. I can't remember ever hearing of any husband offering to keep his wife's privacy safe while she wrote a sonnet or painted the moon. What is sneeringly referred to as Woman's slender contribution to the arts has all been done on the fly, as it were, between cradle and cook stove. What critic would reasonably urge a mere woman to neglect her husband's comfort for the assembly of immortals? Yet, when all's said and done, what would you really think if Leatrice were sincere in her romantic chatter about cloisters and convents?"

"I'd say she was a fool!" the old lady frankly admitted, chuckling. "I'd say anyone was a fool to give up a single day of Youth's delightful madness! Now, suppose we discuss something more in keeping with my decrepit years and dignity. What's this I hear of a sanatorium?"

Oline confessed that so far as she knew, nothing of a definite nature had been arrived at. John had only mentioned it a few days ago. Whereat she discovered that everyone else had heard of the venture long before, that blue prints of the building had arrived, and that both doctors were profoundly interested. Dr. Beur, who had twice left his practice for several months of study in the east, and, according to Illiana, gorged on journals, was thought more than capable of conducting the institution. Dr. Hartman would, of

course, be attached also, for, despite his years, he had a curious, almost hypnotic influence upon his patients which simply refused to admit their indulging in any despair. His crisp cheerfulness and courage did wonders in a sick room. Children, without exception, loved him.

The crowning news, however, was brought them when Leatrice and Manfred, flushed from a ride to town and their customary arguments, burst in, clamorous and hungry.

“Darling, I’m starved!” cried Manfred, squeezing his mother like a bear. “I could even eat one of Tillie Hiner Holmquist’s sausages! Which is nothing short of heroism after the way Leatrice has been riding me!”

Leatrice, a little above average in height, slim and well made, with very dark hair drawn smoothly back from an oval, olive-complexioned face, was a girl to be marked in any gathering. There was an irresistible quality of spirit about her, haunting and sweetly sad, yet she always seemed brightly cheerful. This undertone of sadness was vastly appealing, even to those who could never have analyzed its source or understood that a young mind, seriously groping for adequate expression, is essentially tragic. She looked now like a young Madonna cruelly mocked by one who owed her devotion.

“I did not ride you, Manfred. I merely warned you that some things are not quite honourable.”

“Mercy, not justice, I crave, fair priestess!” her brother jeered blithely, cutting himself a monstrous piece of chocolate cake. “Honestly, Leatrice, I marvel that your head doesn’t break under the strain you put on it, keeping tab of everyone’s dear little crimes! But say”—he addressed the company at large, grinning in adorable fashion—“can you imagine what a riot Greta Holmquist will be as a nurse? With a couple of red heads of her description decorating the wards, and once the news breaks out, the trains won’t hold the male invalids bound for Boyen Sanatorium!”

“There he goes, mamma!” Leatrice lamented. “Greta was always interested in medicine. She’s serious about being a nurse, and Manfred talks as though it were all a joke! As though all a girl thought of was finding ways and means of attracting men! It makes me sick!”

“Me too!” sighed Manfred. “I think it’s jolly rotten the way they chase us, in sickness or in health, till death do us part!”

Halvor chuckled. “Behave now! It will be difficult, but sometimes we must exercise superhuman control. So Miss Greta hopes to train in the new hospital? That will please Herr Beur. He’s always singing her praises for courage and resourcefulness. May I ask if a regular staff has been selected? I suppose someone with authority must train her.”

“There will be a matron, and two or three regular nurses, of course,” Leatrice interpolated. “The whole thing will be conducted under the supervision of the Medical Board. I suppose Greta will have to complete her training somewhere else to get a regular diploma. What really matters, grandma, is that Greta wants to be left in peace to study, and Manfred pesters her continually with his ridiculous attentions!”

To Oline, at least, the boy’s laughter sounded forced, and, despite herself, a feeling almost of pity swelled in her. He was such an amazingly vital creature, so utterly in love with the joy of being, it seemed wicked to thwart his happiness in any degree. It seemed as wilfully destructive as to blot out the sunlight, or to blast the source of a beautiful stream.

Halvor’s tinkling laughter sounded oddly on her ears.

“How fortunate for Miss Greta that Manfred must shortly leave her in peace, whatever his impertinent inclinations. If Miss Holmquist gets too upset, remind her that my grandson will shortly be leaving for Germany.”

“I mentioned that myself,” said Manfred, with a half-malicious glance at his sister. Only Oline saw the quick rush of blood to her face, the hard narrowing of her eyes, as she turned and silently left the room.

CHAPTER XII

BOYEN SANATORIUM sprang into being almost as magically as a castle in fairy lore. That John was eager to add this feature to his other achievements before stumping his constituency had something to do with it. But not that alone. The project had everyone's support, from the poorest fisherman, with his dollar contribution, to those distant political dignitaries only too anxious to retain their plums of office by currying public favour through such happy means as lending influence and very modest cheques to any such worthy undertaking. Even the weather was favourable. Never before, in this history of the district, had plasterers and lathers, stone masons and carpenters worked together in such perfect amity. On the second of August the building was officially opened, with a visiting mayor, four or five aldermen, a district attorney, and numerous medical men presiding, preaching and prophesying.

Oline, very shaky, feeling profoundly silly, cut a white ribbon draped across a small white ward, in future to be devoted to women's diseases, and in a very small voice dedicated the Boyen Sanatorium to the services of suffering humanity.

Josephine, attired in pale green chiffon that billowed and whispered, giving off lilac perfume wherever she whisked, glowed with delicious enjoyment.

For once, Greta's golden brilliance could not eclipse her. She was Josephine Boyen, and it was plainly to be seen that all those marvellous persons from the neighbouring towns and cities looked upon her father with respect. As well they might, for not every politician could afford to angle for votes with such magnificent bait as a privately donated hospital. (Only the public ward was entirely erected by subscription!) It was thrilling to have bearded doctors, and youths in swallow-tails murmur her father's praises in her ear as they danced. Oh, absolutely divine! Until, by miserable chance, she saw Manfred wheeling by with Greta in a tricky wispy, pinkish sort of dress that made her look like a bronze-headed angel floating on a sea of delicate sunset clouds. Greta was immensely irritating. Thank heaven she would soon be wearing stiff, pink cotton frocks, and be chained to an iron routine. But Manfred took her breath away. His evening clothes, she knew, were part of the new wardrobe ordered for his impending departure. People were frightfully formal in those circles where Manfred would move in Denmark and Germany. How handsome he was—really sinfully attractive!

Perhaps the same thought struck Isabella as his straight, supple body swept past, his inimitable smile flashing out at her, swiftly and illusively as light through a rift of green boughs. Quite unconsciously, she glanced towards Ephraim, and found his dark eyes fixed on her with a strangely pensive intensity. Whatever her expression, it called forth a spontaneous laugh. Drawing close, he tucked her arm through his, saying softly:

“Your thoughts are ripe to read, my dear. That young scamp will play havoc with girlish hearts, I fear!” His soft laughter was curiously moving, delightfully suggestive of precious intimacies; “I’m afraid I had not noticed until now how uncommonly good-looking he is!”

“You might have consulted your own mirror,” Isabella murmured gaily, “and hazarded a guess!”

Ephraim glanced at her with quick suspicion, as quickly smiling his relief at what her serenely happy face revealed. Yet he spoke almost sharply:

“There is something more than mere looks about the boy. A strong radiance, my dear, which is not at all Marcusson in origin.”

Because her heart warmed to his sincerity and she was still, after all these years, afraid to fall victim again to his tyrannical charms, she had recourse to mischievous evasion:

“Yes, your mother has told me the men of her family, the Barons Toste, were considered extremely dangerous—in warfare!” she finished, laughing.

“Quite so!” Ephraim laughed with her. “But I know one steadfast, stubborn little woman against whom all the dear barons would have been powerless. And her awful light burns fiercely in my son!”

In the meanwhile, Manfred fought a decidedly losing battle with Greta. They had stolen out from the crowded room into the impressive silence of the prairie night. The air, heavy with pungent scent of ripe summer growth, to which a little coolness off the lake added exhilarating effect, was delightfully refreshing after the hot indoors. Nevertheless, the enveloping darkness and sudden quiet into which they stepped, as to a world apart vastly remote from human affairs, put an instant end to the flippant insincerities with which these two so often regaled each other. Before them lay the open lake, its waters purple under dim starlight, its lonely shores banked at intervals with clusters of tall, thin pines, like emaciated priestesses communing with the night. Thin, wavering bars of palest yellow reflecting the light from the blazing windows of Boyen Sanatorium lay uneasily on the dark, deep breast of the lake. For no sensible reason, their ghostly brilliance brought the sting of tears to Greta’s golden eyes. Entirely disregarding the fragility of her new frock, she seated herself on one of several logs left from

the carpenters' labours, folded slender, capable hands round her knees, and with some impatience said:

“Do you ever think of anything serious, Manfred—really serious, like our reasons for being born at all, and how full the earth must be of mournful memories?”

Indeed, had she looked at him, standing so still and gazing down at her small self, so touchingly lovely in the indistinct light and surrounding sombreness, she might have caught a curiously grim expression on his habitually smiling face. For his thoughts, fixed though they were on nothing graver than the determination to break her defences, had a quality of fatalism which would utterly have surprised her. He laughed, almost soundlessly.

“Thoughts are uncomfortable cargo, Greta. Why clutter up one's hat with anything so troublesome? I'd much rather just know, and feel, and live. I'd rather just sit here, and have your loveliness go to my head like golden wine, than puzzle my brains with mournful speculations.”

“There you are! There you are! Oh, sometimes I could hate you! You have everything. You're rich, you can choose any field of endeavour that appeals to you—travel, steep yourself in learning, see everything the accumulated talent of the world has achieved, and all you want to do is sit around making foolish love to foolish girls!”

“Not foolish girls, Greta. Although I do like them pretty!” he grinned at her. “But look here, aren't you being a bit rough? Am I not going to sink myself in German culture so soon that the thought makes me shudder? Oh, Greta—surely you know how I feel! Hasn't it always been this way since we were kids?”

“We're still kids!” snapped the girl, edging to the far end of the log, although he had made no movement towards her. “All over the world, I suppose, you'll find this sort of thing going on—kids playing at love, and making fools of themselves! But if you have no sense, Manfred, thank heaven I have. I won't be made a fool of! Let me warn you, I'll not be the poor little girl back home who weeps her eyes out for the handsome gentleman above her station!”

“That's rather beastly, you know!” he rejoined, on a queer, husky note. “I wasn't aware that I had ever behaved to deserve that!”

“I'm sorry, Manfred, it isn't easy to say. That's why I'm making hash of it. We have been good pals, even if no one approved. Please let's not spoil it all now! You see, I'd like to keep that much,” she finished miserably.

That he did not take her into his arms then might have shown her how thoroughly he understood her moods. Even his soft, exultant laugh brought

fire on his head.

“You needn’t feel so smug! With less conceit, and some imagination, you’d understand what I mean. We’ve been kids together—fought, and cried, grown older, and gone right on—fighting, at any rate. We’ve gone to school together, rowed and fished, and shot poor little rabbits. We’ve even eaten green plums together, and got frightfully sick!” Greta’s voice was not exactly steady. “That’s what I’d like to keep, Manfred. That’s what I meant. For you might remember, I’ve no brothers and sisters—no other memories of home to keep!”

There was about her an air of bristling defiance more sad than amusing, for it so obviously shielded a threatening despair. This time the boy’s arms closed around her in a spontaneous, eager embrace. Because they were so young, and destined for each other, in spite of everything that was, or was to be, her soft little arms stole round his neck, and a cheek, fragrant and sweet as a flower, suddenly dewy with tears, pressed hard against his. A little sob, ineffably touching, caught on her lips.

“Darling! Darling!” whispered Manfred. “It’s useless to deny it! You’re mine! You have always been mine. Oh, Greta, you accuse me of never thinking seriously, when all the time I go round with my head full of you. You’re everywhere, in everything. All my plans are for you. You’re so much a part of me, Greta, I sometimes wonder if we haven’t shared a thousand worlds together before this life began!”

This sudden seriousness—for want of which she had berated him—now thoroughly alarmed her. Thrusting him from her, she pushed back the little bronze curls so happily disarranged, shook out her skirts, and jumped to her feet.

“I’m horribly ashamed, Manfred. It’s the atmosphere. This queer, brooding darkness does things to one!” she laughed nervously. “It’s utterly silly how I got thinking human happiness was something like those poor little streamers of reflected light—dancing there a moment or two on the frighteningly deep waters—that our individual joys were of as little importance and effect on the ocean of life. So, of course, when you began—oh, let’s forget it!”

His voice had now the harsher note of inflexible purpose so often marked in his father’s speech.

“Dead, I may forget! Greta, you stubborn little idiot, do you suppose I’d let you toss me away like a worm-eaten apple, just because you choose to dramatize my poor old ancestors?”

She was already walking away, swiftly and resolutely.

“What I think, or do not think, has no bearing on the subject. If you doubt it, suppose you ask your grandmother. She might remind you that something besides money comes to you through her with that inheritance from the last Baron of Toste On The Sea, She might tell you, too, how Illiana Petrovna used to sing in low-class Russian taverns. Your grandmother——”

“Damn my grandmother!” Manfred stemmed the flood. “I’m not asking you to love my grandmother!”

“No!” she turned on him fiercely, “you’re asking me an abominable thing. You’re asking me to ruin my only chance of a decent career! You’re asking me to damn myself by breaking your grandmother’s heart, and robbing your mother of the only real joy left to her—pride in her son! Well, even Illiana Petrovna’s granddaughter isn’t low enough for that!”

“Greta! Wait! You’ve got to listen!”

That she had neither wish nor inclination, taste nor time so to do she made definitely plain. Picking up her flimsy skirts, she went skimming over the black ground as lightly as a swift, white moth. To overtake her would not only be ludicrous, but prove disastrous, he knew. Greta lived up to her red hair, at times picturesquely and profitably, and always to the utter confusion of her adversaries. Despite his real annoyance and smouldering hurt, Manfred grinned, recalling several fiery rages, to which his choice arguments had been about as clarifying as smoke. With a shrug, he followed the flying moth at leisure. Let her run. He would catch her to-morrow—some fine to-morrow—and punish her properly.

Greta, by now in sight of the veranda that ran the length of the building, stayed her flight to a decorous, maidenly saunter. In charming friendliness, she called out to someone that the stars were never so lovely as on nights like this when they peeped out lazily, like bright eyes of children shaken from sleep.

Manfred had never known jealousy. Joyous and generous by nature, his whole existence so far had consisted of getting and giving whatever pleasures he fancied. As satisfied and sure of himself as any happy, splendid and healthy animal, it had not even occurred to him to consider defeat. He honestly believed his desires were no more to be questioned than the air he breathed. Now, as he watched a tall figure materialize on the veranda and spring towards Greta with abominable eagerness, an emotion as foreign as it was uncomfortable surged through him. Not anger merely: an actual physical shock compounded of wounded feelings, burning resentment, and something like fear. For a moment his hale young heart behaved very oddly,

balked in its sensible course like a frightened mule, then set up such a furious beating against his ribs he felt exactly as a hollow drum must feel, if such an abominable instrument might speak for itself and its maddening sounds. The feeling was so acute, the disastrous possibilities of the doubts it engendered so astonishing, he was suddenly empty of all thought save vast amazement at his former placid confidence and vain conceit. Great God! He had simply taken Greta for granted! Spoiled fool that he was!

Which honest admission notwithstanding, Manfred flew into a fine passion when the stranger, idiotically eulogizing the stars, familiarly tucked Greta's arm in his and whisked her off to the dance floor. A David's slingshot fitted with a deadly stone would have spelled infinite joy to Manfred just then. For he had recognized the odious rascal who dared coo into Greta's pink ear as the impertinent young interne she had said might come to the sanatorium to acquire valuable experience. "Valuable experience be damned!" Manfred spat at the mocking dark. "Fine experience he'll get with Greta there!" Now that he thought of it, he remembered the fellow had actually drooled when Dr. Hartman, in senile friendliness, had introduced Miss Holmquist as the young lady who would be his companion in distress. His companion!—God! What companionship! Night and day, in that beastly sanatorium, Greta would be exposed to the blandishments of that cockscomb! Each time she raised those golden eyes of hers to take an order, or even to read the clock, the flame of her beauty would draw him closer—closer. . . .

"My God!" whispered poor Manfred to himself. "I love her! I love her damnably. And I'm going away for four beastly years!"

When he had finally made up his mind to go in, he found his mother looking for him. She was very handsome to-night, and her quiet humour had a sparkling charm seldom matched before. There was a rare bond of sympathy between them, although at times she had seemed more partial to Leatrice's interests than his. Now, however, her radiant happiness only increased his feeling of dejection, despite a quick surge of pride in her splendid good looks.

"We were looking for you everywhere!" was her greeting, in the gayest tones. "Grandmother refuses to go to supper without you. It must be your dress suit, darling!" she laughed happily.

"Must we eat?" Manfred made a wry face. "It's divine outside. Come out for a little, please! I must talk to you."

The look she gave him was at once tender and stern. "It can wait, son. I saw you go out. Darling, don't glare so furiously!" She touched his arm

affectionately. "I'm only trying to be sensible. It would certainly confirm your grandmother's worst suspicions if I were to go out with you now!"

Because the mood oppressing him was entirely strange and utterly confusing, he failed to grasp the full significance of her speech—how unerringly she guessed the cause of his distress; that in her calm, judicious way she sought to help him. Yet the reference to his grandmother's suspicions struck him like a blow, giving point to his seething emotion, and outlet for the anger that burned in him.

"Mother! For heaven's sake! If grandmother, or anyone else, wants to nurse vile suspicions I can't stop it! Why, what have I done? What's there to be suspicious about? Is it so criminal to go out for air with a girl one has known all his life? Are you suggesting there's something wrong with Greta?" he finished belligerently.

"Manfred! Someone might hear! You don't have to defend yourself or poor Greta to me!"

He caught her arm in a grasp that made her wince. The expression on his young face struck a chill to her heart.

"Mother, please get this straight! I won't have Greta referred to slightly! Oh, my God! Why can't you see her as she is?"

Thoroughly alarmed, Isabella managed, with exquisite tact, to cover his strange behaviour by an outward show of merriment, getting him past the staring groups clustered near the door as quickly as possible. When they reached the stairs leading to the attractive dining-room on the floor above where a buffet supper was being served, she turned on him sharply.

"Manfred, if you really want to be taken seriously, stop behaving like a hurt baby! Surely I needn't remind you a gentleman keeps his feelings to himself. As for the rest, we can go into that when you've had sufficient time to analyze your feelings in clearer light. Quick! Not so gloomy! Here come grandma and Josephine."

Halvor Marcusson affected to see nothing unusual in her grandson's lowering expression and terse response. She chuckled amiably, asked for his arm and settled her small jewelled hand in the crook of it with proud satisfaction. He was worth looking at, this young man, with his strong, shapely body, arrogant set of head, and a face on which lightning changes of feeling flashed as in a mirror. Something mysterious from unplumbed depths smouldered dangerously in the widely set dark eyes. Glancing up at him slantwise, in the quick, appraising way she had, what she read in the stormy face made her suddenly grateful the last Baron Toste had chosen such a timely exit. When a young man had that look of the exasperated hunter on

his face it was high time to send him into fresh fields. Yes, she really was devoutly grateful that her brother had had the decency, following half a century's useless existence, to step out gracefully just in the nick of time to provide Manfred with the necessary antidote to the inherited Marcusson poisons, which, she saw by their symptoms were beginning to work their havoc in him now.

Her soft, tinkling laughter seemed to harmonize with the rustling of her black taffeta gown, with its exquisite cape of lace, brought from the Indies by the late Captain Marcusson as a peace offering at least fifty years ago.

"You're not very friendly, young man!" she said. "Here's Josephine waiting to have supper with us, although a dozen visiting swains tumbled over each other to beg her company. Yet you don't even tell her how nice she looks in that queer little dress!"

Manfred caught his mother's warning eye.

"Oh, Josie has a fair amount of imagination," he grinned. "And I dare say the visiting swains have supplied the rest!"

Josephine dropped her head in charmingly simulated shyness.

"How horrid you are, Manfred!" she murmured, keeping her tone sweetly liquid, despite the wrath she nursed against him. "One would think you had been stung by a wasp. You know, just as well as I do, why our families insist on this charming intimacy to-night!"

"Sure! Let the originals clown the David and Jonathan act. Why drag us into it? Drat the luck! Do we have to plough through that mob for someone's gooey cake?"

Halvor thought to improve matters. Giving him a sharp rap with the little ebony fan she always carried upon special occasions, she said:

"You're much too cross, my dear! Your mother and I will manage nicely. Run along, you two, and dance off the spleen!"

"But grandmother! You said——"

"Never mind what I said! Be off with you. Don't let me set eyes on you again until you're civil!" Then to Josephine, smilingly: "See what miracle music may effect in that savage breast. And don't be afraid to treat him rough!"

They returned to the dance floor in strained silence, Manfred fuming inwardly with helpless anger and thoroughly miserable. Everything seemed to have changed in some indefinable manner. His whole body was on edge, his thoughts a confusion of tangled resentments. His grandmother, whom he had always adored as some exquisite character out of fairy lore, he now

suspected of autocratic motives. Even his mother had something alien in her attitude of forced amiability. While here beside him walked yet another stranger in the once familiar Josephine of pig-tail and leap-frog days.

Almost against his will he noticed how, when she passed, masculine eyes brightened and necks craned audaciously. She was pretty—really pretty, in a blonde doll sort of way, cuddly and soft, with something warmly appealing in her deeply fringed blue eyes.

Oh, damn! What made him think of her that way? Why must her soft, yielding body, obediently sensitive to every slightest movement of the dance, remind him tormentingly of Greta's hardness, of her uncompromising individuality, and spiritual independence. For strangely enough, Josephine, with her shining yellow head on his shoulder, and the caressing honey of her scarcely distinguishable nonsense in his ears, made him see Greta with disquieting perception. She was flint and steel, and consuming fire! He was suddenly sick with the overwhelming knowledge of his dire need of her. It was as though he had contracted an incurable malady of mind, as well as of the senses, which only her presence might ever assuage. This horrible hunger had leaped up in him not an hour since, out there under the sleepy stars, yet seemed by now centuries old in torment!

Josephine, wiser by instinct than she knew, gave up a hopeless conversation and finished the waltz clinging as closely as many frilled petticoats and propriety permitted. Not till they were seated in a corner where artificial palms and rubber plants afforded some little privacy did she offer to break his curious mood. But then with smiling maliciousness and secret enjoyment she proceeded to break it thoroughly.

"Well, that makes three in succession!" said she, fanning herself with the dance card. "It looks like a crush, but a girl in Greta's position should watch her step."

"What in the mischief are you talking about?" He glanced at her irritably, caught the faintest vestige of a smile ere the dark-fringed lids hid her eyes and was healthily jarred back to normal masculine caution. The little devil! She was laughing at him—enjoying the fool he had made of himself. Guessing what ailed him and fanning the fire! Well, let her beware, then. . . .

From darkest gloom his radiant smile flashed on her so suddenly with a suggestion of intimate possibilities in the laughing eyes, she caught her breath, sharply reduced to proper submissive attention.

"Surely not that Greta stands in need of help? She strikes me as being an overly self-sufficient young lady quite equal to any situation."

Josephine would have given much to know what passed in his mind and how to represent her case in such manner as must destroy Greta's glamorous hold on him yet leave him without knowledge of her part in the destructive process. For Manfred was not alone in self-discovery and dismayed understanding. Josephine had watched his half-playful pursuit of Greta for many months with growing dismay which to-night had burst into open jealousy as she had watched them together, drifting through the dreamy measures of the Blue Danube waltz oblivious of all but their too obvious delight in each other. When they had disappeared into the night her reaction was such she thought for a moment everyone near her must observe her pallor and actually hear the angry clamour of her heart. To the young men imploring dances she had complied with curious lightness, an exhilarating gaiety of manner that left her high-strung, dizzy and secretly tormented by fears of having behaved idiotically and perhaps committed some indiscretion of speech. For what her replies had been to all their silly chatter she could not have said although it seemed to have pleased them. One thing she knew, all her little flirtations with Tony Prix, André Dupont and a score less determined young men were as foam to the river of her real emotion. She even blushed, to the immense delight of André, at the time her partner in the lancers, when she remembered her thousand affectations. How utterly silly Professor Von Barholme must have thought her, always straining after the image of the heroine of the latest book he lent her!

These things again flashed through her mind as Manfred's dark head bent towards hers and his voice vibrating with that inexplicable quality both sensuous and beautiful sent little ripples of fine flame through her flesh. In confusion she hastily said: "Oh, Manfred, I don't know what I meant. I'm so hot and tired. Our house was like an hotel with no end to be done. With papa being groomed for candidate it was to be expected those civic gentlemen should all descend on us. And on top of it mamma and I helped decorate the rooms for to-night. Honestly my feet were lead before the dance started!"

"And sore feet made you solicitous of Greta?"

"Manfred, I'm sorry if you took exception to what I said! Why don't we talk of something else? Your plans—when you leave. . . . Oh, Manfred, I shall miss you so," she concluded on a low, breathless note that caught in her throat like a half-stifled sob.

No normal young man could have failed to be moved by it. After Greta's curt dismissal it was undeniably gratifying to find a girl as pretty and much sought after as Josephine on the brink of tears at the thought of his departure. His smile, this time a mere lightning flash of genuine response, was singularly charming.

“That’s good of you, Josie. You know, I’ve been feeling lately as if everyone were violently set on getting rid of me!” He spoke lightly enough yet Josephine’s amorous young heart throbbed and when their glances met he was a little startled by the indubitable adoration he surprised in her yearning look.

“It’s nonsense of course,” he ran on hastily. “Veder cut up no such row when he left. You should be proud of him, Josie. He knew his own mind, which is more than I can say. Which doubtless explains the concern expressed over me. Grandmother thinks of me as some sort of ancestral jelly which must not—or perhaps could not—harden except in the ancient continental mould. Mother, I suspect, has misgivings I shall ‘set’ anywhere, and dad—well, dad knows his Marcussons! Yet even he looks at me furtively as though he surmised something had gone amiss when the fates were brewing my jolly little destiny. That’s why it seems good someone thinks of me in terms of plain humanity. For here’s the shameful truth, Josie, I suspect there will be times when I—when any of us gone from here where after all we’ve been very happy—must wish to go back and want to be remembered by the friends ‘back home’.”

“Don’t! Don’t! You’re spoiling my evening,” wailed Josephine. “As if this place weren’t bad enough before everyone worth while has left! Veder won’t ever come back to stay. He may even go to Australia on some engineering project when he’s through. Dr. Beur told mamma yesterday the professor showed no tubercular reaction now and would shortly be quite safe in returning to his laboratory. And you—you’ll not come back either, Manfred.”

“Yes, I will! I’ll come back much too soon to please my dear grandmother who secretly hopes I’ll fall in love with that mouldy manor house on the borders of Schleswig.”

Josephine now asked a question more to demonstrate an analytical turn of mind than sincere interest. The sort of question, she felt, that gave her an air of keen penetration and worldly judgment, and, as a matter of fact, had often claimed Von Barholme’s time and attention when he, poor man, was most desirous of sharing a few precious moments with her mother. “Manfred, why on earth is your grandmother so set on Heidelberg? I thought all patriotic Danes attended the University of Copenhagen.”

“Ah! So you haven’t divined the difference between a patriotic—which, I suppose, means a democratic—Dane and the curious creatures surviving from the dark ages before the limited Monarchy? My dear young lady, nothing would please grandmamma better than telling you with proper embellishments how a certain Frederick III, presumably influenced by the

powerful nobility, played very bad dominoes with Denmark's political history and instead of the block was offered absolute power by the common herd which was pretty fed up with the antics of the best people. That's where the Tostes came in. They weren't best people yet. Their escutcheons were all ungraven and their titles still undreamt. But they had stout hearts, hard heads, and (never breathe a word of it) prudent German blood. In fact the Tostes were one of the new aristocrats hastily created from foreign favourites to fill the blank left by the banished order in the year of our Lord 1665. Which, mark you (to quote grandmamma) is a milestone in Danish history, the birth of the Enevaeled—Absolute Monarchy to you—which ushered in a hundred and eighty-eight years of progress. By now you will possibly have guessed that the Tostes came naturally by a mild bias towards things Teutonic not infrequently including a thirst for beer and the glorious city of Heidelberg.”

“I'll inherit death if this keeps up!” thought Manfred who, at the precise moment, had the misfortune to hear a high, clear, boyish laugh which he knew only too well chiming out from the porch. So that confounded interne was airing his wit again for Greta. And she could laugh like that! She laughed as joyously, and unconcernedly as though she had no knowledge of his existence or the precious pain she caused him by her heartless behaviour.

“Come, Josie.” He caught her hands almost roughly. “Let's get out of here! I'm sick of this mob. It's marvellously quiet down on the lake shore.”

Josephine's eyes were blue stars. “Yes, yes. It's frightfully stuffy here,” she acquiesced eagerly, taking care to walk as close to him as possible while they passed the forlorn wallflowers amongst whom was poor Jennifer Dupont, freckled and gauche and secret idolater of Manfred. Her feeling of triumph increased when she saw the angry start he gave as they stepped out on the porch. Not so much the interne, who hung above Greta, felicitously, roused his ire as the silly behaviour of a stubby chap making spectacular business of tying her shoe-lace, obviously for the enjoyment of a beastly trio ranged like monkeys opposite. That Dr. Beur was there also no wise mitigated his outraged feelings. For that instant he hated her, felt her more insensible and callous than all the wantons of history.

He swept by, handing Josephine down the steps with exaggerated care. Dr. Beur called out to them cheerfully. To which Josephine responded in saccharine tones as victorious of implication as the purring of a cat over a mouse. And though Greta, for whose benefit the little business was enacted, affected neither to hear nor see, she missed nothing of the careful play that followed. Daintily picking her way Josie suddenly stumbled, swayed gracefully and as a matter of course was quickly supported by the arms she

coveted. The pretty, insinuating laughter floating over her airy shoulder as they vanished in the dusk reminded Greta of a malicious ghost whose history Illiana Petrovna loved to relate. The malicious ghost of a court lady who, while living, had fed her laughter like Tiberius, on the sufferings of others, and whom the Gods had for ever bound to a hell of exquisite mirth from which all mortals fled. In her quick, casual way she spun round on the doting interne. "Sorry, I've changed my mind about supper. I'm going in with good old Beaur. If I don't he'll forget to eat and I know he went without dinner. Now didn't you, Oscar?"

Oscar Beaur actually assumed a crestfallen apologetic mien. "Some things won't wait for a man's dinner. That particular little fellow was mighty anxious to arrive on schedule. Nice of him, too, considering I was dated for this pow-wow to-night."

"Oh, come on!" Greta swooped down on him like a tornado. "I shall get enough case history by and by. For pity's sake let's rustle up some good strong coffee!"

Meanwhile, down by the lake, where the silence was weighted with an incommunicable quality of accumulated wisdom old as life itself, Manfred stood moodily irresolute, dimly resentful of being there at all. Beside him, one hand against her beating heart, Josephine fought against panic. She must not lose him! The inarticulate cry was almost a prayer. The mere thought set up a trembling and a paralyzing chill of the very bones. To that extent her shallow nature permitted her impulse was sincere. Which sincerity put to rout for the moment all the little artifices her coquettish disposition dealt in for the enslaving of susceptible young male creatures. With Tony, or André her course was always clear. Now she was suddenly frightened, pitifully lost, and pathetic as a drenched kitten alone in a cold night.

From far dreams, dark and tumultuous, Manfred was swiftly recalled to himself by her almost audible shiver. "Poor kid, you're cold!" he was instantly all contrition. "I say, I'm sorry. I should not have kept you here _____"

"Oh, Manfred!" Her little hands went out appealing. She was so little! Her small oval face looked up at him under the shining aureole of hair, white gold in the pale starlight, and in her eyes was such crying need of imminent comfort he must have been stone not to respond. In his arms she was pliantly sweet, her slenderness and fragility and amazing softness an intoxicating anodyne for vexing thoughts and the disquiet senses. Her warm little kisses were an astonishing revelation. This was a very different Josie from the girl he had so often tormented, flirted with and gaily flung aside. The knowledge was not entirely welcome. No! He was mad. They were both mad. It was as

though the whole familiar world were suddenly extinguished in a flood of turgid waters, which terrible tide flung them about at will. For here was curious truth. Josephine kissed him, clung to him in self-abandon that sent waves of exquisite agony through his entire body, yet none of it he wanted. The terrifying flame burning in them, hungry to be fed and indifferent of its fuel, was none of their kindling! Yet they, as all others since life began, must stand responsible for whatsoever havoc and destruction its mad power encompassed.

With saving cynicism the thought flashed upon Manfred that here was queer musing for a Marcusson. Devilish queer a son of Ephraim's should count the cost of kisses and quarrel with amorous instincts! Laughing a bit shakily he eased the soft clinging arms from round his neck. "Josie, I'm an awful ass!" he tried to speak lightly and succeeded in sounding harsh.

Tears streamed to her eyes. "Manfred, if that's how you feel—if that's all it means to you—oh, what must you think of me!"

"That you're sweet, Josie. That excitement and music and all this foolish talk of partings went to your pretty head as it certainly went to mine. Why, what else could I possibly think?"

She was deathly pale now. "There *is* such a thing as *love*, Manfred," she asserted desperately and was instantly to regret it.

He laughed, and there was neither humour nor good will in the sound. "Snap out of it, Josie." His impatience was ill-concealed. "If I'm not mistaken that's your father on the veranda looking for you. Give me your hand, let's run!"

"But Manfred——" she wailed. "Oh, Manfred——"

"Listen—if it will make you any happier, perhaps I do love you." He told her, much as one tells a nagging infant the moon is really cheese. "Come on now, let's run, before they send a posse to look for us."

CHAPTER XIII

ILLIANA PETROVNA watched her granddaughter neatly packing the specified uniforms and aprons designed for hospital wear, and sighed gustily. "I still think it monstrous," said she, "a pretty girl to go messing about with diseases. God save us! I can't see why you couldn't hit on something pleasant."

"Such as what? Marrying a farmer and raising a flock of kids? Or renting myself to some bachelor to nursemaid his pigs?"

"If Tillie were not so mean with money—may the saints forsake her in her hour of need—your father might have listened to me and sent you to the city," grumbled Illiana, poking an inquisitive finger here and there in the meagre pile of Greta's wardrobe. "Even this nursing, now in a big city there are rich patients, men with much money and an eye for pretty faces——"

"Wolves, I thought you called them!" grinned the girl. "Monsters of iniquity fattening on the miseries of the poor. Grandmamma! You surely aren't dreaming I might ever save the sinful hide of a capitalist?"

"How the girl tries me! Was ever such an unfortunate as I? My son flings away ambition for a fat wench whose head is made of cheese and her heart a stony pretzel. All my sacred principles forsworn for nothing! For even my grandchild laughs in my face as she throws away happiness like an old shoe."

"What do you mean, throws away happiness?" Greta's golden eyes darkened suspiciously. "If you really have something to say grandmamma for goodness' sake be direct for once. I have no end of things to finish."

"Little rabbit, I know." The old woman's voice was suddenly wondrous soft. "I was only thinking how differently the strands of life are woven than we could wish or plan. In those early years of bitter resentment Mistress Boyen used to say that the spirit of this country was too much for our feeble hopes and vanities. Maybe. It has certainly changed us all. Tears have dried. The mirages of many haunting dreams have faded into pale memories that no longer burn. Mistress Isabella now walks freely in the village. For Leona Shultz has gone respectable with her cold eyes fixed on real estate instead of the captain's heart and pocketbook. Everything has changed, some for better and some—ah, well!"

"Your love of gossiping at least is unchanged," Greta put in, somewhat tartly. "Grandmamma dear, let that be your rod and staff in affliction."

“This is not gossip.” The softly tuned recital went on. “Human history, little rabbit, that’s what it is. In such few, ineffectual words may be told the long histories of suffering women; of their years of heartbreak, and those rivers of tears that once it seemed nothing could dry. No, it is not gossip to pause and remember for a little beside one’s dead. For these are my dead: your father—to you he is only a grumpy little man very sharp with cheating customers—while I still think of him as the boy who was once on fire to accomplish wonders. And your poor little mother! . . . Your packing away stiff white aprons made me think of her. Oh, may the holy Saints forgive me if I wronged her.”

To Greta’s bewildering dismay Illiana Petrovna now covered her face to hide the bitter tears she could not restrain. Quickly the girl sprang to her, holding her close. “Grandmamma! What is it? Have I hurt you? Talk all you like dearest, tell me anything, anything! Oh, grandmamma forgive me—I’m a hard little beast but I do love you. You’re all I have to love! That’s why I want to work, grandmamma, to take care of you, to give you something pleasant to enjoy. You have slaved too long for nothing!”

Illiana Petrovna’s old head lifted in swift pride and her still fine black eyes were prophetic in expression. “No! No! Don’t interrupt me, little rabbit, for I begin to understand at last: to see something in all this sad weaving of human woe and misery. You are the finished pattern of those seemingly lost endeavours. Your father’s aborted ambition, your pretty mother’s childish dreams of magnificence, my restless fire, all these have congealed in you—grown fine and strong in you. In us they were as a restless wind carrying fragrance from far unattainable places. You will accomplish your fine dreams girl—Greta. We only dreamed them.”

“Grandmamma, was my dear little mother very lovely? Am I like her, just a little?”

From across the years Illiana Petrovna saw again the fluttering indecisive Gerty with her mincing manners, ash-blond hair and milk and cream complexion. How marvellous the magic of God who moulds from such soft stuff a thing of steel and fire like Greta! The memorable vision of poor Gerty packing away her impractical garments, beaded bodices, innumerable bustles, camisoles of sheer lace and dozens of petticoats each of which resembled a pagoda of frills, was a curious contrast to that of her determined daughter briskly putting away plain hospital garments. But there was a more haunting, inestimably touching memory. A pale waxen Gerty lying fearsomely still under the cold prairie stars, her small ineffectual hands crossed above a quiet breast, all pain and terror done.

“Yes, she was lovely, child,” said the old woman absently patting the fine bronze head nestled on her breast. “She died at sun up on the vast silent plain. I still remember how stricken we were, out there in the empty wilderness, to hear your first little wailing cry. With your dead mother lying there, her long golden hair spilling over the green grass like threads of dying flame. God rest her soul. At sundown all was ready, the little grave, the rough coffin, and the rude cross made from white poplar boughs sweet with young sap. And not one of us who saw her in her pretty wedding dress, filmy as a cloud, but felt she was a dream bride returning to her own country. . . . Ah, yes, she was very, very lovely, little granddaughter.”

Greta did not weep. Her finely moulded face had a rapt expression, her eyes an infinite depth of tenderness, her passionate reply revealed an equal depth of understanding. “Oh, I am glad she went like that! My sweet little mother, before her pretty dreams crashed and her hopes turned ashes. But papa—poor papa, I begin to understand and pity him now.”

Illiana Petrovna nodded, wiping the moisture from her face on a checkered gingham apron. “I used to say that myself when I heard poor mistress weeping in the night and thought to myself how more than likely the same sad sounds disturbed the quiet of ‘Glen Haven’. Little rabbit, because of these many miseries (perhaps some self-inflicted) that I have witnessed in a long life-time I ask again, are you quite sure no action of yours stands in the way of happiness?”

The girl instantly darted away, retreating into her shell of mocking defiance. “Oh, I knew it! Someone has been telling tales again. What is it this time? Have I been disgracing the neighbourhood by shooting quail out of season with André Dupont—poor fool, all he does is bleat about Josephine! Or is it the poor interne for whom the town trembles?”

“God save us, how you carry on! Have I no eyes in the head? Am I suddenly so senile I no longer read rightly the oldest desire in the earth when it burns in a man’s eyes for all to see?”

“Then I must be blind,” said Greta banging down the lid of her bright new trunk, hardly bigger than a valise. “I have seen nothing of the sort, nor have I the faintest idea of what you are talking old dear.”

“To lie successfully, my rabbit requires practice in subtleties. You were not born in Russia where the gift is native to the air.”

The sharp clap-clatter of hoofs that ended abruptly before the house and the gay sound of an eager voice calling: “Hi there! May I come in?” startled them both, inordinately. Greta paled perceptibly, which brought a gleam of triumph to Illiana Petrovna’s keen old eyes. It was she who hurried to the

door. "God bless my soul, young man, you ride fast this morning," was her greeting to Manfred. "And what a grand beast!" she added, eyeing with swift admiration the coal black mare, prancing on proud little hoofs in the restive fashion of nervous thoroughbreds.

"Father's new mount," Manfred explained briefly. "Just shipped her from Minneapolis. Beautiful lady, isn't she?" he queried smiling and bent forward to caress the sleek tossing head. To which the mare objected violently, reared on her haunches and but for sharp handling would have bolted. Manfred's gentle voice almost crooned to the trembling beast: "There! There! poor lady! Some brute has been abusive. Steady now, there's a good girl. . . . Poor brute, she's frightfully nervous after the cramped journey." He apologized, quite as though these antics were somehow his moral responsibility, and smiled, fit to steal one's heart away, for Greta had come to the door, drawn by the noise.

She was not, however, a vision to make most men smile. Her expression was anything but friendly. As a matter of fact she glared. "Well! If you are through showing off that wicked creature and have any business here, come in before your neck is broken," said she.

"Some folks really do improve with age," he replied in an aside to Illiana. "I am glad to find you so cheerful, Greta, my lamb. I was going to ask you to go riding with me, you know," he said, hopping the steps and entering the topsy-turvy house as eagerly as though no golden fury glowered at him.

"You expect me to go riding, do you?" she sniffed. "Pillion behind that devil, I suppose? Or am I to be led in chains behind the conqueror?"

"Nothing would please me better," he admitted, choosing a seat beside the little trunk, to which he pointed with what Illiana imagined was actual contempt. "That, I suppose is the trousseau for our Sister of Mercy? Ah, don't trouble to answer, sacrifice stands out all over it! I *quite* understand. That's why I'd like to show you the beauties of the poor despised world before you entomb yourself with materia medica. Good lord! See what comes over me just to sit near the dashed coffin! What do you say Greta? You can ride my Tobin, I'll come for you at four."

"At four I shall be in hospital," Greta told him. "You wouldn't know of course, but we already have ten patients in the tubercular ward and five" here she grinned despite herself, "assorted diseases and two prospective mothers."

"Good Heavens!" Manfred turned to Illiana. "She sounds like a medical journal. Inhuman! We shall all be classified shortly by ailments, bone

structures, skull formations. Why, I can feel the seeds of something-or-other sprouting in me this minute under the gimlet eyes of Nurse Greta.”

“Oh, Manfred, you fool!” She had to laugh and felt tremendously better for it, a little heady and ashamed of her silly temper. “Honestly, I could slay you in high glee. You know I love riding especially when the woods are turning and everything has a warm look of rich fulfilment——” She stopped and bit her lips. “But it’s impossible, Manfred. I really must be on time the first day, you know.”

“What about this morning; you’re all packed. It won’t take over ten minutes to get Tobin; he’s in the livery barn in town.”

“No, no, no. I won’t go anywhere. Grandmamma, for pity’s sake, make tea—make something so we’ll get rid of this pest.”

Illiana intercepted a desperate look from Manfred. “Now, little rabbit, is it civilized to behave so to an old friend who wants only to give you pleasure before the hard work begins? What’s the harm of a little walk, for instance? A little stroll in the lane behind the house, let us say, while the kettle boils and the little biscuits you made toast on the fire?”

“Yes, what’s wrong with that?” he echoed, elated. “Walking is much recommended in journals on diet and health.”

With both of them so insistent she had no choice but go, although the thought of being alone with him now actually frightened her. They did not walk far. A few paces from the house a small clump of white birches afforded seclusion.

“Greta, I’m not going to waste words. What I said at the dance I meant. I want you to promise when you’re through with this fever for work and I come back from college that you’ll marry me.”

She was very still, all the colour drained from her face, yet an almost unbearable feeling of joy ran through her veins. Oh, she knew he meant what he said! She knew it as well as she knew every adorable line in his dear, dark face, every shade of feeling in his curiously moving voice. She had no need to look at him for something keener than sight interpreted his lovely love for her. Manfred Marcusson, for whose first amorous escapade the gossips waited, avid to transfer to his straight young shoulders the mantle of his father’s infidelities—Manfred stood there still as herself, clean as herself, and asked her, his only love, to marry him!

“Dear God, pity me,” she prayed silently. “Oh, pity me that I must kill this lovely thing!”

“Manfred,” she began with difficulty, “I can’t find the right words—we’ve been such good friends—but that’s all.”

For a little it seemed he believed her. His silence was so utterly devastating, as though all at once she swung alone out in mid-space in eternal darkness. As though, in fact, the world no longer held the miracle of his being, of his darling mulishness and maddening self-confidence! How more than beautiful his laughter sounded when it broke the frightening interlude. Thrice beautiful, although it made her feel a fool and set her temper boiling.

“You’re an atrocious liar, Greta. In fact, the only truth about you is your amazing loveliness. Just now you look like a particularly dangerous Goddess with lightning in her eye and thunder on her classic brow. But it’s not at all a terrifying show, for under it all the austere lady hides an almost human heart. Greta, you lovely liar, you know you love me.”

“And what if I do?” she came back at him angrily. “Perhaps I’m the sort who love easily, by the dozens! Can I marry them all? Must I marry anyone? Has it never dawned on you that a girl might want to do something better with her life than throw it away on a man! Times have changed for women. Leona in her crude way proved that.”

Whether from the deliberate cruelty of her words, or the reference to a woman whose existence he had bitterly resented despite an outward show of cheerful indifference, he now went ghastly white and his words flew at her like pointed barbs. “What other girls do is nothing to me! How they throw themselves away or mummify themselves in foul careers is aside from the point. I want you—I made up my mind to that when I was only six and you slapped my face because I kissed you—your crazy arguments can’t shake a thing inevitable as that!”

“My crazy argument is quite as determined and infinitely more sensible,” she flung back, tearing to bits the leaves she had plucked from the tree she leaned against. “Try using common sense in place of sentiment, Manfred. I’m not like Leatrice or Josie or even Nellie Prix, girls with prosperous parents. I’ve got my way to make in the world. Grandmamma’s been pretty grand keeping me this long. Can’t you see it’s up to me to make some small return?”

“But what’s so awfully wrong with marrying me, Greta?” he returned to the attack with endearing bewilderment. “Can’t I be trusted to treat your grandmother decently—and not to beat you more than you deserve?”

“Manfred, I tried hard to avoid this horrible wrangle. Now it’s too late to avoid what otherwise need never have been said. Even if I wanted to marry you—which I don’t! your family would never permit it. Think of it! Manfred Marcusson, great grandson of Sir Eric Marcusson, Knight, and the

Lady Ingeborde Boer, the future Baron of Toste and God knows what else, married to Greta Holmquist, gutter-brat!”

“My God, if I thought you meant all that I’d kill you! How can I help it that my ancestors robbed with sufficient skill to earn a title from a damned rascal of a king! From what I gather Sir Eric’s morals were such even my father might blush to own them. Greta, you darn fool, don’t you know it’s my mother, my good upright middle-class mother, has kept me from going to the devil like all those blasted Knights of the Marcusson breed?”

“I told you before it was your mother I thought of. Your mother would suffer silly agonies blaming her common instincts for cropping out in you! And I’m thinking of your grandmother too. She’s fine, she’s splendid. When you look at her you seem to feel behind her the impress of hundreds of ages of human striving. Those knights and barons weren’t all rascals and thieves and even those that were represented an advance in human sagacity. I’ve thought out these things because I do love you, Manfred. Because I love you terribly and never, never, under any circumstances would think of marrying you.”

“Greta! Greta! I wonder if you realize how terrible that sounds——”

“Truth is generally terrible,” she checked him, frightened lest she weaken by reason of the boyish hurt in his eyes. “And it’s final,” she added, and like a terrified bird fled back to the house.

Illiana Petrovna hovering over a neatly-set table took one look at the tragic figure which, almost fainting, supported itself against the door. Then she opened her old arms, wordlessly. Even when the sounds of a horse being hastily mounted and furiously ridden away smote on both their hearts like actual blows, no word was spoken. Illiana Petrovna was accustomed to grief. Patiently she waited for this storm of agonizing tears to pass. Then, as to a child in gentle suasion, she said: “Little dear one, high hearts find many and strange solaces but an old woman needs her tea.”

That desolate tea-drinking was destined to assume the malicious magnitude of a dark rite in Greta’s eyes. For Manfred, sent away in anger on his nervous, high-strung mare, was thrown and seriously injured while she (ah, horrible thought!) drank tea and told herself how like to the finest Baronesses of Toste her self-sacrifice had been!

CHAPTER XIV

FOR one thing she was profoundly grateful. She learned of the accident before going to the hospital. Old Dr. Hartman mercifully chanced to be idling along home behind his fat horse, enjoying a pipe and innumerable cheerful reminiscences, when the frantic animal tore by riderless. Some paces up the road lay the inert body of Manfred. His head, by happy chance, had barely missed a nest of rocks left by the road-menders. For that the old man gave fervent thanks when he reached the quiet form. Some bones were broken. With fervent gratitude he reflected upon the fortunate circumstance of his having borrowed the Boyen buckboard for an errand to a thriftless family of French half-breeds he kept supplied with garden produce, collected in lieu of outstanding fees from slightly more provident patients. With strength astonishing in one so old he managed to ease the unconscious young man into the back of the vehicle, using the empty vegetable sacks as a pillow for the beautiful head. Once at the hospital, however, he acknowledged himself undone, more than glad to surrender to another this patient whose entire life he had followed with the keen interest a lonely man so often fixes on a boy he could have wished for a son. Almost grimly he thanked God for Oscar Beaur's passion for bones. Bones! Bones! How often in the past he had wearied him with his obsession for the marvels of the human frame. The strength as well as the beauty of the human animal depended on the symmetry and perfect functioning of the delicate mechanism of the bones. . . .

And now, as he once had told Oscar to seek equilibrium and peace under the eternal stars that long gone night (was it really twenty years ago) when Marie's broken body had called for his ablest ministry, so to-day Oscar kindly bade him be gone. With quiet forcefulness sent him away to walk off nerves! For he was not to worry! He was to bundle off and forget this splendid human creature whose little, sprawling form he had slapped into vigorous life only a few hours after poor Marie's tiny daughter was born. Ah, he was old, old—done for. Shaking like a withered leaf and glad enough to go.

The sight of his ashen grey face brought a cry from Illiana Petrovna. "You are ill, man-dear! God save us, you're greyer than a ghost."

He shook his head, duly grateful of the chair Greta leapt to fetch him. "No, no. I'm well enough—just old."

Greta's eyes dilated, she was suddenly and mysteriously afraid. As from a distance she heard herself cry, "Something terrible has happened!" And instantly knew what the terrible thing must be. "Manfred! That wild mare has killed him! O my God! It's all my fault. I—I sent him away! I sent him to death with my beastly temper."

"No, child, no. Not death. He was thrown, yes, seriously injured, I'm afraid, but, thank God, he's alive."

She swayed a little, as a strong young tree bends under the impact of a terrible wind. Then straightening quickly, her face assumed a resolute, almost grim expression. "I must know the truth. Grandmamma, send someone with my things as soon as possible. Dr. Beaur was going to take them over. I must go to the hospital at once."

There she found small consolation. The new matron was assisting Dr. Beaur in the tiny operating-room. Nurse Anderson, little older than herself and less versed in human emotions, responded to Greta's strained inquiry with careless bluntness. "Yes, doctor and matron were on a case, young man cracked up, probably internal injuries. Swell job anyway for a bone specialist." Alone in the corridor on her way to the small back wing where she was to share a little cell of a room with this heartless creature, Greta felt suddenly sick. A swell case! Her Manfred with his grace of physical perfection, laughing buoyancy and mental alertness, a case! The thing was monstrous, a sacrilege. From such an inhuman attitude, may God preserve her. And suddenly she seemed to hear Manfred laughing at her in his wonderfully musical voice, because her silly talk was all of bones and blood counts and fascinating cases!

"Oh, God," she breathed passionately, beating her little breast with fierce, hard fists. "Pity my foolishness. I understand now the miracle of life. Its awful majesty before your face who gave it. Help them in there! Guide Oscar's hands—guide all the hands that try to heal precious human bodies!"

This one outburst over, Greta went about her dull chores capably and quietly. Nurse Anderson thought her extremely promising material, tractable, and seemingly not startled and a little insulted as so many beginners were when faced with the most disagreeable but highly necessary services of a sick room. It was a little astonishing in a girl so extremely good-looking, she thought, and issued orders accordingly. As though she herself were a patriarch in years and experience condescending to direct the blundering efforts of a novice and not a rather timid newly graduated nurse.

To Greta anything was welcome which shortened the eternity of waiting. A thousand times her eyes consulted the clock in silent, helpless fury. Time

stood still, it seemed! An hour could not be so long! Once she caught a glimpse of Matron Kelly hurrying out from that little room, but nothing was to be gleaned from her professional face. How long would it go on, she wondered, and fought the crazy impulse to rush up and storm that frightening door. And then all at once Dr. Beaur was beside her. Dear, kind Oscar with his florid German face smiling at her as she fumbled with a tray of iced orange juice for a queer old woman suffering from jaundice. She could not have guessed how tragic she appeared in her desperate fortitude. All she knew was that Oscar quietly shut the door of the spruce little dietetics kitchen and with wondrous understanding let her cry on his medicated breast.

“It is not so good, a shock like that on our first day,” he said, kindly patting her shoulder. “The young man—he does very well. Yes. Now we feel better, so?”

She gave him quite a turn in replying by suddenly throwing her arms round his neck and kissing him fervently. “Blessed old thing! There was never anyone so good.” She told him in a voice a little funny even to herself. “I’ll behave now, I promise.” And she dashed away with the orange juice, leaving him standing there a queer look on his tired face. Well, he was ageing he supposed. No doubt he seemed ancient as the hills to the strangely fervid generation he had watched grow up from infancy. What had happened to his own youth? Had he lost it in the swirling river when he saved the fairy form of Fräulein Hauffman from drowning all those ages and ages ago? Or had it quietly died in him that awful night when he waited under the dark trees of “Glen Haven” while a woman he might have loved but for the irony of fate, suffered bravely to give life to the boy whose broken body he just had mended?

Oscar Beaur discovered a pot of hot coffee (trust Greta to think of that!) and poured himself a draught. Well, after all, he had not lived in vain. To-day a thousand lonely strivings and countless struggles against his baser self were amply justified. To-day, by God’s grace, it had been given him to know he might say in his soul to Isabella: Your son who was as dead lives because of me! For so high an office a man must have clean hands and a clean heart. It was good to have lived after all. . . .

A little later Greta was undergoing a cross-examination by the matron. Dr. Beaur had given her to understand she might expect unusual qualification in the new probationer for he had been painstakingly teaching her for years. Now she doubted it a little. The girl seemed inattentive, although her answers were rational enough. Despite a faultless manner her strained attitude of listening for outside sounds was decidedly annoying and

suggested nerves. Which was true. For Greta had caught the sound of carriage wheels and knew the Marcussons were arriving. Oh, surely if they were to see him she might be granted one small glimpse! Under the pressure of her intense feeling her senses seemed to spin like a top. Nothing very real or of any importance, but the terrible craving for concrete assurance of Manfred's life. Matron, tapping the desk sharply, saved her from committing some stupid folly.

“Well—you understand what I am saying, I suppose?”

“Large fomentations to the chest and spine, continue until relieved. In case Mrs. Duer has another attack of asthma,” sing-songed Greta. “Purely nervous affection, occurring in individuals who have distension of the air cells, due to some great pressure in expiratory effort. Bronchitis most common cause.”

“Right! Now get a bit of air. We needn't cover everything in a day.” Matron dismissed her not unkindly and in her crisp, energetic fashion hurried out to intercept the dazed visitors. Greta sat still, shivering. Would she ever be as brightly encouraging as that, she wondered, as she listened with stunned fascination to Miss Kelly quietly assuring the Marcussons all was safe and well. Certainly Mrs. Marcusson might see her son, shortly. Alone, of course, and only for a moment. Naturally nothing must disturb his sleep. Oh, yes! He was sleeping beautifully.

Tears, no power of pitiful pride might control sprang to Greta's eyes and quite unheeded ploughed down her pale face. Even when Leatrice entered the neatly appointed and highly sanitary waiting-room leading her grandmother by the arm, she made no effort to check them. Leatrice gave a start as though such display of extreme concern in anyone outside the family was a little improper. Then she smiled. The grandmother apparently did not even see her.

She walked as one in a dream, her features fixed in a curious mould absolutely expressionless, except for the dark, sunken eyes burning with fierce light. Her step was light and sure. That Leatrice made a felicitous point of guiding her to a seat, stupidly clinging to her arm as though the Halvors of this world needed any such support, she merely tolerated. As she had oft times and many tolerated other foolish offences against her personal dignity because it was perpetrated in the name of charity. Stiffly erect, with hands still as blown leaves, she prepared to wait whatever the Dark Weaver chose to decree.

Strange patterns he wove with human destinies! Little and old she sat now like some ancient idol before whose face shadowy beings unroll the

scroll of time. For sixty years without abatement the fine flame of the Tostes had burned in her. To her alone of the vanishing breed the ancient Manor House, and the dim-coloured moors over which fleets of waterfowl wheeled like drifting leaves, had ever seemed a sacred shrine hallowed with the bones of her ancestors. To her brother, the late baron, it had merely represented a troublesome charge, to which the Capital, with its modern conveniences and infinite variety of pleasures, was vastly preferable. While her husband, the long-deceased Captain Marcusson, had actually shuddered whenever she even hinted of a faint nostalgia for its replete isolation. And because once, in her misery, when his first affair engaged him, she had braved public censure and fled to the brown moors and thick sheltering walls of Toste he had forbidden any further reference to the Manor thence onward. But her heart had remembered! And once again—once only—she had stolen back, taking her young son with her. Hoping against hope his eager mind might find anchor there. But Ephraim had promptly threatened to run away to the gipsies unless she went home.

Home! What home had her heart ever known but Toste with its ghosts and its graves of the past? Yet here she was once more constrained to wait again fearfully apprehensive though in passive silence while the Master of the Show decided upon the fate of her last fair hope. In Manfred the long generations lived again. In Manfred the torch of her glorious forebears burned brightly once more, and through him the House of her father might again be honoured of men. . . .

This, and a thousand other diamond clear images, reborn from the mist of years, flashed with lightning rapidity through her mind as she sat there. To her granddaughter she seemed stunned. "Poor grandmamma," Leatrice whispered to Greta, "she's been like that ever since Tony brought us word. We're so afraid of a stroke."

"You need not be!" The stiff little figure spoke with scornful emphasis. "And bear in mind I am far from deaf. Now leave me, and take that girl away with you. If you see your father, kindly send him to me."

Out in the corridor they found Ephraim Marcusson nervously pacing to and fro, waiting for Isabella to emerge from the dimness of the queer-smelling little room that held their son. For the first time he showed signs of age, a literal breaking up of vital forces that left its strain in face and form. There was something so touching in the droop of his erstwhile arrogant shoulders that Greta found herself full of pity in spite of the deep-rooted prejudice against him.

Strangest of men! His shameless philandering, callous disregard of public opinion and the accepted social virtues, was familiar history yet she

saw him now as with new eyes. A proud, passionate man, of the calibre which takes fire from some illusive, often doomed, cause and spends itself freely, yet is restive under rule and totally incapable of veneration for lack of the small fidelities little fearsome souls practise for their own salvation. She would have liked to speak to him companionably, as ships passing in storm hail each other enhearteningly. For she understood now that if some called him loveless it was because they had not, as she, surprised him in an hour of stark misery.

The faint sound of a cautiously opened door drew every eye and quickened a myriad apprehensions. But Isabella, who emerged softly, turned towards them quickly and the sight of her face caused Greta's heart to miss a beat—never before had she seen an actual light radiate from the human countenance. And the glory of it was all for Ephraim to whom she came straight as an arrow to its mark. Serenely radiant she sped to him that he might share the fine glow of her gratitude. For her son had escaped death by a miracle. In the knowledge of which high mercy she walked as one who, after fearful desolation, scales the green hills with God.

“He will live,” she said, her voice like a chiming silver bell. “He will live, dear Ephraim. Now let us go to your mother.”

Leatrice began to cry. “You see?” she sobbed on a rising note half defiant, half beseeching. “She's always that way. Wonderful past understanding in any crisis—my lovely, lovely mother!”

Something clicked in Greta's retentive memory. A fragmentary conversation overheard, long ago, between her grandmother and Oscar Beur, which at the time had puzzled her greatly with its reference to Leatrice's troublesome ancestry. Now she recoiled as from a mortal blow, before the realization of its incredible significance. Leatrice, sobbing out her pride in Isabella, whose charity and fortitude inspired passionate devotion, had unwittingly claimed for her soul's enrichment a source with which she had no physical bond. What a ghastly joke! For Greta knew the moody Leatrice well enough to foresee how utterly demoralizing the truth would be.

What then were the actual merits of so-called truth, she wondered, striving for sensible composure and control of her spinning senses. Could anything which lent power and beauty of being to consciousness be construed as a lie by whatever God wove the awful splendour of human destiny? By what marks might one know the relative goodness of any human concept? Well, she for one would take for her measure human happiness. No power of persuasion should ever drag from her this bitter truth.

With an air of calmness she was far from feeling, Greta went to the sobbing girl. "Let's go outside, Leatrice. It is always easier to get a grip on oneself in the open."

"But mayn't they let me see Manfred?"

"No. They will let no one else see him. You may believe me. Come, dear, your mother will appreciate a cheerful attitude after so much strain."

"Yes, oh, yes! I'll behave myself now, Greta. I love her so! I wish I might spend the rest of my life keeping sorrow from her."

Greta managed a rather feeble laugh. "Poor Leatrice, you are cracked up, aren't you?" she said as the door closed upon them. "But we're not in the Middle Ages, you know, when females dedicated themselves to impossible ambitions and rather silly behaviour. Come along, this way. There's a bit of garden started at the back of the building—Mrs. Boyen's idea, and there's a brand new baby out there. He looks like one of Raphael's little angels—perhaps because no one knows who or where his father is!"

Nothing could have been better calculated to shake Leatrice out of her tearful mood. She stiffened, stared at Greta with eyes suddenly hard and condemning. "How can you jest about such things. I suppose"—she hesitated, picking at her throat-band as though it choked her—"I suppose it's that awful Julia's baby. And everyone thought her so shy, sitting out dances with the wallflowers."

Greta was skipping ahead on light feet. In the shelter of a small clump of willows stood a little cot. Greta removed the netting and lifted the little wide-awake baby in mothering arms. "See, his eyes are like the skies he watches so patiently, poor little man." She smiled across the downy head at disapproving Leatrice. "He hardly ever cries. Do you, little fellow? No, of course you don't," she assured the wriggling baby whose groping fingers had fastened in her hair. "Perhaps he knows it's useless. . . . Julia died, Leatrice. I thought you knew."

"No. I hadn't even heard about the baby—being born, I mean," Leatrice replied in a voice that to Greta seemed charged with puritanical disfavour. That she was right, Leatrice's following explanation amply proved. "You see I've made a point of refusing to listen to gossip. It's cheapening to self and injurious to others. Besides I've been reading a course in church history and haven't been to town for weeks."

Greta compromised with maternal instinct and modern hygiene by kissing the baby's soft little back. Church history. Good heavens! What a dusty, dismal, dry-bones approach to human service, thought she, tucking the babe back in his lonely crib. With a thousand changes taking place in the

district representing as many avenues of activity, both physical and mental, Leatrice sought direction in obsolete books and backed her sense of righteousness by Isabella's virtue. Was ever a more ironic pleasantry perpetrated by the humorous divinities that shape human ends?

But now she could laugh. "Well, as grandmother might say: 'pudding to one and poison to another!' I'm afraid the dear dead saints would seem dull to me after a day with plain every-day sinners."

Leatrice, quite recovered, turned to go. "You wouldn't understand. No one here does, not even mother. It's a call. I want to serve God as the holy men and women of old served him. In the world, yet not of it. I saw it more clearly to-day when this thing happened to Manfred. I should have been prepared to pray for him—I should have been consecrated to godliness so that I might have known how to comfort mother."

"Don't let it worry you too much," Greta advised dryly. "Dr. Beaur wasn't exactly a Job's comforter on this job. I don't know anything about prayer, but isn't it written somewhere that the perpetual prayer of a righteous man is the works of his hands?"

"Oh, there comes papa looking for me," Leatrice spoke with relief. "You've been awfully kind, Greta. I hope you'll get on just famously. You'll see us every day, of course, while Manfred is here."

Captain Marcusson waited politely for these felicitous inanities to end. Then in his quick, regal manner he approached the little crib and said to Greta, "That I presume is the child of the unfortunate young woman Dr. Beaur was speaking to us about? I understand no one has come forward to claim the child."

"Julia came here from an orphan asylum in Winnipeg to work on the farm. The notice of her death brought no inquiries. I suppose she had no relatives even aware of her existence," Greta explained somewhat stiffly. Because she had always been a little afraid of Manfred's father. Afraid that she might like him, if the spell of his personal charm were to fall upon her, when she wished instead to dislike him for the shame he had caused his son.

"He is a fine baby," she concluded, flushing. "Anyone might well be proud of him."

Ephraim smiled at her and queer things happened to her heart. "We shall see," he nodded. "Your grandmother knows everyone hereabout and, if I remember rightly, dotes on a mission. Ask her for me to find a home for this baby. I shall place a thousand dollars in trust for its maintenance."

Leatrice lost colour and her eyes were wild, and the cry she emitted was as startling to Ephraim as it was distressing to Greta, who understood the

twisted psychology of her thoughts.

Ruefully he shrugged, "My dear girl, hurry round to the carriage and if possible behave like a normal human being. For I assure you your flattering suspicion is quite unfounded."

"Even so!" Leatrice flung at him wildly. "No one will believe it. If you pay for that baby's keep, how can you expect anyone should? Papa, please—for all our sakes, don't do it."

"You will kindly do as I bid." He spoke with remarkable patience. "If I see fit to discharge a debt of gratitude to a some-while malicious fate in this fashion that, my dear Leatrice, need not concern you."

The look she gave him might well have wounded a less sensitive heart. His brooding eyes encountered Greta's so warmly golden, and the thought struck him forcibly that here stood a remarkable girl. A girl beautiful in the finely sculptured classic fashion, with depth and fire and firmness of purpose written in every line of face and form. And this rare creature was actually regarding him with sympathetic belief!

"We shall start with the thousand," he smiled at her with charming intimacy. "If the little fellow justifies all your fine praise we may add a bit later. The cost of babies, as of everything else, is rising, I understand. And now I, also, wish you every success, Miss Holmquist."

"Captain Marcusson," she detained him shyly, "let me thank you—oh, just heaps! In poor Julia's stead. It's a beautiful, brave thing to do!"

CHAPTER XV

THE long day was done. In the hospital a deep quiet reigned. The matron and Nurse Anderson had retired to the pleasant room they shared facing out on the back garden. A thin, grim-visaged mortal inaptly named Angelica ruled in their stead. Greta, now reduced to a quivering, jumpy bundle of nerves, fought against the beneficent impulse of tears. A fine nurse she'd make at this rate! Shivering and shaking and wanting to burst into weeping at the least provocation! Once or twice she had caught Nurse Anderson eyeing her through narrowed lids as if she suspected the uttermost folly in this latest handmaid to science. Fortunately the matron was much too occupied to take serious notice of her. Matron was completely absorbed in the difficult details incidental to the establishment of routine and system in her toy hospital—for it must seem like that, she supposed, to a woman trained in a great London Institution, and later head nurse in a Canadian hospital of high repute.

Dr. Beaur she had not seen except at a distance since that blessed moment in the tiny upstairs kitchen where the nurses prepared special dishes for patients and by matron's permission might boil tea for themselves after a grind. Greta was thankful the dreary responsibility of night duty was not in her humble province. For ever since the dusk had descended upon the house the deep silence, in which the suffering household sat as a small frail bark on an overcast sea, seemed to have tongues for a thousand ominous murmurings; to have eyes that pierced to the furthest crannies of mind, and ears keyed to hear the faintest cries of the heart. In this pregnant quiet the hurrying footsteps of Nurse Angelica softly shod and rubber-heeled, seemed to beat and echo in Greta's head. And when old Mrs. Duer, whose ailment was only slight but temper choleric, rang her bell with impatient clatter the thin, tinkling sound made her start up in nervous fear.

She must get a grip on herself! She was to roll bandages in the morning, to give a friction bath and a salt glow to the elderly dyspeptics with rheumatic fever, who had the honour to be the first patients in the white-enamelled public ward. Dr. Beaur had assured the matron she might be trusted to do it efficiently and well—that indeed she might safely be charged with more serious assistance, for he could testify to her able help in a hundred emergencies. How good he was! How ambitious for her ultimate success. Yet she sat here quaking like a coward. Afraid to sleep lest while she slept the nameless thing she feared might come to pass.

With renewed agony of longing the thought broke into whispered words at last: "If I might only see him an instant! See for myself if I dare believe what they say. I should come out of this frightful fog—think clearly. Sleep sensibly!" She told herself and suddenly grew tense, listening. That was Oscar's step in the upper hall. . . . Why had she not heard him go up? How long had he been there? Oh, heavens, how slowly he came away. . . . Frantic with fear, she slipped out into the narrow hall. When his big, loose-jointed figure came past the bend, which obscured the back stairs, she had to clutch the door sill to keep from falling so unnerving was the reaction of her infinite relief to see him smiling. Her obvious misery roused instant concern. "Well, what have we here?" He tried to sound jovial. "Eleven o'clock and my little nursling not in bed? Is that the way to set about accomplishing fame and fortune?"

Her feeble wisp of an answering smile went to his heart. "I'm washed up, dear old thing," she attempted the customary flippancy. "From head to heel I'm in a rotten funk. Oscar——" she stopped, fighting for clarity and composure and not succeeding very well. For the driving force of her emotions produced a pitiful tremor which she instantly suppressed at such cost he thought she would faint. And her humble, beseeching, almost inaudible appeal was ineffably touching. "If only I might see him a moment—not to go in! Just stand in the door—I'd not make a sound. You know that, Oscar. No matter *what* I'd see—I shouldn't make a sound."

"Gott! such foolishness for nothing, my nursling." He tucked her hand under his and started toward the little kitchen. "Why didn't you tell old Oscar? You make yourself sick for a little thing like that! But come, now we drink a little hot water and brandy before we go to stand in the door."

Which she did, very gratefully and keeping very still, clinging to Oscar's big, warm, capable hand while her eyes worshipped the strangely quiet figure in the narrow white cot within. Manfred slept peacefully. His face, extremely pale under the heavy fine black hair had an aspect of tender melancholy more beautiful than sad and profoundly moving. Like the beautiful faces of the dead in whom all dreams are at rest. She caught her breath on a sob. Oh, he was so still! So frighteningly still she needed Oscar's grave compassionate smile to keep the heart from failing in her breast.

Oscar closed the door softly. "Now we sleep—yes? You have seen that all is well, eh? So now we sleep satisfied old Oscar knows his business?"

But she could not speak as yet. Not until they reached her little room again. Then, faintly: "He seemed so awfully still! So frighteningly quiet," she whispered.

“So? You object to the healing quiet! You would have him tossing about, upsetting all my fine work, I suppose? Well, for that you shall take this tablet, and I promise you after counting twenty sheep you, too, will be still. Himmel yes, frighteningly quiet or I spank you!”

CHAPTER XVI

THE next few days were inordinately trying to Greta. Her efforts to appear merely politely interested in “that handsome boy in No. 3” (to whom Nurse Anderson referred, she thought, with tedious enthusiasm) was an actual physical strain. It helped, of course, to know he was making a remarkable recovery. But Anderson had an exasperating way of remarking: “Oh, naturally one so healthy might be expected to respond to Dr. Beaur’s expert treatment, still, in a toss-up like that one can never tell the extent of internal injuries.”

“Yes, he does seem a bit scrambled!” Angelica growled in grim retort one morning as she went off duty. Anderson’s beaming bedside smile evidently irked her intensely.

“Well!” The exclamation fell with the force of an icicle dislodged from a tower. And Nurse Anderson’s glance followed her sister in grace with chilling disapproval. To Greta it was slow torture to listen to their professional clashes. For it was tantamount to that. Nurse Angelica threw water on Nurse Anderson’s optimism because she suspected the younger woman of instability of temperament. That they came to verbal jousts over Manfred was incidental and irrelevant to the real issue. Their contests were purely professional, never indulged except off duty, and to them Manfred’s fractured leg, dislocated shoulder and several caved-in ribs were merely the highly interesting evidences of nature’s remarkable powers to survive battering shocks; nevertheless for her their respective wagers as to how soon this, or that, bone might knit, the nervous organism readjust itself, and the *case* in general return to normal, were almost unbearable and seemed savagely inhuman.

Then there were the endless inquiries after his health which she so often was relegated to answer. For the matron, accustomed to sensible brevity, lost patience with these bucolic dunces whose curiosity extended to the amount of night air he breathed and the quality of the broth fed him. She was overworked, too, what with three new maternity cases and a diabetic individual whose constant fear of death was an abominable nuisance. They were all worked to death. How on earth had the district managed before, Greta wondered? Had all these ailing mortals hidden their pains in backwoods solitude, and only now flocked out for healing in response to John Boyen’s advertising in the new Maple Bluffs *Courier*? Oscar laughed at her heartily. Then just what did she suppose had worn out a half-dozen

nags and at least two stout springless buggies in his service? Sickness, accidents, births and deaths these had always been present in the growing district as a source of tribulation. But now, the difference was these homely burdens were being made to glorify and support Herr Boyen's political aspirations. Or, to quote the *Maple Bluffs Courier*, whose editor wisely bore in mind the buttering of his bread: "Boyen Sanatorium was a noble gesture from the founder and father of Maple Bluffs, etc." After which it would have seemed little short of heresy not to sprout a few ailments now and again.

The Marcusson family behaved with the circumspection to be expected. Halvor rustled in and out of her grandson's presence with the prompt dispatch of a court lady paying visits of strict duty timed to royal routine. Ephraim often no more than glanced in speaking cheerfully a word or two of irrelevant nonsense. Isabella shed her quiet joy as unobtrusively as moonlight. Leatrice behaved rather less well. Her queer conception of spiritual values inclined to the belief that jocularly was monstrously out of place in a sick room. She would have gloried in the vision of herself stealing to Manfred's bedside, clothed in sombre black with silver crucifix swaying from her girdle, a lighted candle in hand and words of courage for a penitent sinner on her grave lips. As it was, she tried praying aloud, the tiniest prayer of thankfulness for his deliverance from violent unshrived death, and got for her pious pains a curt dismissal from horse-faced Angelica.

Leatrice stormed about it to Greta. Why Manfred was evidently touched! He had shown every indication of awakening conscience and that wicked nurse had to interfere! "Nurse Angelica has thirty years experience in watching the sick," Greta responded icily and to Leatrice's amazement left her to make her way alone to the door.

Yet even this paled into insignificance before the advent of Josephine, on the first day visitors, other than the immediate family, were admitted. Greta was watching the desk in matron's absence (there was a breach birth going on in the maternity room on the top floor) and every now and then she thought she heard an unusual stir over her head and wondered if these noises had any significance for the other patients. Then the door opened, almost without assistance, so it seemed, to fall back unctuously before the radiant creature who swept through, laden with flowers and delicately suggestive of some delightful festival. "What a get up!" thought Greta disrespectfully, not even smiling in response to the graceful nod, and birdlike wave a tiny lace-gloved hand bestowed on her beneficently. Josephine never missed it. She tripped forward in a mincing fashion, obviously somewhat recently acquired and not as yet quite perfected. She was dressed in a new white, marquisette gown displayed over a pale yellow silk slip. The combination was admirably

suiting to her creamy complexion and ash-blond hair. With this latest story-book tripping, and her long-cultivated cherubic gaze, she might easily pass for the sort of angel doddering old men, with subconscious memories of mislaid naughtiness, possibly dream of in moments of extreme piety.

Her manner was sweetly condescending. "I'm so pleased you're here, Greta. It's so embarrassing having strangers spy out one's true feelings. And of course one cannot hide everything! I suppose these *are* the visiting hours?"

"Very nearly." Greta was laconic. "Won't you sit down—or will something wrinkle?" she interposed wickedly. "You'll have to wait for Nurse Anderson. She's with him now—alcohol rub, I shouldn't wonder."

"Oh? Dear me—isn't it frightful?" Josephine perched on a chair, the flowers gingerly clasped to a bosom whose insertions and laces must not be marred. What it was she thought frightful, Greta neither cared nor troubled, to guess. Possibly the vision of a young lady vigorously massaging a male anatomy clashed unbearably with the Victorian role she was at the moment portraying. A delicate sigh raised pinpricks of impatience on Greta's skin. The effect was identical with a cat's sudden bristling. She was angry in advance and glared at the dainty sigher with baleful eyes, made thrice expressive by the black circles of fatigue that underlined them.

Josephine repeated the exasperating sound: "Dear Manfred! We were so terribly shocked. I was playing at the time the news came—Rubinstein's Melody in F—and if it hadn't been for papa watching me so closely I'm sure I should have fainted. Dear papa is a little medieval in his attitude. If he only could *see* how love springs *unwonted* in the breast! Oh, what these nights of suspense have meant! This morning I weighed myself and, as I suspected, found I had lost a pound. You can see for yourself, how bad my colour is. Even mamma remarked on my pallor, and dear papa said I quite reminded him of the Lily Maid of Astolat—sweet of him, don't you think?"

"Very!" Greta glanced at the clock and up the corridor with impatience. Drat that Anderson! Why didn't she come and flick this buzzing butterfly away? "Appropriate too, considering your secret affliction," she added maliciously, and knew the cynicism was utterly lost on the modern Elaine. "The whole getup is entirely becoming—sleepless sorrow, pale asphodel cheeks and that ariel dress. All you've got to worry about is Manfred mistaking you for a Victorian order of angel, likely to flit through the roof under rude masculine scrutiny."

"I'm glad you like it," Josephine beamed. "It must be tiresome for the sick to see only uniforms all day. One gets so dull I imagine. And this is not

an interesting season.” She paused, as though to let this highly conjectural remark sink in. “I mean,” she continued sweetly, “that this time of year isn’t the *best*. Although, of course, winter would be worse here where one simply can’t buy a flower and no one even thinks of installing a hothouse. I must suggest that to papa. A sick room isn’t really a sick room without flowers, do you think? Of course not! Why, the first thing I said to mamma after we knew about Manfred was how glad we should be it was still summer with heaps and heaps of garden flowers available.”

“Quite a provision of fate!” Greta suggested. “Well, here comes Anderson at last. Hope you won’t be disappointed in the patient—we haven’t had time for trimmings.”

Two years earlier Josephine might have giggled, gleefully responsive to the ludicrous. Now she replied with sweet seriousness wholly bereft of humour. “Oh, I quite understand. As papa said to the Mayor of Winnipeg, an institution such as this requires time and a great deal of money to perfect. But I feel so proud darling papa had courage to make the start——”

“Nurse Anderson, this is Miss Boyen,” Greta interrupted callously. “*The* Miss Boyen, of course—to see Mr. Marcusson.”

Josephine tripped away in a discreet frou-frou of petticoats, delicately scented with lavender, with a suggestion of lilac perfume added for good measure. The sunlight falling from an upper hall window turned to white gold, soft as sea spume, the silky mass of her hair. There was no denying it, Josephine Boyen had all those charms man had died to defend and committed unspeakable crimes to possess. “Oh, damn everything!” muttered Greta, and consulted the clock once more. In an hour she was free to go home for the evening, her first relief since arriving in this madhouse of real and imagined pain.

Illiana Petrovna welcomed her granddaughter with characteristic effusion, clasping her fast in a gusty burst of warm affection. “My little rabbit! My spotted lamb, what a wilderness is life without you! God bless my sinful soul, even the samovar refuses to work!” was her complex greeting, apostrophied with resounding smacks of kisses. “But can you believe it, Herr Boyen has raised your papa’s pay ten dollars a month and only doubled his duties?”

“Goodness! Now I know the world’s gone mad,” laughed Greta, disentangling herself. “Grandmamma, dearest, I’m dying for some honest to goodness tea!”

“Ha! dying it is by the look of you,” Illiana Petrovna frowned. “I shall tell Herr Beaur it can’t go on, he must fire you. My little chicken, your eyes

are holes in your head. You haven't slept—you lie in bed inventing mischief for yourself. For what? Because a hot-headed boy rides off on a wild mare and cracks his collar bone!"

"The tea, grandmamma, the tea!"

"Yes, yes. But am I a witch to boil water by a wave of the hand? Someone must put sense in your head. If the work is too hard for you, Greta, come away. Even your papa was a little troubled about the long hours and all those queer diseases. And can you believe it, Tillie came to see me yesterday, bringing some cottage cheese gone a little sour, and said to me when she left: 'Illiana Petrovna, I think our Greta might do better with dressmaking in the city.'"

"Dressmaking? Me?" Greta was too dumbfounded for grammatical niceties. "What a damn-fool idea! Me, dressmaking for snooty little minxes and their insufferable mammas? I'd steal first!"

"God bless us, what a dither. Who suggested it, my little rabbit? For a bright child you are sometimes very blind. How one gets to the city, does it matter? Dressmaker, drummer, or dead herring, it's all the same—you get there."

"Well, I don't want to get to the city. Not now, at any rate. Not till I've finished at the hospital and can earn my living decently with dignity," the girl informed her with weary patience, having said it all a thousand times before.

"That makes everything right, I suppose? Hollows in the cheeks and rings under the eyes? For dignity a girl should kill herself and no one say a word."

"Grandmamma, have you found a home for Julia's baby?" Greta changed the subject abruptly.

Illiana Petrovna cut a seed cake into sizable parts. Her face assumed a slyly knowing expression. "It is queer how crowded houses are when it comes to asking shelter for a baby. Now a cat—a good mouser, let us say—has little trouble, and a dog to nip the tails of cows is a welcome addition. A baby, be he sound as Adam's rib and brighter than a king's goblet, finds every cranny full and doors locked and bolted."

"Do you mean to say no one in the whole district will take the poor little creature?"

"God bless us, give me time! How should a rheumatic old woman cover the whole district except on a broomstick? I was coming to the strangest part. When those I had banked on failed me your stepmamma Tillie came forward with tears in her eyes."

“Oh, grandma! That’s your plot to get some of the money for me, and I won’t have it. Why, Captain Marcusson would think me a despicable penny-grabbing monster trying to exploit a helpless little baby!”

“The little one will be better off in an orphan asylum, where everything is poisonous system and inhuman rectitude? You want him to grow up meek and hypocritical, full of suppressed hatred against God and man? Little rabbit, have sense. Tillie isn’t the brightest, but after all she’s a woman. Her tears were real enough. ‘Illiana,’ said she, ‘I’ve always secretly wanted a baby. (Praise God she was barren!) I’m getting an old woman now. I would be good to him, Illiana Petrovna. Ja, even without the money I could love him, so pretty he looks in the little crib under the hospital tree!’ Poor ninny, to hear her was to think babies grew under trees and this one dropped there for her comfort in old age. As for the captain, I have already told him. He thinks it a fine arrangement, my little fuss-pot.”

“Nevertheless, I don’t like it. Tillie will be kind, but for ever gossiping. With the baby in town no one will ever forget Captain Marcusson paid out this money.”

“Eat another biscuit. Tut! You don’t know the Tillies of this world. Once they own it a five-legged pig is precious enough for battle. No one will breathe a word against Tillie’s baby—to say nothing of the man who gives good money for its support. Now tell me, little dear, is grandmamma really so mischievous as you think?”

“Worse, worse.” Greta grinned a bit ruefully. “You’ll swap wings in heaven and ruin the morale of the archangels. Darling, you’re beastly, but I love you. I want to see you in silks and satins riding about in these new contraptions one hears of that sputter and spit and roar through the streets like demons.”

Illiana Petrovna’s sharp old eyes grew warm and moist. “My blessed lamb, such dreams for the old grandmother—ha! to roar through the streets like a rushing wind, what joy for old bones!” Whereat they both laughed heartily, drank more tea and fell to talking in sensible vein.

So many events had transpired in this mad week. Mrs. Boyen had paid her customary visit, bringing a letter and a new picture of Veder. Illiana Petrovna had it to show her. Veder had broadened, filled out to rugged proportions. His serious face smiled at them companionably. A nice young man. He would graduate next summer and already had a tentative offer from a Construction Company in Australia. Oline was proud but frightened as well. Australia had an ominous sound. It suggested head hunters, fevers and plagues. Yet Veder wrote of it with the passionate enthusiasm of a pilgrim

sighting the promised land. He was not even certain of coming home before he left. Which Oline despairingly attributed to John's stiff-necked obstinacy in retaining an icy indifference all these years.

Perhaps he might change now that politics had taught him the immense importance of a broadly beneficent pose. The fatted calf slain for a recalcitrant son might swell his prospective votes. Poor Oline, she had other news as well. Professor Von Barholme had been called to a chair in some famous university. Illiana Petrovna gathered he was leaving in the spring—at Easter probably. And Josephine worried her mother. What with her boundless passion for clothes and sentimental posturings she was at her wits' end as to how to deal with the girl.

To which Greta grunted, significantly, and banged at a foolish moth with vicious precision. Illiana continued her narrative, keenly observant of the darkening expression of her grandchild's face, wisely ignoring its origin. Young Sarah aspired to be a music teacher, and John, who doubtless believed so plain a daughter had little to hope from the matrimonial market, was seriously debating sending her to Holy Cross Convent in Winnipeg, where the sisters were famed for meticulous instruction and unflagging devotion. Certainly the Lutheran pastor's wife, who had been teaching her so far, had little more to contribute. Isabella Marcusson, still an agreeable pianist and keen lover of music, thought Sarah had genuine ability, if not actual musical genius. If Sarah went to Holy Cross Convent she might have Leatrice for room-mate. It would be good for both of them. Sarah's patience and naturally sunny nature could not help but benefit Leatrice, whose moods were inexplicably sombre at times, or again inordinately elated. On the other hand, Sarah might pattern herself with equal benefit after Leatrice's singularly easy grace of manner. Leatrice had never been gauche. In her darkest tantrums she wore the dignity of a tragic queen whose imaginary sorrows one felt constrained to respect. Sarah, from the cradle under the shadow and dominance of Josephine, on the other hand, seemed always to be apologizing for her very existence.

All this poured from Illiana Petrovna's tireless tongue with colourful fluency, in varying shades of tones, and interjections of illuminating expletives all heightened by emphatic gestures. When she, momentarily, ran out of breath, Greta inserted the required word of amazement, commendation or doubt. They differed on much, but agreed in their repeated wonderment over the visible fact that the districts of Maple Bluffs and Little River had changed more in the last three years than in the entire decade theretofore. Yes, the town alone was proof of that, Illiana resumed her chronicling with zest. Now take the newspaper, for instance. It was only a

rag fit for swatting flies, but a paper none the less. The editor was a young man and his office, over the feed store, was hardly bigger than a settler's hencoop and the actual printing was done in Winnipeg, yet it was a fine beginning. Yes, indeed, a paper which reported one's doings small and great was certainly a sign of development even if it was launched for no better purpose than John Boyen's political support. So, too, the hospital with its elegant name and terrifying departments, smelling oddly, and resembling a morgue with its gleamy alabaster walls. But there was this annoying aspect to the hospital. It set the little Tzar for ever on a pedestal quite as though the burden of it were not bound to fall upon the district and the province which already had promised a sizable grant towards its maintenance. Clever John! His few thousands were safely enough invested in that building.

Queer the way public feeling changed. Once it was the jovial captain had their regard. Now he got no praise for his ventures. Yet such as they were, he bore their brunt alone and just as many people were benefited. Take, for instance, the hotel he was building. A fine thing of brick and stone fit to house the rich relatives of patients flocking from distant parts to enjoy the bally-hooded benefits of the balsamed breezes and idyllic quiet of Boyen Sanatorium. Who would praise him for that? Or dig into the stocking to help furnish the kitchens, linen room, laundry and dining hall? And yet would not merchants greatly benefit by the transient trade, girls find employment and the whole town bristle with importance when they pointed out for visitors such a hotel?

"Well, I for one am all agog over the hotel, grandmamma. I think it's good. So does matron. For she seems convinced the sanatorium will prove immensely successful. Especially the T.B. section which, she says, will have to be greatly enlarged in a few years. And of course patients confined to the hospital for long periods of time will have relatives and friends coming to see them, who must be housed somewhere. I can't imagine a wealthy mamma or self-made plutocrat papa weltering in Peter Hiner's Stopping-Place!"

Old Dr. Hartman coming home from a profitless call on a patient whose multiple ailments rivalled the afflictions of Job, interrupted local history. Greta leaped at him, straightened a tie whose knot was under one ear, roundly scolding him in daughterly shrewishness for killing himself to no better purpose. "Ugh! You impossible old man. The smells of Katrina's hovel cling to your coat. Oh, you can't fool me, Herr Doctor, I know them all; sauerkraut and blood sausage and sunflower seeds dried behind a boiling stove! All the perfumes of Araby won't wash *that* away, let me tell you!"

Dr. Hartman had his tea. His docility in submitting to various ministrations of comfort was truly astonishing. Greta began to eye him with suspicion, and Illiana Petrovna assumed an expression which seemed to say: Ha! now something happens—and bad too.

“Herr Doctor, you have eaten a stale sausage—maybe sour bread?”

“No, no. Your estimation of my endurance is flattering, Illiana, but unfounded. I ate nothing but a small leek which I admit was bad for me. But look here”—he fumbled for a bundle of papers in a bulging coat pocket and held them aloft—“from Germany. Good Cousin Maria, who still remembers the black sheep on occasion, never sent more disturbing news. The army, it parades, it stamps above the bones of the quiet dead! The noise resounds through every hut and hamlet and a million fears plague every breast. The glitter of helmets and gleam of braid blind the good calm eyes of the peasant. Their ears are turned from the skylark’s song to the speeches of Bismarck’s spiritual sons—damnable Imperialists full of greed for power! A nation that once knew God worships trade expansion and loves no better music than the soul-destroying roar of factories and foundries and mills. And in defence of this unspeakable idolatry every young heart is made to feel it must gladly perish!”

Illiana Petrovna’s intelligent old face was alight with ancient fires. “Ah—once again the poor will bleed!” she wagged her greying head. “Always in Russia when the true grievances of the people got out of hand some fathead of the Imperial Army began crying for patriots to put down the imaginary foreign foe. If the trouble was small, to be sure, a band of Nihilists or foolish young students with heretical leanings were sometimes made to suffice; if the trouble was big the Jew was patriotically slaughtered. To kill something—that is indispensable to any people who devoutly believe the Eternal gave commands to a father to sacrifice his son—whose terrible God must be fed human victims like the holy crocodiles of the Nile.”

Dr. Hartman nodded. “Nothing is more curious than man’s paradoxical religions and their indisputable relationship to war. Under the lash of the despotic church of the Middle Ages otherwise sane men gloried in the death of witches, heretics and harlots, roasted or quartered in a public square. Priests in fine vestments held up crosses for dying wretches whose only crimes were feeble doubts of the infallibility of despicable prelates whose real concern was not salvation but self-aggrandizement. The resultant psychology is obvious in the body politic to-day. Priestcraft has gone, and the cleansed church harbours many devout and saintly men. Statescraft has inherited the ancient shibboleths. For country (which no longer is the shining spiritual home visioned by the Holy Maid of France) men lend their

hands to bestial deeds that the ruling hierarchies may continue in power and glory. Which power and glory is not a people industriously employed, and deeply content with the normal life of man which is simple; but a nation of tradesmen bent on foreign markets, and financiers conniving at compounding usury as never a Shylock dared before!"

"All of which means exactly what, old dear?" demanded Greta, as impatient of words as a wild bird of bars against its wheeling flight.

"It means, young lady, that unless the basic good sense of the common people prevails against the old cry of aggression in new guises, millions of mothers' sons will shortly be milling to war, stampeded into unspeakable carnage by a clique of madmen. Boys like that lad there," he pointed to Veder's picture on the table before them, "splendid fellows, in whom may lie incalculable riches of vital energies and racial genius for the passing on to others—boys like your Manfred, my dear."

Her golden eyes fixed on him hypnotically, as though some faculty of inner perception in him communicated a terrible understanding she must forswear. "You exaggerate, old dear, like grandma with her poisonous pessimism. Why, everyone agrees the civilized nations have outgrown war. And even if Europe got to scrapping again, in its filthy habit, what difference need it make to us in America? We ran away from all that, didn't we? All but grandmamma, I mean," she amended with a laugh, meant to be mischievous. "Grandmamma, I can't help believing, would thoroughly enjoy a little carnage after such tiresome, uneventful peace."

But for once Illiana Petrovna made no retort whatever. After a moment's painful silence, in which they all maintained a straightened air of matter-of-fact cheerfulness, Dr. Hartman returned to his papers; the gaunt old woman began to put away the uneaten cake in a red tin box, grumbling at the cat, which moved insistently about her feet. While Greta, smiling stiffly, her thin, exquisitely sensitive hands clasped tightly in her lap, tried to imagine the eventualities of such a nightmare as these two hinted: war, pestilence, hunger. . . . How impossible to conceive of it to-day!

With a frown of recollected duty, Illiana Petrovna came to herself, glancing at the clock. "Ten o'clock! My little rabbit, Herr Beaur will be furious. God bless us, *I* am furious! You sit here, grey as a missionary's Sunday shirt, with eyes sunk in your skull bones, gabbling nonsense when you should be sleeping! Away with you, my chicken, and don't come home again looking like a victim from Siberia."

When Greta had kissed them good night—a mere peck on each wrinkled cheek, yet somehow warmly expressive—those two so old in the world's sad

wisdom, sat long into the night, reviewing with anxious foreboding the tangled political machinations of their respective countries. To the average citizen of Maple Bluffs, had he overheard their talk, Illiana Petrovna would have shone in new and startling light. For this erstwhile charwoman incurable gossip and sly schemer showed a grasp of foreign affairs, of statecraft and political history, as astonishing as it was dangerous to the sanctities of tyranny. Certainly such enlightenment boded an eventual ill day of reckoning for those in any country who tirelessly sought to suppress, and hounded and forced into exile thousands like her. Poor blind fools! Tin gods by happy accident, they had foolishly forgotten who raised them up, fed and feted them and made sacred tradition of their pitiful vanities. In their stupidity of manufactured pride they had forgotten that the people who shouted hail! hail! as they drove by their stinking hovels had created them, and might as quickly unmake them. For the final victory is never really to the strong, who sit in the sun for a day or a century. But to the timeless people whose changing ideals priests and potentates typify, uphold for a brief while, then degrade, dishonour and betray. Victory, and dominion over the earth, are to the people, who create all things, suffer and survive all things, and, at long last like the locust, swarm in God's wrath to devour their oppressors!

At two o'clock, Illiana Petrovna broke off in the middle of a sentence. "God save us!" cried she. "What little sense was in me has flown. Look at the clock, Herr Doctor. The little devil leers at me. Ho! It seems to say, you foolish old woman, one day I shall race you into eternity, and the spent runner will not be I! Now I heat some milk and fix your bed, Herr Hartman. Empires may be trembling on the brink of disaster, but a foolish old doctor bent on coddling old ladies with delusions of disease must sleep just the same. God bless me, yes. If you stir before eight, you'll get no porridge, I warn you!"

CHAPTER XVII

JOSEPHINE avoided her father's eyes. She was not quite sure what air to assume. Papa was generally quite manageable except in his stubborn attitude towards Veder and a much older, more deeply rooted, prejudice against Captain Marcusson. The latter made her problem a little more complicated. Dear papa frowned upon her visits to the hospital. Only two at that! First, when she merely tiptoed into poor Manfred's room, to flit from vase to vase with her flowers and, ever so softly, her hand had *barely* touched his before she succumbed to tears. (Succumbed was the word she ecstatically used.) Second, on the following day when attired in cheerful sky-blue, she had brought a gift of golden poppies artistically set off by wisps of asparagus fern. Manfred had seemed brighter then, but, naturally, she had merely laid gentle fingers on his lips, while her dewy smile informed him of incommunicable things. Ah, how divine it was to hug *incommunicable* things in one's virgin breast!

Now she had on the sweetest apricot-coloured organdy with dinky, puckery sleeves that hardly reached her elbows and showed the dimples there. She had just picked a huge bowl of pansies and had meant to talk—very, very softly—while she arranged them in a flat earthenware vessel, which, she knew, would *exactly* fit the shelf of Manfred's bedside table. Yet papa thought she ought not to go! Still uncertain as to the wisest manœuvre to adopt she slipped to his side, seating herself on the arm of his leather easy-chair. "Papa dearest, you *know* I wish to please you always. I just don't *quite* understand——" her sweet voice quavered as with unshed tears.

John's hand instantly reached out to caress this sweetest of daughters. "Now, now, of course you don't, my pet. Papa realizes that. Some things are difficult to understand and harder to explain. A pure young girl cannot even imagine the wickedness of the world. For which praise God! Neither can she estimate the horrible effects of slanderous gossip. Certainly I should not object to an occasional visit or any little gifts you wish to send. But to make daily calls—my dearest pet, it could hardly fail to make talk."

Josephine buried her face in his breast. To his doting parental eyes she appeared sweetly overcome in her maidenly shyness by this delicate hint of nameless evil. His heart swelled with pride. After all his patience with Oline, his unfailing gentility before the children was amply rewarded in this darling child. His eyes were moist. An anticipated result Josephine jubilantly noted from the tail of a watchful eye. A very creditable shiver preceded her

manifestly horrified whisper: “Oh, papa! How—how *could* anyone think of such things—especially of me! But—dearest, Manfred isn’t a bit like—well—like *that*! I think it’s wicked of people to suggest such ideas to my darling papa. After all, it isn’t as though he were an *ordinary* boy—Manfred will have a *title*—did you forget that, papa?”

As a matter of fact, he had. The significance of it was a little startling. Irritating, too. It confirmed his opinion of titled aristocracy. Halvor Marcusson had always been insufferably superior, self-sufficient and on several occasions—he frowned to remember—had even dared to order him about—or at least had almost attempted so to do. As when, for instance, she had suggested that poor, nervous Oline might be happier making the trek from Winnipeg to Maple Bluffs with the Marcussons rather than her wedded husband! Still, a title had its uses, he supposed. Beautiful young women aspired to such trumpery with exactly the same fervour they manifested towards clothes, shining trinkets and other useless baubles. Bless their little hearts! A man naturally laughed at such vain things, but except in extreme cases saw no legitimate reason to withhold them. Even savages adorned their necks with strings of teeth, bits of glass and, not infrequently, set vast store by hoarded human skulls. Man was undoubtedly a queer creature and eons of evolution had not greatly altered his essential being.

True enough, John admitted the unflattering fact with the cheerful spontaneity peculiar to the happy mortal who believes himself separate from, and above, the vulgar masses thus tolerantly adjudged. Just now he would really have liked to humour Josephine’s little weakness; would certainly have done so at once had the object of her whim been other than Ephraim’s son. But after twenty years of whole-hearted contempt for Captain Marcusson’s unprincipled behaviour, he could hardly be expected to surrender his favourite daughter to the dubious keeping of such a man’s son. Especially now when he had openly declared himself before the people as a champion of the sterling virtues and wholesome old-fashioned moralities!

He stroked Josephine’s tapering back. “Now dry your pretty eyes. You may take the pansies this time, child, papa will go with you. And in future my little girl will conduct herself with maidenly reticence, I know. Sympathy, my dearest, is sometimes badly misconstrued. Manfred may seem a nice boy to your innocent eyes, little Josephine, but papa knows that figs do not spring from thistles.” Very neatly put, John thought, planting a kiss on the tiny soft hand curled in his.

Josephine decided now was the time for a main offensive. With a quite startling little wail she flung herself on his breast weeping in shuddery, uncontrollable gusts. John was deeply distressed—almost frightened. Dear,

dear, what did one do for hysteria? Now why on earth wasn't Oline somewhere near when her dear daughter needed her most? He must speak to her again—he really must. The sobbing subsided sufficiently for the tender creature to whisper, as she imagined a despairing Cleopatra might have whispered of hopeless love: “Oh, papa, it's much too late! He loves me—it would *kill* him to be cruelly, senselessly *spurned*! And for something he couldn't *possibly* help. Oh, papa—it isn't fair! I still don't think you quite understand.”

Darling child! Not a word for herself, thought he. “Josephine, papa is proud to have your confidence. What you say, however, is a little alarming. You force me to speak plainly, dearest child. The Marcussons were all known to be infamous philanderers—a distressing thought for a young girl to grasp, I know. But even at the cost of a few tears now I must safeguard my Josephine's future happiness. Now kiss papa, my pet, and trust him to make everything right.”

Josephine dutifully kissed him, her wet cheek a sweetly scented rose to further stir his pity. “There's a brave, sensible girl,” said John, extracting a ten-dollar bill from a fat wallet and closing her unprotesting fingers round it. “But what am I to *do*, papa?” she wailed. “Can't you see that to suddenly cut Manfred would seem awfully strange to everyone? And he'd probably do something desperate—he'd probably drown himself, papa! You'd be blamed, dearest, and it would just *ruin* your election. And—and—I'd die from it all, papa!” She quavered into a tiny patch of checked muslin handkerchief, hiding a now truly vexed little face. Indeed, papa was hardly ever so difficult with her. It was very annoying really! Everything was quite spoiled, the freshness of her gown and the flowers—even the things she had planned to say to Manfred were forgotten. Yet of course one had to humour papa—no use jumping him. Veder's experience had definitely proved that.

But she had shot an effective barb. John could readily believe that Manfred might retaliate in some scandalous fashion for an assumed personal affront. And any shade of gossip was disastrous to a political career. Yes, caution was certainly best. He cleared his throat.

“You have amazing insight into character, Josephine,” he began, quite seriously. “There may well be a taint of mental instability in the young man. A little patient kindness—purely platonic, naturally—is, perhaps, the wiser course. But he must be made to understand that your interest is quite impersonal. It is quite impersonal as yet, isn't it, my child? You said nothing of your own feelings.”

Josephine dropped her head demurely. “You forget, papa—but it no longer matters. My thought is for Manfred now he's sick and miserable. You

can trust me not to overstep your permission. If you really wish it, I'll not go to the hospital to-day. Sarah can take the flowers and say I'll call to-morrow."

"Now that is what I call a dear daughter!" said John proudly. "For such a sensible girl one must do something fine! How about a little shopping trip to Winnipeg with papa when he goes next week?"

Her response was properly subdued, as became one bravely submitting to outrageous fortune. "You're sweet, papa! It would be lovely. We could see about Sarah's room at Holy Cross. She may need extras. And it would be such fun to select a nice coat for mamma's birthday—her baby lamb is frightfully out of fashion. Then you should buy a new morning coat, papa. A member of parliament must make a good impression on every occasion. Dearest, I'd love to choose the material for you."

There! Had he not known it? The child always put others first, John gloated silently. His little Josephine would make a rare wife for some happy man one day! The thought filled him with a pleasureable glow, followed by a swift determination to meet this new emergency in sensible manner. He must see that she met eligible young men. If he proved successful in the elections he might consider taking a smart suite in one of the leading Winnipeg hotels, with Josephine to play hostess for him. . . .

"Papa," she slipped from his arms, and stood meekly before him; "I won't keep you any longer. You have letters to write, I see. But would you very much mind if André Dupont took me to the dance at Little River to-night?"

"My unselfish pet! Would I want my little girl to sit at home unhappy? These country dances are not the best amusement, but I've no objection to your going with André. He did very well in that Catholic seminary, I understand. The Duponts are very decent, enterprising people. I hear they are contemplating the purchase of another quarter section. And they must own more timber land than any other Little River settler except Captain Marcusson! There will be money in timber one day," he sighed, remembering with bitterness Veder's lack of interest and subsequent rebellion. Which incident, quite without foundation in fact, he blamed for his failure to secure an option on Beggar's Island, later granted to Ephraim Marcusson. "By all means go to the dance, if it will please you, Josephine. Only bear in mind that my little girl must hold herself courteously aloof. There will be more refined enjoyments for her pleasure shortly."

"You sweet!" She blew him a kiss from the doorway where, poised airily as a bird, she paused to impart with an adorable dimpling smile this parting

shot: “You’ll be proud of me, I promise. I’ll wheedle all your poky old politicians into doing what you want. But, darling, don’t forget that a title, even if bought at some cost, is very effective!”

Left to his papers, John chuckled. The little puss was clever, and no mistake! What she said was doubtless true. Democracy was only a new, rather thin veneer over hard-baked racial beliefs rooted in obsequious worship of knights and nobles, squires and dames. None of which however in the slightest degree affected his decision against Manfred.

Sarah, humble and apologetic, appeared in the doorway. John frowned. She was actually going to be a big woman. He suspected she must weigh at least a hundred and thirty pounds, and might even go to forty.

“Well?” said he. “What is it, Sarah? Kindly be brief. I am extremely busy.”

“Yes, I know, papa. It’s about the flowers. Is it quite all right for me to take them now, papa?”

“Certainly, if your sister wishes it. Your might have known that, Sarah.”

The intimation, as she well understood, was that to question Josephine’s delicate commands fell little short of heresy. John picked up the pen, and reached for a monogrammed sheet of notepaper. His eyebrows lifted interrogatively. Sarah’s face showed a faint flush. “I’m very sorry, papa, to hold you up. But I don’t think mamma approves—she’s at an Aid meeting or I’d ask her.”

John put down the pen with a little clicking sound. His heavy figure straightening appeared to swell with the ballooning wind of offended dignity. “Sarah, I regret to say you have the most unfortunate capacity for tactless blunders,” he rumbled thunderously. “Whatever your mother may find reprehensible in Josephine’s conduct is for her, not for you, my dear, to lay before me. Since she has not done so”—he smiled significantly, reaching for the paper again—“may we not safely conclude the little errand for your sister is quite irreproachable, even if I, alone, permit it?”

“Yes, papa. Thank you, papa. I wasn’t implying a criticism.” Poor Sarah was scarlet now, feeling fifty times a fool. Hating herself for the oafish inadequacy which always settled upon her in her father’s presence. She would have liked to tell him in graceful words how deeply grateful she really felt towards him for marvellously agreeing to spend good money on her indifferent musical talent. Instead of which she merely blurted: “Mamma told me about the convent this morning. Oh, I shall work so hard!”

John began his letter. “That is to be expected, Sarah.” The pen scratched on more rapidly now. Sarah felt herself righteously snubbed, and firmly

dismissed. The sound of the closing door was curiously like a broken sigh.

Out in the charming back garden, where flowers of every hardy variety gladdened the eyes from early spring until late fall, when the maple-trees were its glory, Josephine waited for her sister. The tragic manner had given place to sheer pettish anger. To sit still was an utter impossibility. Back and forth like a little cat stalking its shadow she flitted over the searing grass. Mary, the housemaid, privileged above common by reason of her twelve years service, came out on the back stoop to inquire if little miss was sick. Little miss came as near to snarling as an angel-faced girl, in heavenly blue, finds it possible to do. The sum of it was that Sarah, poky, plodding, impossible Sarah, was simply killing her with exasperating delay!

Sarah duly appeared. Her straw hat sat a little awry on fair hair inartistically knotted behind each ear. Her dress was green gingham, run up by the poor old seamstress who went about the village helping with plain sewing. One gore hung badly, giving the whole skirt a melancholy, uncertain appearance, as though the thing might suddenly think better of itself and turn front to back. Horrible! Josephine shuddered. "Good gracious, Sarah, must you wear that *dreadful* rag?" was her tactful salutation. "It makes you look bilious! And whatever kept you so long? I told you I wanted to run over to Mrs. Delains for the last fitting of my organdy."

"I know, Josie. I had to finish setting the table. Mamma may be late, and this is Mary's baking day."

Josephine stamped her foot. "Oh, never mind—I haven't time for silly apologies. You might have hurried. Now remember, give Manfred this note—(she produced a pale pink envelope scented with musk)—when *no one* is looking. And be sure to tell him I'll come myself the first possible moment. Remember—the first possible moment!"

"Yes, Josie. The first possible moment." Sarah repeated stoically and started away.

Josephine called after her, in gentler tones now. "Oh, Sarah, if you see Greta be sure to tell her Veder has won something or other again—he wants her to know. Oh—Sarah, you wouldn't mind if I wore your amber beads to-night, would you? They'd be so dinky with my new dress."

Sarah brightened. She was forgiven. Ah, more, her beautiful, infallibly artistic sister actually admired something of hers and actually wanted to wear it. Sarah felt as though a distinction of high degree had been conferred upon her. "Why, Josie—if you like the beads, keep them. I never wear them anyway."

Josephine blew her a kiss. "For to-night only, stupid! They are real amber, remember, mamma wouldn't like you to give them to me. I got her pearls, you know."

At the hospital Sarah had the strange experience of being quite at home. The plain, practical rooms and the matron's substantial figure sailing majestically towards her had a curiously enheartening effect. Here was an atmosphere of solid and sombre reality to which her nature tended. Quite matter of fact she expressed her desire. Matron Kelly smiled. "Mr. Marcusson is not quite so well to-day. But you may see him for a moment, however." The suggestion implied was gratifying. Sarah's serious face lost its plainness under the spreading charm of her responding smile. "Thank you, matron. I shall be only a minute—and very careful."

Greta came hurrying from a queer little place full of cupboards and glass cases that gleamed in a shaft of yellow sunlight. To Sarah she looked quite important in her pink probationer's dress and stiff white apron. And the blue bottle she carried in one hand seemed a kind of royal mace; royal, too her marvellous bronze-coloured hair, and eyes direct and fearless as golden stars in their gaze.

Matron received the bottle with a nod. "Show Miss Boyen Mr. Marcusson's room," she said, adding hurriedly as she turned away, "Dr. Beaur is there now. He wants to talk with you." She laughed. "Don't be so alarmed, my dear. It's only about the baby going out for adoption."

Poor Sarah was in a quandary. How was she to give Manfred the note, unseen, if the doctor was there—especially Oscar, whose grave eyes missed nothing. To linger was naturally out of the question, after matron's implied faith in her common sense. And yet if Manfred was worse and possibly fretting about Josie, ought he not to have the note as soon as possible? The only solution was to solicit Greta's co-operation. Josephine might not like it, but what else could she do? At the top of the stairs she caught hold of Greta's arm sharply. "Wait." She looked hastily about, then pointed to a room down the right corridor. "That's it, isn't it—No. 3?" she whispered.

Greta nodded, surprised at such odd behaviour in sensible young Sarah. "Why, yes. What of it—it's no mystery by now."

"I don't want to be overheard," said Sarah, and to Greta's increased amazement began fumbling in her plump bosom, and finally succeeded in extricating the pink bit of paper from a stubborn fold of her shirred corset cover. "I was to give this to Manfred, secretly," she explained, blushing scarlet. "From Josie, of course. But I can't very well manage it with Dr.

Beaur there. Please, Greta, do it for me later. And—well, please forget I asked you.”

Greta’s golden eyes narrowed: “What’s the sudden secrecy, Sarah? Josephine seemed quite pleased with her mission of mercy yesterday and not caring who knew it?”

“Papa”—Sarah gave awful solemnity to the word—“papa doesn’t quite approve. Of so many visits, I mean,” she added hastily, and turned red again, suspecting that was not the thing to have said.

“Perhaps I object to playing cupid,” Greta sniffed, quite rudely Sarah thought, with pale resentment. “But you know him so well, Greta. It needn’t embarrass you as it would me. You have always been good friends. While I—oh, Greta, he just terrifies me, really!”

“Give me the darn thing.” Greta put out a hand which to Sarah seemed actually to itch with destructive intent. “You won’t forget?” She stressed her fear mildly. “Sick people fret easily. Josephine is so anxious!”

“Now isn’t that sweet of Josephine.” Greta’s liquid tones had a decidedly acid inflection. “You may depend on it, Sarah, I wouldn’t increase her—*beautiful sorrow* (she mimicked Josephine perfectly) for worlds. This sweet, solacing billet will be safely delivered. Well—here we are.”

Greta gave the hesitant visitor an impatient little shove forward, herself, as always, stopping just inside the door. Dr. Beaur spoke kindly to Sarah, who had paled at the incredible vision of a Manfred apathetic and motionless. He had evidently been listening to Oscar with straightened patience bordering on nervous irritation. At Greta’s voice, an extraordinary change came over his greyish-white face. To Sarah the sudden flash of his eyes looking past her, completely ignoring her stammered greeting, was alarming. His sharp cry and sudden jerky movement was still more frightening. “Doctor! For God’s sake stop that stubborn little ass!” he cried. “Don’t let her go! Greta, Greta——”

She was upon him like the wind. Not gentle and soothing. Fury blazed in her face. “You crazy fool! Do you want to break your cast?” she hissed at him, thrusting him back on the pillows. “If you dare wriggle like that again I’ll slap you.”

“Oh, would you?” said the demented young man in accents that seemed to imply no honours on earth could be half so fine. And his hand shot out, gripping hers with astonishing strength. Greta cast an imploring glance at Oscar. “What am I to do with him?” she asked, trying to sound whimsical and feeling very foolish. Sarah’s eyes were burning a hole in her back, so

she imagined. Although Sarah wisely and quietly had crossed to the bureau where an empty vase invited her flowers.

Dr. Beaur answered Greta: “You might hear what our patient has to say,” he told her. “A patient has extraordinary rights and a nurse must have extraordinary patience—a very bad pun but to the point.” He turned to Sarah: “Miss Sarah, how would you like to see our babies. Quite an assortment—fine little creatures.”

With their departure Greta’s long-tried fortitude broke. She dropped to her knees in utter misery her face buried in the bed-clothes. “You unspeakable idiot,” she sobbed. “You might have broken your fool neck!”

“Darling! Look here, if you don’t stop I’ll wriggle again. Damn it, you’re a fine one to cry now after leaving me to stare cracks in the wall all these days. Greta, if you don’t kiss me I’ll bust every darn bandage and blasted splint Oscar takes such fiendish pride in.”

Tears had never been easy to Greta. Some fierce pride of soul had always held her fast in its iron grip. All her childhood’s little griefs had been met with fierce bursts of rage, cold silence and the tragic stoicism of a proud animal suffering a mortal wound.

To Manfred who knew this, her tears were an indescribably touching evidence of her actual feelings towards him. Her stubborn will was another matter. His hand upon hers tightened. “Greta, darling, what’s the good fighting something too big for us? We love each other—why, God knows, but there it is. You’ve made me suffer enough. Hour after hour listening for your footsteps! And that horse-faced female making the night more hideous. Now kiss me or I’ll cut a fit and tell matron what ails me.”

Greta’s golden eyes were slightly wild. No telling what crazy thing he might do. He had always found a trick to force his opponent’s hard game. She snatched away her hand and, not unlike a diving king fisher sighting bait, kissed him. “Much good it will do you!” said she escaping with maddening ease. Standing well back from the bed, her slim form bristling with fierce determination, she eyed him coldly. “Just because you’re the utterly spoiled only son of a very rich man don’t think you can have everything your own way. I’m horribly sorry you got hurt, I blamed myself. But even if you make twenty-seven fools of yourself, what I said at the cottage still holds.”

“I’ll hound you all my life, my proud beauty.” He grinned at her. “Do you know when you’re mad, darling, your hair sparks like a dear little cat’s?”

Lightning flashed. “Speaking of the nasty little brutes, here’s a note from the sort of cat you should admire. Darling Josie defying parental caution for the sake of her dearest love!”

“Hell!” Manfred was seldom so consistently profane. “That girl drives me crazy. Leatrice is bad enough with her pious solemnity, and veiled hints for my spiritual upliftment. But Josie—hell! You can’t half follow the damn-fool parts she plays.”

“Oh, you’ll get the knack with patience.”

He tore the note into strips unread. “Listen here, Greta, you can call me anything you like, avoid me like the devil and torment me into fits. I’ll still get you for my own precious plague!”

A bell rang somewhere. Greta assumed a professional air. “That’s the Jaundice—she wants her orange juice. I’ve been here much too long. Dr. Bear’s waiting too.”

“Greta, you’ll come back? It’s damnable lying here like a stick and you running about with jaundices and tumours, snubbing mere bones.” His grin was devastating.

“Perhaps—once in a while. If you behave,” she grudgingly assented.

“I shall behave. Wait! Promise me this much, Greta. Give me a chance. All this rot you’ve built up in your mind about grandmother is sheer imagination, at least let me try to prove it.”

“Very well, Manfred, I promise this: if, when you come back from Europe, you still want me and Mrs. Marcusson does not object—I’ll listen.”

Satisfied, his head sank deeper into the pillow. The slow lighting up of his fine features, as from the glow of an infinite indwelling rapture, made her feel slightly giddy. Like staring at the sun, she thought, foolishly, and hurried away with beating heart.

CHAPTER XVIII

JOSEPHINE was vastly disappointed on her next visit to Manfred. His looks and manner conveyed no hint of the adoration she had anticipated as a result of her heroic, high-souled note. In fact, he seemed taciturn rather than pleased, and it was impossible not to perceive how often he glanced at the clock. Imagine! Here was she, dressed in apple-green organdy with the darlinest white flowers at her pretty round breast, all for his benefit, and all he did was growl in monosyllables and watch the clock!

Even when she mentioned having gone to Little River with André—oh, just out of a bore! Because sitting about worrying over Manfred was so terrible, he took it more than calmly. “Fine!” he exclaimed heartily, “fine!” And her blushing reference to Tony Prix’s awful behaviour—he had actually called André Dupont a cheat and a dirty chiseller, horning in on his girl!) only made him laugh. Well, Josephine supposed that having one’s neck and shoulder strapped so horridly and one’s leg in a nasty plaster of Paris cast *was* awfully trying. Even so he might have shown *some* consideration for her feelings and appreciation of her willing self-sacrifice in defying dear papa.

In gentlest tones, as she tied on her new bonnet, she intimated as much. “I may not come *quite* so often next week, Manfred. Of course I shall try. But papa’s *just* a little difficult, dear.” The barest ripple of a sigh escaped, faintest hint of the burden she was bravely bearing alone for his sake. “Still, you mustn’t blame dear papa; when he *understands* I know everything will be right.”

Manfred’s temper was never long-suffering. “Josie, would you mind talking quite plainly—as though I had very little sense; I feel that way. For I must admit I’m completely in the dark as to what should make papa difficult or isn’t right and should be right. And whether you come or not—well—it’s decent of you, of course—but I shan’t hold it against you if you stay away.”

Josephine lowered her velvety lashes. Anger smouldered in her soft blue eyes. Under all her poses and impersonations lay a rock-ribbed reality of unchangeable female nature, primitive in its acquisitiveness and utterly unconscious of morals. An element of cunning had taught her to swing rapidly from the precocious giggling Josephine—who had openly made fun of the moth-eaten proprieties—to the present dainty Victorian reincarnation who, by a flicker of dewy lashes expected completely to vanquish the hapless male. Every idiotic male on whom she had experimented so far,

except this wretched stick of splints and plaster, had been properly subdued, overawed and vanquished. Well, she had learned the effectiveness of an apparently meek, plastic subjection, and guileless simplicity. From behind the mask of her delicate peach and cream face not a hint of her rancour or the angry resolve to bend him to her will was even momentarily discernible. When she spoke, her voice trembling a little, was honeyed as ever. "I'm *so* ashamed, Manfred. I can't *think* how I was so selfish to worry you with such *silly* things while you're sick. And you must not fret about papa, when he knows the *truth* he won't interfere——"

"With what?" snapped Manfred. "What the devil is there for him to interfere with?"

Josephine patiently declined to understand him. To understand, she knew quite well, might for ever ruin her carefully laid plans.

"Poor dear," she smiled. "Oscar said you were frightfully cross. A sign you'll soon be up! But I must run. We're very busy getting Sarah's things ready. Isn't it *splendid* she and Leatrice are to share a room at Holy Cross?"

Although she tripped away in the usual benign manner, smiling at all and sundry, she was thoroughly upset. What if Manfred really disliked her? He had certainly acted that way to-day. Horrid brute after kissing her by the lake! What if he continued to ignore his obligation—for surely he could not expect to act that way and chuck her like a housemaid! But what could she do? What did girls do with men like the Marcussons? Quite unconsciously the comparison had cut across her mind like a whip—papa might be right. The Marcusson men must have been singular in their treatment of women. Certainly neither Tony nor André (she shivered a little at the recollection of their ardour) nor those nice boys in Winnipeg would have acted like Manfred to-day.

She did not want to go home. Mamma was very tiresome these days. For ever harping on the changes round about. Good heavens! As though it weren't high time Maple Bluffs came out of the woods! And what was so remarkable about one's children growing up and wanting to leave? Like Veder to Australia. She toyed a while with the idea of being the fair sister of a rising young engineer in far places. But Australia had snakes and horrible savages and the unmarried white men were mostly remittance men, kicked out of England. Sarah was positively vile. She had eyes all over her head and the imagination of a dyspeptic acolyte. The simile pleased her sufficiently to set her humming. Poor mamma, she was a perfect simpleton! Bringing up this nonsense about feeling hopelessly lost since the railway had altered all their old habits, when anyone less blind than papa might have guessed it was really the professor had changed her. Good old stick! She

supposed he must have been fearfully handsome as a young man. She had been a little smitten with his charm herself when he first arrived. Silly little goose! She laughed at herself delightfully.

Mamma would miss him when he left. That, of course underlay her restless, unending activities these days. She was preparing for the empty days she must employ with insignificant tasks to the complete exclusion of dangerous thoughts. Josephine wondered how it really felt to be a woman burned out, with only pale memories to feed on and in a queer welter of despair because even the dull comfort of hours over rather tiresome books was to be taken from her. Frightful bore, she imagined.

It was really very fine outdoors. The autumn sun burned low over the bright trees on papa's lakeside property and a softness reminiscent of fled summer days lingered in the air. A walk to Professor Von Barholme's little house would be extremely pleasant. She would at least escape hearing Sarah practise a million scales and hear her tell mamma how sure she was of getting her certificate in less than a year.

Von Barholme's little rustic cottage stood close to the lake. At its back the gleaming white trunks of birches looked like guardsmen on parade. Two little rock beds on either side of the porch held bright-hued flowers. The odour of nicotine blossoms was beginning to scent the air. It was a dear little house papa had built for the professor in this quiet, isolated spot a mile or more from the village. Now that the new high school was completed, with its adjacent neat, shingle and clap-boarded cottage for the staff, it was not likely he would rent the cottage again. He had, in fact, half promised her the darling place for a summer retreat. Sarah had foolishly hinted of its possibilities as a music studio. But that was nonsense. Who wanted children messing about such a dear little place—so near the hospital too, where they ought not to run making a row and, of course, would——

Jaegar Von Barholme had evidently seen her approaching and came smiling out on the tiny porch. "Well, so the fairies have come back," said he. "You know I'd quite forgotten such pretty beings existed. You positively startle me in that dress."

He was nice! Every dimple danced gratification. "It is nice, isn't it?" She floated up the steps in a dainty gale of skirts. "But you shouldn't spoil me. I'm vain enough. Dear mamma is in despair about it."

He perfectly understood the mood she wished maintained. He had watched her through so many, the amusing little miss. She had plenty of hard sense underneath, a deep vein of indestructible acumen that often enough had surprised him. Her vanity he thought natural and, in her, oddly

endearing. What worried him were her passionate impersonations. Josephine was not truly romantic. Her ends were always concrete. For which reasons her affectations were somewhat like a soldier's ammunition, deadly if turned against her. He could readily conceive of her so definitely merged in the part she played as actually to perish with it if her little cunning failed her. Now she was the pensive daughter, ostensibly troubled for her mother, actually fishing for gossip by which to steer to some coveted end.

"Mamma thinks me quite insensible to the finer things—poetry and music and religion. Leatrice talks a lot of missions and Christian obligations, but I can't see where it does much good. She's very difficult, really, always popping off in a temper. And Sarah—heavens! She's certainly good enough—if it's good to be always working and fussing and staying perfectly miserable!"

Von Barholme laughed in his quiet fashion. "Which means, my pretty friend, you not only want me to flatter your looks but back up your secret convictions that to be good is to be dull, and intelligent a waste of time. Perhaps I agree. The happiest women are quite brainless, invariably lovely and marry captains of industry, prominent statesmen and monsters of scientific learning."

Josephine permitted herself a tiny giggle. "You know I hadn't any such idea. At least not quite like it. But I have been wondering—(she blushed divinely)—oh, just idly, of course, why people marry the way they do. The wrong people—like Mrs. Marcusson, for instance, and—well, even dear mamma."

For a bad moment he actually wondered whether the pretty puss was unsheathing a claw. After all, she was John's daughter and he had not stopped at cruelty when it served him. Then, mistakenly, he thought he understood her and preferring, if possible, to escape juvenile confessions of love, he said: "The real trouble with human judgment is it invariably falls after the event. Often enough what seems dire tragedy, if left to the balancing laws of the spiritual universe, turns out to be a genuine blessing, or at least of vast benefit to the progress of the individual or the race."

Josephine heard him, little yellow head held sidewise, like a nervous little wren held fast against its will by driving curiosity.

"It may surprise you, professor, but I quite understand—both your inference and evasion," she shot at him, dimpling. "Now don't deny it. You were afraid I might burst into girlish confidences, and the balderdash about the spiritual universe was brought in to block it. Even at that you may be

right—about the balancing business. Two harmonious fools might make a worse hash of things than two contrary-minded idiots.”

Jaegar studied the pretty creature intently. Her daintiness sang the hymn of the sweet girl he had lost on the blue hills of Sunholme. But Oline had neither dared to form her own convictions nor to follow her desires. This new generation had at least the courage to question and to doubt. Time must show how far it had heart to venture. “My dear,” he rose abruptly, “I almost forgot the pastor’s wife asked me to tea to-night. If the biscuits get cold it would be a calamity.”

Josephine made a sound between sniff and snort. “There! That’s what gets me. The holy trinity of a woman’s life: Biscuits! buttons! babies!”

She really was a clever little minx, in whatever guise one found her, he decided, and his laughter was both flattering and infectious. She giggled unashamedly, glad to be momentarily relieved of her carefully cultivated strait-jacket Victorianism. While he changed into a fresh shirt she hunted through the magazines in their dusty racks beside the fireplace. The pictures alone really intrigued her. Flagg’s marvellous young ladies inviting the caresses of Flagg’s equally marvellous young men! Josephine sighed. Manfred was really quite as handsome as any of them—but his heartless speeches! No hero under the glorious sun of fiction had ever barked such unfeeling things!

As they swung along the lake road into the village, Josephine, quite unsuspected of Jaegar, solicited the information she had come for. Yes, he was staying on until Christmas. That is, he meant to drift back and forth between Maple Bluffs and Winnipeg. He had some research work in hand—tedious stuff—it would keep him near the university, however much he preferred staying in Maple Bluffs.

“Then you won’t mind if I slip out here once in a while, as I used to?” she said innocently. “I’ve read all papa’s books forward and back a dozen times over.”

“Of course I shall not object,” Von Barholme smiled at the pretty liar. Papa’s books were not the sort of diet his favourite daughter threw on. “To prove it I shall give you my duplicate key. If you hanker for a taste of Samuel Johnson you may help yourself on Saturday. I leave to-morrow. For Sunday I advise something frivolous: Jane Austen in a descriptive mood.”

“I might read the book of Esther and do better!” the pretty wisp of Eve retorted. And as by magic fitted her dainty body to the queenly glide, gentle yet aloof, which her soaring fancy attributed to the Hebrew maid. Esther? What a wise Virgin in her generation! Josephine smiled to herself. She knew

all about Esther, having read her entire account that she might impersonate the gentle creature at a church concert. In a charade, of course. At the time it had struck her that Vashti, the queen, with her blunt refusal (almost modern in its tiresome independence and stupidity) to show off her charms to the king's drunken revellers, was very like foolish Sarah. Sarah would undoubtedly forfeit a crown for the mistaken privilege of upholding a minor scruple. Wise Esther, meek as a dove before her lord, had accomplished all her ends! When the gentle lady's first softly murmured request had been granted: the slaughter of five hundred men (who had only purposed evil against her people) and the death of Haman's ten sons, and similarly playful enactments in the provinces, the fatuous monarch had demanded further: "Now what is thy petition and it shall be granted thee even to half my kingdom." Then said wily Esther: "If it *please* the king (Josephine's smile was appreciative) let it be granted to the Jews which are in Shushan to do tomorrow also according unto this day's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows."

No half measures for virtuous Esther! Josephine had instantly perceived the excellent wisdom of the sainted lady's clever hypocrisy. It worked marvellously with papa. Papa simply ate up that gentle dove stuff.

It had apparently been equally effective with all the Christian tyrants, domestic and otherwise, of whom she had ever read. Her smile deepened. All the way to Maple Bluffs she kept reassuring herself of its excellent merits. It had never failed. It could not fail if one had, in addition to sweetness and beauty, Esther's implacable purpose. . . . And yet, man though he was, something about Manfred fitted badly into the picture. Manfred, she half surmised, was at heart a free-souled pagan, little given to dreams of himself as a lord of creation made in the image and likeness of a jealous God. Even so, Josephine's dimples deepened, there was another male weakness on which the dovelike woman might play. Chivalry! The eternally abused desire in the male to satisfy, rescue and safeguard the helpless female. Her laughter bubbled over. A delicious serenade of childlike joy, Von Barholme thought. She prettily encouraged the illusion by pointing to a pair of puppies gambolling about in Peter Hiner's corn patch which they were passing just then.

"Dear little things," she cooed. "I must have papa buy me one. I really must—he owes me a present." But her real determination as to what dear papa owed, and must eventually concede and secure, to her no matter what the cost had nothing to do with Peter Hiner's young setters. She was humming happily as they entered the village.

CHAPTER XIX

THE next three weeks fled by uneventfully except for those customary fall activities: church bazaars, corn feeds, a concert by the Episcopal Choir, and much preserving and pickling by thrifty housewives. Manfred had been removed to "Glen Haven" where his grandmother fussed over him charmingly and read quaint books aloud, to which he listened at first with patience and later with enjoyment. They generally sat in a little summer pavilion built of polished cedar logs, in the middle of Isabella's exquisite garden. "Glen Haven" house still maintained its dignified rustic simplicity, more beautiful it seemed with age and the heavy scarlet creepers clinging colourfully to its thick walls. But Isabella's garden was something of which neighbours boasted and every visitor must see. In it some magic of her own soul was strongly revealed: harmony and peace and dreamlike stillness in which the song of birds and droning of bees contrived to create a sense of well-being in all who entered there.

Ephraim, especially of late, used often to stand at the small white gate, with its tenderly nursed climbing roses, that led to this fragrant kingdom, and feel himself at Isabella's feet, humbled and in the dust as he should be. That he might put out his hand and enter in he dared not hope was symbolic of her readiness to accept him back into her heart. But what he liked to feel was the fragrance of her quiet soul closing round him, easing his restless spirit as the perfume of her flowers drugged his senses.

Isabella was much too happy in her son's good recovery, and too occupied with preparation for Leatrice's impending departure to mark any actual change in her husband or what went on in the neighbourhood. To Olga, in whom withered virginity had created an acid of soul only relieved by barbed criticism of others, especially the young, she turned a partially deaf ear. Yet she gathered that Miss Josephine was "carrying on" with André Dupont in what Olga called scandalous fashion. But after the way she had haunted Manfred in the hospital, Isabella was not particularly perturbed over this sudden passion for André. As a matter of fact, she was vastly relieved. Josephine's sweet persistence had been a little annoying. However, she quickly chid Olga for her gossip, professing to believe that Josephine's little vagaries amounted to nothing but the girlish desire to show off her pretty new dresses.

Dame Halvor, on the other hand, thought the little minx not at all above creating a real scandal. "She's neither fish nor fowl," said she. "One moment

her demeanour is such the late Queen Victoria might have had her stuffed as the one perfect paragon of the female virtues, and the next her antics must have amazed Catherine of Russia. But to play any game consistently well one must be undivided in interest and attention.” Halvor shrugged away the problem of Josephine, having quickly perceived that Manfred’s attention was fixed elsewhere. And it was to win his confidence on that score she had devoted herself so assiduously to his convalescence.

On the day a huge bundle of magazines arrived for him (with love from Josie) to be dumped at his feet by a disdainful, disapproving Olga, Halvor thought the hour for plain speech was come. “Very thoughtful of Josephine,” said the old dame cryptically. “She seems to have covered everything now: flowers, books, jellies, magazines and inspiring messages. Are you in love with her, Manfred?”

He actually blushed. “Lord, no!” He kicked the bundle viciously. “I wish to heaven she’d find another victim. It’s all nonsense, you know.” He hastened to explain in defence of Josephine’s asininity and his own unchivalrous behaviour. “Josie’s incurably bitten with a mania for make-believe.”

“So you think she merely imagines herself in love with you?” His grandmother helped him, dryly.

“Lord, yes! What else could it be? Just the same I’m damnably sick of it! Sorry, dearest, for the fireworks,” he amended.

Halvor held out her tiny hand—wrinkled as an old leaf yet somehow beautiful—for a gay little butterfly which cheerfully survived the summer: “What makes you so sure? You’re not exactly hard to look at, Manfred.”

His startled expression quite amused her and was touching as well. At his age Ephraim would have laughed her out of countenance and hidden his real motives under a hundred fantastic inventions. Manfred looked at her with Isabella’s frank, honest eyes, and like Isabella betrayed in his intensity an amazing incapacity for complex emotions. The pendulum had swung back. Poor boy, he was evidently destined to be the sort of idiot who, in flat contradiction to his ancestors both immediate and remote, would love one woman, one dog, one horse in unreasoning and thoroughly uncomfortable fashion. “But grandmother——” he hesitated painfully. “Yes, yes,” urged the lady. “Don’t struggle—young men have committed the folly of falling in love before.”

“You’re wrong,” he burst out. “I’d as soon think of Sarah. (Halvor’s eyes narrowed at the unconscious male cruelty.) I almost detest her!

Grandmamma, you might as well know now as later. . . . It's Greta Holmquist—it's always been Greta since we were kids."

She sat very still. What her true reaction was he had no way of guessing. Her rather cold face under its gleamy white hair showed not the slightest quiver of emotion. "I wanted you to know before I left," he hurried on, glad now to be rid of the pestering weight of it. "She's frightful about it. Said I'd have to make good in university and see what you said after that." His captivating smile flashed out suddenly: "She's inhuman, dearest, a perfect little devil for temper and pride, but you should see her with a sick animal—or when she dances to those sad Russian tunes."

A fatal reference. Halvor detested all Russians for no reason on earth, and Illiana Petrovna in particular. She said, however, in quite pleasant vein: "Dr. Beaur speaks very highly of her. I think we may safely leave the rest until you return from Europe."

His relief was pathetically naïve. "Dearest, I knew you'd be grand about it." He got up and in great excitement began hobbling about. "That might convince her!" cried he, to the garden at large. "The stubborn little angel of a mule!" He swung round on Halvor with alarmingly bright eyes: "She trotted out such abominable rot—knights and barons and one's sacred obligations to family! But I knew you'd agree the best one could do for our particular tribe was to inoculate a few homespun decencies into its illustrious vices."

Her ready laughter was gratifyingly appreciative. Yet she was thinking: Isabella again! Thank heaven the boy will soon be away from here. The old brown moors of Toste may teach him something. He is very teachable, poor dear. Out loud, she said, "I commend Greta's good sense. Even you may do as much one day. Here comes your sister. I shall leave you to her admirable company."

Leatrice was anything but good company to-day. It seemed that someone was giving a party. Tony Prix had asked her, but only after Josephine had refused. An enheartening intelligence guilelessly imparted by Sarah. "I wish you'd marry Josie and end her flirting," was her sisterly contribution. "She's positively disgusting with her craze for thrills disguised as something-or-other out of books! You ought to stop her, Manfred. She'll end up in a mess."

"Good lord, you are cheerful," Manfred grinned. "Must have prayed all night and forgot to sleep."

Leatrice frowned. "Some concern for your own spiritual being would not be amiss, Manfred. I should think you'd be ashamed to jest of sacred matters

after the narrow escape you had!”

He threw a great red aster at her, “Sacred humbug! I’ll wager most prayers are beggarly appeals for the same sort of thing normal people rustle up for themselves. Go duck in the river, old dear, and cool your pious head.”

“Well, laugh if you like,” she replied with haughty forbearance. “Just the same, remember what I said about Josie. I am not the fool you think, Manfred. It’s no use worrying Mrs. Boyen. Josie wouldn’t listen to her, and she laughs at Sarah. She would listen to you because she’s mad about you. That is why she’s making such a fool of herself with André.”

“But, good lord, Letty, I’m not her father confessor. I have no right to barge into her private affairs.”

“You might have,” Leatrice came back with the cold logic of an abbess wrestling with the nonsense of a recalcitrant sinner. “You know quite well she considers herself tentatively engaged to you.”

“She can tentatively go to the devil!” Manfred fired back. “For heaven’s sake, Letty be reasonable. Read the psalms, knit, kick the cat, but leave me out of the picture. To hear you one would imagine poor old Josie teetered on the brink of ruin and only I could save her.”

Leatrice’s thin, shapely lips compressed into a hard line. Her expression recalled to Manfred’s mind the description of certain proud penitents called upon to confess shoddy little sins before inferiors. Leatrice felt smirched in advance by having to admit knowledge and understanding of the shameful thing she was about to relate. “What name you would give to it I cannot say,” she asserted with austere dignity. “I should think it ruinous enough to have people whispering all about that she spends *hours* (she made the word ominous) all alone with André in Von Barholme’s cottage!”

Manfred’s lightning rage struck her dumb. “What a filthy thing to say!” he roared. “If all your lousy piety can’t keep your mind any cleaner than that try scrubbing steps for a change! Of all the despicable things for one girl to say of another—God! You make me feel sick.”

He hobbled away so fast he failed to see the pitiful figure she made weeping bitterly. For he had really done her a grievous injustice. Tormented with emotional urges for ever at war in her breast, Leatrice had fixed upon the leaning tower of religion for her defence. Why she felt she needed a strong defence she could not have defined. The feeling made her abnormally sensitive, fearful of spiritual offences in herself and others. But she would not, without good cause, have come to suspect anyone of concrete sins. Real concern for Josie, not malicious intent, had moved her against all inclination to repeat the wretched gossip which she knew had some foundation in fact,

only to bring upon herself this bitter, undeserved humiliation. Long after Manfred was restored to passable humour poor Leatrice wept, her thoughts dark as the long shadows closing over the blue pines behind her father's now obsolete, seldom used mill.

CHAPTER XX

LEONA SHULTZ came back from an extended tour of the Eastern States, England and Continental Europe and created a nine-days' wonder. She not only brought five trunks packed with smart clothes, souvenirs and curios, but shipped in the first automobile to honk and hoot and terrify the horses as well as the pedestrians of Maple Bluffs. A splendid black monster with a sneering expression on its snout of a radiator, a positive glare in its disapproving lamps of eyes, and fenders set so high it had the perennial air of a stout lady crossing a ditch with carefully lifted skirts. But this was not all. Leona was always thorough. To leave no possible groove of astonishment untouched, she offered even more luscious excitement. She was going to be married! Actually married in orthodox fashion to an elderly gentleman with a literary bent. He had published a volume of verses, decidedly sentimental and slightly sepulchral, to which the young ladies of fashionable finishing schools had taken with zest. His stories were hardier stuff and sold to the sort of clientèle which inhabited democratic taverns, travelling lunch-wagons and small beer-gardens. His health was rather uncertain and Leona proposed setting it right. For which reason she had returned to Maple Bluffs to see to the building of a suitable house on one of her few remaining lots fronting the lake not far from the Von Barholme cottage. The whole town buzzed. Leona's relatives expressed themselves variously. Peter Hiner slapped a heavy paw on a greasy overall and roared with unholy laughter. Mamma Hiner's fat body rocked like jelly in response. Ja, Ja, that one was sly! Himmel, to catch her a poet what a joke. . . . Cora flung down her latest progeny, sour with milk, and burst into violent tears. It wasn't fair! Leona, with nothing but figures in her hard head and no heart got all the luck. A poet! Hateful injustice. Why, look at Vilhelm, bald, always smelling of beer and making her have these hateful babies. Eight now and that likely not the end of them! Tillie was more sympathetic. "Well, why not should she get herself a poet?" she demanded, tying a huge bow under the chin of her tiny adopted son. "Why not, I ask it, Cora," she reiterated blandly. "A wild animal I would rather have than a baby, that I once said. But now my little Fritz makes a world. You should know, Cora, a woman is funny. Maybe yet you cry for twins."

The Marcusson ladies went into gales of glee when Oline, piloting a strangely wistful Josephine, brought the news. Isabella thought it called for special celebration—a little wine in thin, tall glasses. Halvor twinkled, raising her beautiful glass warmed to liquid fire by its rare contents: "To the

Dark Weaver!” she chuckled. “To his incomparable humour and fantastic disregard of common sense!”

Leatrice, cutting cake for tea and covertly studying Josephine, said in her reproving abbess manner, “Isn’t that a little blasphemous, grandmamma—if you mean God? Should He not know the end and reason for his creation?”

Halvor chuckled: “Ah! perhaps He should. If I mean God——” her eyes narrowed to mere slits of faintly malicious derision.

“Ifs and buts lose their consequence with age—cut the cake thinner, love—one comes to feel, after half a century of folly, that the mischievous little words have lost all power. That the ‘but for this’ calamities have turned out just as well as the ‘if-it-had-been-so’s’. I go so far sometimes as to suspect that God himself is quite unconscious of the blighting words and the blasting effects they have on silly human hearts—add a few macaroons, your mother makes them so delicious—which observation, my dear Leatrice, makes me think the Universe wags along very nicely without regard to so-called laws of common sense. And that each of us is like a tiny shuttle shooting restlessly about unreeling its bit of coloured thread. The pattern spun from our undoing, from our tortuous shunting to and fro, and uneasy little creakings may be glorious and of superlative worth to the Weaver. Yet for us—who cannot see the end nor conceive the beginning, such eternal realities are summed up in commonplace experiences, both good and evil, and have little value unless, thereby, we learn to laugh at ourselves and the parts we play.”

To everyone’s complete astonishment Josephine burst out crying and ran from the room. Leatrice gave her grandmother a dark, condemnatory look, and hastily followed after. Genuinely distressed, Isabella tried to bridge the uncomfortable moment with a reference to the teapot. The handle was a terrible nuisance, it got so hot, she averred, silver was impractical that way. Halvor busied herself with the cups. But Oline had shared too many griefs with these good friends to hide from them now what she honestly believed was only an insignificant, although trying problem. “I must apologize for Josephine,” she began, trying not to show too great impatience. “It really isn’t like her to behave this way. I think she’s worn out with all these dances and parties—but what can one do?”

“What indeed,” Halvor shook her dainty laces. “If I were you I should leave the worry to her father, she’s his idea, anyway,” the outrageous dame chuckled reminiscently. Indeed, she remembered very well how frightfully upset Oline had been over Josie’s advent. “Drink your tea, my dear. Leatrice was made for quieting pretty sinners. She’ll spank our little miss into proper cheerfulness.”

But there she was mistaken. Leatrice returned alone, perplexed and really troubled. Josephine would not stay, she informed them. She had really come to see Manfred about a play, but since he wasn't home had decided to go on to the Prix's. She sent her apologies to the ladies, Leatrice recited, as felicitously as though before a bar of justice. Josie was sorry to have made a scene but grandmamma's fantastic theories had reminded her of a frightfully depressing book by Hardy. One of those things about people doomed to inevitable tragedy. She was thoroughly ashamed and had begged Leatrice to offer her profound apologies.

"Well, well! Eat something, Leatrice, and stop looking like a female Torquemada reciting the merits of a newly-roasted saint. Girls do cry over no end of things. I once wept because a beautiful bishop in billowing vestments (or better said, the beautiful vestments billowing round the bishop) could never be mine since he was already married with seven children and I not yet ten. It struck me as outrageously unjust at the time. I quite lost flesh and refused my porridge. However, I was happily saved from the decline I was set upon achieving by the arrival of some gipsies at Toste."

Nothing more was said until Oline had gone. Then Halvor plied her granddaughter in very different vein. But Leatrice had nothing more to add. Not for worlds would she risk a second rebuffing by voicing her real opinion. And perhaps she might have found difficulty in expressing it concretely. She had a vague idea of Josie involved in secret rendezvous, plagued by lovers and courting parental displeasure, nothing more, of course. Josie was silly, but a nice girl of nice family. Really dreadful things did not happen to nice girls. Keeping wisely silent on these nebulous matters, she thought proper however, to venture a little hint that Josie was perhaps a bit too interested in Manfred. To which Halvor promptly replied with a frosty reminder that certain camisoles, and flounces of numerous petticoats were yet to be monogrammed, embroidered and hemmed. After which characteristic reproof she added (as one bestowing a new edict on suffering mankind) that any girl in her right senses—even Josephine—should know how utterly stupid it was to fix one's affections on a young man bound for a university with its exacting sciences and proportionately distracting amusement!

A commonplace fact which the said Josephine would certainly have perceived as quickly as anyone, except for the blinding turmoil of her outraged senses. For there was growing in her a slowly demoralizing fear sprung from the amazing discovery that unlike Esther her patience and gentleness were unavailing. Manfred was in all respects a disappointing king! Her willingness to please merely bored him. Her visits were a

nuisance. And neglect, far from whetting his appetite left him contentedly at peace. She had even tried the ancient poultice of a rival lover and drew out nothing resembling jealousy.

Everything, seemingly, had failed with Manfred. Nevertheless, like her chosen pattern of feminine guile she refused to give way to despair. In the quiet of her own room she postured before the mirror, now tragically resigned to defeat, now arrogantly certain of ultimate victory. And when her acting was over she invariably recalled to mind that anything one wanted badly enough, and was prepared to pay for to the last farthing, was as good as won!

CHAPTER XXI

ALONE in her room some days later she shivered miserably, recalling with disgust her naïve gullibility in accepting such statements unquestioned. On the strength of such lying philosophy the glorified guile of the recorded Esthers of sacred and profane history she had planned a fateful picnic at Von Barholme's cottage, an outing which should have brought Manfred to her feet. And had damned her soul instead! He had promised to come—if he could—and he certainly could. He limped only slightly now. Limped willingly enough to see Greta whose yellow eyes hypnotized every man under eighty! André Dupont (the shudder wracked her again) had jumped at the chance to come. Yet she had only asked him that Manfred should see for himself how true rumour was when it said he was crazy about her. Oh God! How was she to have known the extent of his madness? Or judged of the power of the beast in every man!—almost from the start he had been changed, electrified as by a frightful force that made his simplest gestures seem charged with mysterious explosive. His voice had betrayed an elation out of all reason and what he said had lost sense, and filled her with nervous fear as they sat by the glowing fire, eating food which had lost all character, taste and meaning. His eyes had devoured her like flames! And because her heart was on fire with rage at Manfred and her whole body listening, listening, for the sound of his coming she had laughed and laughed and talked the wildest nonsense to keep from being afraid of the strange new thing she saw growing in André's face. Before she knew it the fire had died down to red embers and the moon appeared like a silver feather in the window and was blown away in a black sky. Crickets chirped in the eternal silence. And the awful spirit of that vast silence had swept down on her like an actual sinister presence. It had stripped her of sheltering pretence and torn from her face the masks of gaiety, guile, and sweet evasions. So that she was no longer Josephine, clothed in her right mind and the mantling conventions, but a shivering bundle of aching nerves and unspeakable anticipations.

Had she cried out? She asked herself now, in shuddering wonderment. Had the leering dark, with its frightening insinuations, and soundless laughter full of timeless gloating, forced some sound from her paralysed lips? Some desperate sound that drove André over the final bars of restraint. . . .

Suddenly he was beside her. Talking, talking, talking. A wild river of sound that beat against her mind with terrifying persistence. Holding her close. Kissing her, clutching her convulsively, crying. Those tears contrasted

with the frantic strength of his warm, vital body worked curious havoc. Snapped something in her taut and incredibly weary self. And André, and she, and the whole world were suddenly blotted out in a fearful paroxysm that drew them into the vortex of the terrible silence. Into outermost darkness where the red heart of life beat like a giant drum, blotting out consciousness, blotting out feeling—destroying time and space and death with its eternal clamour.

No. No. No. Josephine struck clenched fists against a feverish forehead. That outrage could not have happened to her. She must be dreaming and in her dream have this ghastly role assigned to her. Forced on her by an arbitrary power against whose design it was useless to cry. But perhaps old Mrs. Marcusson with her frightening talk about shuttles and threads and dark weavers was right. She had felt as though a force outside herself had hurled her into strange and crazy revolutions quite beyond her power of comprehension or strength to repel. A little shuttle with its load of living thread to be spun into a pattern whose beauty she might never see—oh God! Was that her destiny? No. No. No. Let someone else furnish the harsher motive. Someone who did not shrink from disagreeable tragic things as she did, someone strong and unselfish, devoted to sombre duty like Sarah. The thought brought with it a wave of comfort. It was so obvious, on calmer reflection, that anyone as exquisitely made for the enjoyment of laughter and loveliness as herself could not, even by an arbitrary Fate, be chosen to furnish any dark shadings in the cosmic web. Surely, surely, Josephine Boyen, whose father was a man of consequence with an even greater future before him, was meant for happiness?

She was foolish to be so frightened and upset. She had not been quite so foresighted as Esther, that was all. Esther had made sure her king came to the banquet as well as the enemy. Oh, why had Manfred failed her! She knew he loved her. How could he help it? Oh! Oh! Oh! She flung herself prone on the bed, shivering with sickening revulsion, for suddenly she was feeling again the nightmare of André's devouring possession. Horrible, horrible beast! She hated him. She wished him dead—consigned to the eternal torments his religion prepared for such as he. She would a million times rather die herself than marry him as he begged and implored. The mere thought of meeting him in the street made her physically ill.

Six times he had come to the house and by great good fortune she had been able to bribe Mary to send him away quietly, but it could not go on for ever. He had said when he left her that night he would see papa. . . . Oh God, why don't you strike him dead! She almost screamed and sat up again, tense and wild-eyed, on the edge of the tumbled bed. Well, papa's stubborn

attitude toward Manfred was to blame for it all. He had driven her to the dangerous duplicity practised with variable success by helpless women for millions of years! It was all his fault and consequently his duty to put it right again. What *could be* put right again! . . . She began to cry now pitiably, the tears unheeded falling down her white little face, hands clutched tightly in her lap.

Down in the big front-room Sarah was rattling up and down the old piano. The din sounded like rain, monotonously musical. Sarah was always gusty in her music: giants clambered over mountains, ghosts wailed in valleys, and dead hearts beat again. Soon she would stop. Come home to herself, and the family darning, on a brisk canter along some sea strand where the breakers rolled and thundered. Only with the old piano was shy, awkward Sarah a compelling and vital power. Josephine, weeping, listened with riper understanding. Sober, unattractive Sarah played at make-believe in her music. In the world of sound her soul fared grandly, dispensing judgment in peals of thunder, bestowing rapture with reckless freedom, unquestioned master of an intangible empire whose reality, Josephine dimly perceived, was as indestructible as spirit. "The things of the mind are eternal," Leatrice was always quoting that. She had used to laugh at it. Now its significance was made terribly clear by Sarah's splendid music. Leatrice, too, quite unknowingly played at make-believe. Whatever she did, wherever she went, the saints moved with her. Their shadow hung about her in a cloud freighted with imperishable yearnings, old as man's oldest ascending thought and first cruel sacrifice. Out of which cloud of disembodied virtue something as ruthless and unsparing as the thing which had leaped at her from the lascivious dark of the prairie night, would pounce upon Leatrice and claim her for its own. Shuttles! Shuttles! Shuttles!

Sarah had stopped playing. Now she would come upstairs for her blue cambric all-over apron, neatly ironed and starched and laid out on the bed. She could see it, like a patch of bright sky, through the open door between their rooms. There were always aprons or socks and shirts to be mended on Sarah's bed. Her room was as plain and unadorned and utilitarian as herself. No frilly cushions, no clutter of powders and perfumes, soaps and creams on her prim bureau. No gallery of golden women, pretty cupids and gallant lovers on the walls. No ornaments at all except a bust of ugly old Liszt on the equally ugly combination secretary and bookcase, and a big marine picture full of sombre shadows and threatening power.

She ought to get up and wash her face. Sarah would be sure to make a regular fuss seeing her this way. She tried to rise and found herself faint, a queer sick feeling in her stomach, everything reeling in sudden darkness.

She must not scream. She must not faint. Flaming swords thrust at her from a furnace of fear, the leaping thoughts pierced her. She must not faint! Must not! Must not!

Sarah humming softly entered for her apron. Was Josie asleep, she wondered, glancing with surprise at the rumpled bed, its lace-covered cushions tossed about, some on the floor, and Josie sprawled so oddly. Timid as ever before the sister she worshipped, Sarah tiptoed forward cautiously. Now she could see in profile, lovely as a cameo, Josie's face pale as death against the pink satin coverlet. "Josie! Josie!" Sarah was on her knees in panic, her hands frantically loving. "Josie, darling, what is it?"

Through the pressing fog of her nauseating sensations Josephine heard the fond wail, and sheer fear of what foolish Sarah might do lent her power to fight off the curious faintness. The first lie she could think of must serve. "I bumped my head," she whispered, "on the wardrobe door—the upper one—I—I nearly fainted I guess."

Sarah was so relieved to find her worst dread unjustified she let the fib pass. The wardrobe with its two sets of doors was tightly locked. If Josie chose to lie about what ailed her she could not be seriously ill. Any slight ailment always sent her flying to old Dr. Hartman for fear her complexion, hair or figure might suffer. Yet it seemed to Sarah her face had a faintly greenish tinge and was oddly pinched. For a moment she wondered if the salmon salad they had eaten for lunch could have poisoned Josie, canned fish was not always safe, papa said. But then, the rest of them should have felt indisposed.

Josephine wished nothing less than a discussion of her symptoms and their possible causes. Clinging to her sister she pulled herself upright and found, to her almost hysterical relief, that the odd sensation had passed. She began laughing feebly, "Sarah, you idiot, by your expression of sheeplike melancholy one would think I was dead. Where's mamma?"

"At Illiana Petrovna's, it's Tuesday, dear," said Sarah.

"Oh, silly of me to forget. Did you go for the mail, Sarah?"

"Yes. Nothing but papers and subscription lists for papa and a card from Professor Von Barholme. He won't be back for a fortnight at least, says the weather is nice and all sorts of building going on. A regular boom."

"Papa home yet?" Josie's voice had recovered some of its peremptory snap, very enheartening to Sarah. "But of course, he isn't. You wouldn't have banged the roof off if he were. Give me the hair-brush please, Sarah, I look a fright. Oh, Sarah, be a dear and make me a strong cup of tea, while I dress."

When the willing Sarah returned with the tea Josephine was apparently her lovely self again. Her eyes shone, blue as the bluest cornflowers, a delicate colour suffused her cheeks, her mouth was a loving-cup of cherry-ripe sweetness. The dress she had chosen clung to her lovely figure down to the knees and, as if giddy from the delightful employment, suddenly billowed out in flounces that danced and quivered sensuously at each step. The pale gold of her hair was almost silver seen in the slanting light from the window behind her head. Sarah caught her breath sharply. Josie's sweetness could never be told in words or felt by the coarser senses. Only the strange magic of music could translate the substance of her loveliness into adequate expression, only the heart of a poet could feel and understand the tragedy of her beauty. For something indefinable in the atmosphere, possibly created by the turmoil of Josie's troubled thoughts, or some medium of intuition, revealed this astonishing truth to Sarah: Josie was like those glorious downy moths whose passage across the sky was a miracle of grace and beauty, too exquisite for length of days. This Josephine of palpitating cream and gold could not survive the harsh realities of ordinary existence despite the curious paradox of a quite materialistic nature. Josephine robbed of her fairy beauty by the cruel years would be just as truly destroyed as the pretty moth mouldering on a leaf.

The curious belief came to Sarah that Josephine's soul was her beauty, as Leatrice's was piety, papa's an iron loyalty and mamma's infinite patience. That was the sum of their being so far. Perhaps, as Von Barholme had said one day, there were other lives in which to acquire yet other qualities in the slow evolution of one's soul towards the perfection God desired, and ordained for his creature.

Quite suddenly Josephine turned from the mirror and coming to her kissed her in the pretty, darting way she had when moved. "You're the best ever, Sarah. You make me feel a rotten little beast. I hope you'll be divinely happy at Holy Cross and fetch oodles of medals home for the natives to gape at."

Sarah's plain face was transfigured by this unexpected praise: "Oh, Josie! It is you who should be going. I know how you hate this place. But I expect papa won't ever come to see that girls are different to-day from those of his generation. Want to do things. Be themselves, I mean, without interference from men—even if it is only temporary nonsense, as he calls it." She laughed as a boy might, a short, cheerful little bark of amusement. "You know it's because I'm so hopelessly ugly papa came to believe an exception might be wise in my case. There is nothing temporary about ugly

women. . . . Darling, do you want anything else before I go and help Mary in the kitchen?"

Josephine, balancing a rose-leaf teacup on a cloudy knee, looked at her strangely: "Sarah I wonder how much of that you really believe? Girls being different—wanting to do things. . . . Oh, it's the jargon we sling about, I know Nellie Prix, Leatrice—I." She veiled her eyes under the long brown lashes that cast such endearing shadows on her cheeks, as though what she now had to add was a confidence the most intimate: "Once at a dance, I even overheard poor Julia say the same things to Jennifer—they were easing the wallflower misery by talking independence—you know where it got Julia."

Sarah would have been less astonished if the bronze bust of Liszt had suddenly begun damning the miracle of music. For Josephine was serious. She was not putting on a character for someone's benefit. As a matter of fact, before Sarah she rarely troubled to maintain any pose. Her little rages, tantrums, infrequent tears spent themselves as freely in Sarah's presence as though she had been merely an added stick of furniture upon which it was often convenient to lean. But here was a mood, or the shadow of a mood, so foreign to Josephine who really hated introspection and, like papa, had always concentrated all her energies on getting exactly what she wanted that Sarah was once more plagued with anxiety. Something, certainly was very wrong. Yet if Josie chose not to confide in her she must wait and watch with patience. Picking up the tea-tray she said gravely, "I expect we do talk a lot of rot, Josie. But for all that we are different. I can't imagine any of us doing as mamma did, or Mrs. Marcusson. Bad as she was, I think Leona is more our sort. What I mean is, she had to be bad to get anywhere. There wasn't any better way to get what she wanted."

Josephine stared at her, that queer twisted, cynical smile so out of place on her pretty face. "Perhaps there never will be any better way," she said, almost in a whisper as though she scarcely cared whether Sarah heard or not. "No other way at all—now or ever!"

"Josie! That's horrible."

"Yes. It's horrible. It is much more horrible than you will ever know," said Josephine and, quite as though she had merely agreed upon the excellence of the weather, began rummaging about in her topsy-turvy bureau for a handkerchief to match her dress. "Oh yes, do be a dear, Sarah, and tell mamma I shan't be home till quite late. Nellie Prix is giving a party. Tony's picking me up at Leona's. She's taking us out in that famous car. Tony says he'll buy one if it manipulates the roads to Little River without any broken bones."

Sarah started away, turned in the door to advise, maternally: “Be sure to take a warm coat, Josie. Those things go at an awful rate—thirty miles an hour, papa said—it’s sure to be cold.”

CHAPTER XXII

JOSEPHINE'S activities, on Sarah's departure, would have more than astonished her sister. Reassured from noises in the kitchen that no one would interrupt her she flew to the wardrobe, brought out a small suitcase from the bottom; apricot mules from the little shelf where her many slippers twinkled in a row, and a new silk dressing-gown. From the bureau she added a night-gown, toilet articles, six handkerchiefs and a huge powder-puff. These things packed she hid the suitcase under the bed and sat down at her spindle-legged and wobbly little desk to compose the most disastrous bit of drama ever devised in that house.

The task was not easy despite her facile imagination. An undercurrent of caution intruded with almost paralysing effect. She wrote and rewrote until her pretty head spun and her whole body seemed a solid ache of protest.

Satisfied at last with the two letters she had finished, she glanced at the clock. It was only a quarter after five. Mamma would not be home till six. There was time to slip into the village where she must find some youngster willing to take one of the letters to Manfred at "Glen Haven". She picked up her hat and with pounding pulses left the house.

The garden with its avenues of maple-trees had an air of restrained melancholy grace. Only the hardiest flowers remained. Stocks, asters, stout-hearted pansies and a few brave sweet williams. The burning-bush turned darkly russet made a path to the gate. A light wind, gratifying to her aching head, ran through the ragged branches of the stately old trees, as though anxiously gathering riches of fading memory; all the sweets of summer seen and observed by the eternal trees for their long winter harpings. The sun, low and of deep orange hue shading to scarlet, showed through the half-naked boles, like the flaming herald of some inimitable dawn beyond the last death.

To Josephine the spiritual significance of these imperishable illusions, in which nature clothes her variable moods and unswerving purposes, was lost in the storm of her own rebelling inner consciousness. The letter in her hand seemed to burn into her palm. Conscience, like the brisk little wind in the trees, stirred up a thousand memories. What she contemplated doing was suddenly odious. Curious she should find anything odious after that horror in Von Barholme's cottage. Curious the duplicities of her historical favourites should appear hideous and unspeakably savage in the golden sunset of the quiet garden. For a moment it seemed she must find a better

way, a more human way. And then, as though to rout for ever these belated scruples, she saw André Dupont entering the gate.

All vestige of colour left her face. Trembling she fell back, clutching the fence for support, such fear and loathing in her face it brought an anguished cry from the unhappy young man. "Josie! Don't look like that. Oh, *Mon Dieu*, I am like one mad, I cannot see you. I cannot explain. I am in the dust with remorse."

Because furious resentment and searing humiliation blinded her to everything but the case against him his utter misery escaped her. "Don't come near me!" she cried in a small voice charged with actual venom. "If you do, I'll kill you. If there were any God you'd be dead now! I hate you. Hate you. Go away before I call someone to throw you out."

It was his turn to fall back pale and shaken. His olive skin turned a sickly grey. Beads of sweat broke out on his forehead. For an interminable moment, in which his brown eyes clung to her desperately appealing, he found no words. *Mon Dieu*, she had a right to be angry, the beautiful, chaste young virgin his madness had destroyed. But he loved her. He loved her. That he must offer, not in defence, but in humble expiation. His soul was truly in the dust as he had said. "But listen, my adored one," his voice was hoarse and strange, "love is a madness—*Mon Dieu!* Have I not wept, have I not wished myself dead. . . . But if you will only forgive me, we can be married and go away. To those places you want to see. I am not so poor _____"

"I don't care what you are!" she hurled at him, stiff as a marble creature endowed with mechanical powers of jerky movements and unnatural speech. "I never want to see you again, do you understand? Never. Never. I'd die rather than marry the unspeakable brute you are!"

Such was his genuine contrition and mad devotion that even this wild exaggeration failed to draw any defensive retort. So convinced was the poor young man of the enormity of his offence against his sweet beloved, it had never occurred to him to assign any blame to his temptress. To offer in self-justification the obvious excuse of an opportunity entirely created by Josephine. He loved her. His remorse was so keen it had driven him to his father confessor. A stern man, grown kindly through his tireless struggle against a persistent tendency towards a cynical contempt for the follies of mankind. A small, grave man who had heard André's agonized confession in the dusk of his patch of garden under the wall of his miniature church on the banks of Little River. Yes, he had done ill, said the father. But the good God had wide pity for true penitence. That the little maid shrank from him, hiding her hurt was proof of the evil he had perpetrated, and all but absolved

her from guilt. For what can a small, frail girl do in the battle of sexes, save the holy saints guard her? This one was perhaps not nurtured in the things of the spirit which give superhuman strength. . . . Wise in the ways of faltering humanity the father had spoken calmly, surely. Pointing out for André the sure reparation. Matrimony, in which he might with patience extract the sting from the little maid's heart, and both together observing God's sacred covenant they would find enduring happiness. But something more deadly than humiliation and wounded pride looked at him from Josephine's blazing eyes. Hate! Unrelieved, and implacable hatred leapt at him like swords leaving a coolness of death in his bones.

"But—you can't understand!" he cried. "To not marry now—Josie before God I ask you to believe I honour, love, adore and beg you to be my wife."

She took a step forward: "André, will you go now before I call someone and make a scene," she said in a dead, cold voice that made icy streams of the warm rivers of his blood. She had a look of insanity, an unnatural luminosity of the eyes which, wide and glaring, roved restlessly, seeing yet unseeing. The horrible thought flashed upon him that the physical shock she had suffered was unseating her reason.

Determined to see her father on the first possible occasion he took a miserable farewell of the unhappy girl, whose pale fury was to pursue him down the tortuous valleys of the dark years ahead.

When his somewhat stocky figure had vanished up the road Josephine, now fixed in her purpose, picked up her dainty skirts and ran lightly as a young doe through the maple grove. On a tiny patch of indifferent land bordering on "The Maples" a poor widow with three children eked out a precarious living. She was a squatter on Boyen property and sometimes helped at "The Maples" when work was especially heavy. Her youngest son often ran errands for Josephine. He was only too delighted now to earn a whole dollar for the cheerful task of delivering a note to the young master of "Glen Haven".

Satisfied, she returned to the house, telling Sarah she had changed her mind about going to Leona's so early. At supper she was unusually gay. A little unstrung, Oline observed, absentmindedly, and put it down to late hours. She had been so busy with the annual church bazaar and harvest supper she hardly knew what the girls had been doing. Except, of course, that one never need worry about Sarah. Yet it was sweet hearing Josie's gay little rippling laughter and watching the play of rapidly changing emotions in her face.

The mood was so pleasant Oline was moved to recite a little nonsense to herself. Illiana Petrovna had been full of gossip concerning Leona. The way her house was shooting up with the speed of a mushroom. Which was no wonder considering the number of men working on it. The marvels of convenience it was to contain; a complete light and water system and two bathrooms, mind, as though Miss Shultz was now so modest she could not share a bathroom with a lawful husband! Leona's green canoe, her pancake hats, her snorting demon of a car and the pale ghost of the poet on the horizon all made excellent conversation. Then Greta had arrived. Very brisk and more efficient-looking than ever, said Oline, with Manfred docilely carrying parcels of sugar, minced beefsteak and tea.

Josephine pushed aside her dessert. "He stayed, I suppose?" she inquired as casually as a galloping heart permitted. Foolish girl! mused Oline, smiling gently, would she continue in her absurd infatuation with a boy plainly indifferent? "No, my dear." She was glad to offer what she divined was welcome consolation. "Halvor was in town, he left almost immediately. They had all been for a ride in Leona's car." Oline laughed. "Halvor's delighted approval of the monstrous contraption can only be equalled by Illiana Petrovna's delirium. Both are convinced it will completely replace the horse and carriage, and Halvor has ordered Ephraim to purchase the fastest kind made."

The rest of the conversation passed by unheeded for Josephine. As soon as possible she escaped to her room to finish dressing for her party, she said. Oline stopped by for a word of advice about the weather, on her way to see a sick woman in the village. "It looks threatening, Josie," she said, "better carry those thin slippers, dear, and take a raincoat. I'll have Mary make a pot of chocolate when she gets papa's ready and leave some in the warming closet for you."

Josephine, nervously watching the clock, and wanting to be alone, mumbled a promise. Oline's preoccupation with other matters seemed to lift and in the clearer light her pretty young daughter appeared changed. Strain and anxiety underlay the fixed smile on her face, an unfamiliar brittleness of manner indicated an inner struggle, kept in check at nerve-racking cost. But she knew the futility of suggestion. Like her father, Josie acknowledged no power but her own and accepted advice badly. However, as she turned to leave, Oline said: "You look fagged, Josie. Why not lie down for an hour? If you want me when you come home, don't hesitate, darling. I'll most likely be awake anyway."

At last the time was come! Sarah was banging about in the kitchen, listening cheerfully to Mary's grumbling about the hardness of the water and

the stiffness of the pump on her rusty sink, the trouble of setting bread. Sarah would alleviate these evils by offering to wipe the dishes, pump a huge jug full of water and knead the dough. With no fear of interruption, now mamma was gone, Josephine took the second letter from under the blotting-pad on her desk and hastily tiptoeing to papa's room, set it prominently on his bed-table—upright beside the Bible which he dutifully read each night. Then, slipping back to her room, she caught up the little suitcase and stole out of the house in something like panic.

Dusk like a smoky, sweet-scented screen veiled the village lights, pale-yellow flickering stars, that added a touch of unreality to the night. Josephine stood still, her hand pressed tightly against a little breast that seemed on fire. The sudden stillness, which seemed alive and waiting for her, momentarily deprived her of action. Then the little hand closed in a cruel fist striking the fearsome breast. This time the terrible dark with its sensuous vibrations should not destroy her. No, she, little humiliated Josephine, would turn the poison of its malice against feeble women into victory.

CHAPTER XXIII

SARAH sat mending in her room when her father, more flustered than she ever remembered seeing him before, came rushing in without knocking as was his irreproachable habit. "Where is your sister?" he demanded curtly, eyeing Sarah in a way which seemed to suggest that if anything was wrong with Josephine she was to blame for it.

"Why, she went to a party, papa. To the Prix's, I think," Sarah added cautiously. Without a word he dashed out and down the stairs. In a second she heard him leave the house. What on earth had upset him, she wondered, and accustomed to digging for facts for herself, stole across to his room. Josephine often left notes for papa; she surmised that one of annoying nature had been left him now.

But when she found it Sarah sat down on the bed, feeling sick for the first time in her robust life. With eyes almost starting from her head she reread the damning letter:

"DEAR PAPA,

"I am writing to point out that it is quite useless to try running other people's lives. To assure yourself of this, come to Von Barholme's cottage at ten to-night. What you will find will explain what I should hesitate to write.

"JOSIE."

Dazed, Sarah searched for reasonable explanation, but nothing even faintly bordering reasonableness came to her aid. Josie was planning some awful prank. No. Sarah, who knew herself possessed of uncanny intuition at times, felt in her bones that here was worse than mischief. Then came flooding back the terrifying memory of Josephine's peculiar behaviour earlier in the day—her queer talk, her strange reference to Julia. Oh, dear God! Sarah jumped up and flew back to Josephine's room. In the wastebasket she found confirmation of her suspicion. Josie had written Manfred as well as papa! The torn bits of discarded paper, although minute, gave up that horrid intelligence. Now she remembered, too, how startled she had seemed when mamma spoke of Manfred's being in town.

Something had to be done quickly. Papa, thanks to a heavy unwillingness to be forced into any action not actually of his own choice, would, in all likelihood, wait till the last possible moment before complying even with Josie's suggestion. For Sarah knew papa would never for a

moment connect his favourite daughter in a personal way with this obnoxiously suggestive letter. Nor must he ever suspect. He, and dear mamma, must never know that Josephine evidently was staging what the books she fed on would politely refer to as an “assignment”. Hurriedly flinging on hat and coat and snatching up the tell-tale bits of paper, she ran down the back stairs into the kitchen, where she disposed of the paper, and out the back way, taking all the cross-cuts she knew to Illiana Petrovna’s cottage.

Greta was still there, curled on a lumpy sofa like an orange-coloured kitten, revelling in her infrequent leisure and Illiana’s flowing gossip. At Sarah’s abrupt appearance a queer silence fell on them all. Greta, snapping upright like a soldier, demanded harshly: “Well? What has happened now? Nothing pleasant, to judge from your expression.”

“It’s Josie,” gasped Sarah, turning pale. “She’s made a date at Von Barholme’s cottage with Manfred—and—wrote papa to come and see for himself. . . .”

Greta’s golden eyes narrowed and the firm line of her scarlet mouth was slightly cruel. “Well? What’s that to me? If Manfred meets her in a cottage and papa gives his blessing what have I to do with it?”

Sarah began wringing her hands. “Greta, don’t you see it’s something she’s thought up out of books? A way to get Manfred (poor Sarah blushed to say it). A crazy plan for making papa change his mind about the Marcussons—don’t you see? Oh, Greta, you’ve got to stop her. She won’t listen to me. Mamma would only make her do something worse. And papa worships her so it would almost kill him to find her less perfect than he believes.”

“Yes, yes. But what makes you think she will listen to me?” Greta interrupted impatiently.

Sarah replied with simple honesty quite unaware of its bitter sting. “Because she knows Manfred loves you, not her. Oh, Greta, you must make her see, understand that now she’s a woman she can’t keep on having everything her own way like she did when we were kids and gave in to her all the time. I should not say it, but if it hadn’t been for his accident and those visits to the hospital when she got imagining herself as some devoted mistress—or heaven knows what—(poor Sarah gulped) this never would have happened!”

Greta began putting on the coat Illiana Petrovna had brought forward. “So you think it’s another story-book episode? That she really does not love him—just imagines it?”

“Oh, I’m sure of it!” cried simple Sarah. “Why, look at the way she carried on with André Dupont after Manfred made her mad. One would have thought she could not live without him. Now she even refuses to see him.”

“Which proves nothing,” Illiana Petrovna interposed curtly. “Run along then, my little rabbit, if you must go hunting nasty snares for yourself. But I warn you I don’t like it. Crazy young girls in love, whether they imagine it or not, are dangerous lunatics. God bless us, I should know!”

Quite convinced that all was now well, Sarah went back to the house and Greta grimly made her way to the cottage. Lights were burning everywhere. “All set for the show!” muttered she and in short temper banged impatiently on the door. Josephine’s honeyed voice, a little shaken, invited her in.

She was alone. Her hair hung loosely about her shoulders, and to Greta’s astonished eyes it seemed the shell-pink flesh showed through the trifling gown she wore. Flushing furiously, Josie snatched up a dressing-gown. It was then Greta realized that the filmy concoction through which the tempting flesh showed alluringly was a night-dress. “My God, you little fool!” she cried, “what a getup for a date with a decent chap. What’s the matter with your head? Does it never sprout an intelligent idea?”

Josephine blazed back at her, a cat for fury, hardly knowing and certainly not caring what she said. But throughout the barrage Greta’s golden eyes, cold now as inanimate topaz, never wavered in their utterly impersonal gaze. When Josephine ran out of breath she said calmly and coldly: “Now that’s off your chest, try putting on your clothes. You’re coming home. You look sick, talk like an idiot, and should be spanked. I’m sure on second thought you don’t want your father to find you.”

“That’s where you need to think again!” Josie almost screamed at her, clutching with hands that shook the flapping folds of the dressing-gown. “He shall find me! He must. It’s the only way to make him give in about Manfred.”

“And what if Manfred should not come? Won’t that take a bit of explaining for papa?”

“*This* time he will come!” Josephine shot back, hysterically. “This time he won’t fail because, if you must know, I sent the invitation in your name.”

Greta caught her by the arms and shook her till the soft golden hair flew about like mist blinding them both. “You liar!” she cried through clenched teeth. “You wouldn’t dare! You’re a spoiled, conceited, irritating little cat, but I can’t believe you’d do anything so rotten. Ah, shut up!” Her exasperation increased, for Josephine had burst into hysterical weeping. “Shut up! Save the tantrums for someone soft hearted.” Roughly she thrust

the sobbing girl on to the couch before the fire and hastily fetched water from the tiny kitchen: "Here, drink this and pull yourself together!" she commanded, beginning to harbour faint misgivings about her ability to cope with the unstrung creature. "Drink it or I'll dash it in your face!"

Josephine put out a hand that shook so badly the water spilled on the apricot silk which at once seemed to grip the little knees more jealously. The face she raised was no longer furious; misery the most acute showed there, and her streaming eyes were so piteous that Greta guiltily felt as though she were fiendishly tormenting a baby. After swallowing a drink or two, she set the glass down and clasping her hands together as a frightened child may, she moaned: "Greta, I'm sorry you hate me so! But you've got to understand—I must marry Manfred. I must!" She began to cry again, softly this time. Greta, brows wrinkled, stared at her helplessly. What on earth did she mean? In anyone else the inference might be plain—but Josie was such an inveterate liar with her play-acting. . . . Josie continued miserably, "I truly must, Greta—I just couldn't go on living otherwise." She stiffened a little, listening. Surely that was a horse galloping? The certainty gave her strength. Jumping to her feet she made a last appeal. "Greta, that's him now. Don't interfere, for God's sake. After all, I've always thought of him as mine. Always! And you know he couldn't possibly marry a girl like you anyway."

Greta let that pass. She was thinking furiously. The clock in the corner pointed to a quarter to ten. Papa was due at ten! Whatever this craziness meant John Boyen must not find his daughter in such a state and, to his orthodox mind, unpardonably compromising position.

She acted like a thunderbolt. Her strong hands, half lifting, half dragging, hustled the protesting Josephine into the kitchen and rudely divested her of the alluring dressing-gown and the silly mules. In fierce afterthought she flung her own woollen coat round the shivering, half-naked figure and with a curt demand for absolute silence, shut and locked her in.

She was none too soon. Manfred's slightly dragging step was already on the porch. His expression, as he entered, would have made her laugh at any other time. Now she pounced on him: "Quick! there's not a moment to lose. Here, give me your hat." She tossed it unceremoniously behind the couch.

"But I say, what's this all about?" He grinned anxiously as she kicked off her sensible shoes, tossed them after the hat, and grimly wriggled her toes into something of silk and feathers resembling two powder-puffs. "Your note was such a surprise. I couldn't quite make it out."

"Surprised me too," Greta assented ironically, and began peeling off her stiff cotton dress as unconcernedly as a boy yanks off his shirt at a

swimming hole. She paid no attention to his astonishment, which had a quality of vague indignation behind it. Slim and straight as a boy she stood in her plain white petticoat, her proud bronze head turned in a listening attitude. Yes, that was the sound of wheels in the near distance. The time had come! Darting to the couch she snatched up the apricot silk. The touch of it on her clean strong flesh sent a chill of revulsion through her. The quick rush of blood to her face was a burning flame that raced from brow to breast winged with death and left her white as marble.

“Greta! For God’s sake——” Manfred exclaimed, and stopped. He too had heard the carriage, close now—rapidly drawing closer. . . . Fantastic thoughts shaped in his mind, multitudes of enraging possibilities born in the short moment of his jealous doubt. Then his angry gaze met her clear golden eyes mutely imploring and infinitely tragic.

A shock of self-loathing seared him. How could he have suspected Greta of the foul things his beastly mind imagined! “Darling,” he laughed shakily, “whatever damn nonsense this is I’m yours to the finish. But couldn’t you just explain——”

She seemed not to hear him. Which indeed was true, for the hammering of her heart made a terrible din in her ears, a paralysing confusion through which only the thunder of John Boyen’s carriage wheels, halting with a grinding screech before the house, could penetrate. With a barely perceptible shudder of revulsion, Greta sprang into action. “Here, old dear! Where’s your gallantry?” she laughed loudly, pulling him down beside her on the couch. “Kiss me, you fool!” she hissed in his ear. “Put your arms around me.” With anything but love she thumped his head to her heaving little breast. “If you say a word, I’ll poison you!” the fierce voice whispered. “Gladly, damn it!”

They sprang apart guiltily enough when John Boyen entered. “Ha!” said he, “Ha-ha!” To anyone less preoccupied there might have been discernible in the gentleman’s manner and voice a faint, gloating relief rather than pained shock. “So that is how you employ your leisure, my girl? Very illuminating! Very! Yet hardly conduct befitting a trusted employee—not to say a nurse.”

“Mr. Boyen, you’re damnably mistaken!” Manfred flared at him. “What I mean, sir——” he floundered helplessly, aware how ludicrous any explanation must appear in face of such abominable evidence. “You can’t jump at conclusions. The whole thing is a beastly joke——”

“Oh, what’s the use.” Greta’s cold little voice cut like a knife. Her smile, the way she lolled to his side and put a hand on his arm was outrageously

foreign and fiendishly convincing. “Mr. Boyen will spare us tiresome explanations, I am sure. Waste of time. Sorry to have made a mess of it—but that’s my hard luck.”

“Greta, you’re mad. I’ll not be party to any such outrageous lie as this! As a joke it’s a complete failure and has gone far enough. Mr. Boyen——” he turned to the contemptuous John, “I’m as much in the dark as you—more probably.” He laughed in a way very irritating to John, for it seemed to imply a thousand disparagements. “But you’ve got to believe me. I only just arrived from ‘Glen Haven’——”

John Boyen smiled disagreeably. “That may well be so. It hardly affects the essential nature of my grievance. Miss Holmquist,” he coughed, found his watch-chain and assumed the fine political manner, “you will readily see that your presence in the hospital can no longer be tolerated. I shall report your conduct to Dr. Beaur and the matron at once. You need not appear nor expect recommendation of any sort. I shall see to that! If you are wise, Miss Holmquist, I suggest that you leave Maple Bluffs quietly and speedily.” John’s heavy dignity seemed to swell to ponderous proportions, making simple speech impossible. Something biblical was required. The tasty bit about the ingratitude of a thankless child being like a serpent’s tooth tempted him. But on second thought it seemed slanderous to himself. Even metaphorically speaking he could not conceive of this brazen red-head as his child. On the whole, a firm pontifical dismissal of the whole disgraceful business was best.

With a wave of a fat hand, as though commanding some invisible mountain to be removed, he said: “For your father’s sake, who has served me so long and well, I shall attempt to have your dismissal brought about quietly. . . . As for you, young man——” He just slightly turned to Manfred on his way to the door, “Miss Holmquist was right. Explanations are entirely superfluous in the case of a Marcusson!”

The door closed with a bang. Manfred, grey of face and completely mystified, waited for Greta to say something. Instead of which she shoved him aside, ran to the kitchen door, and from the dimness within dragged forth a half-fainting creature all rosy crêpe and cloudy showers of silvery-gold hair.

Even in grief Josephine had not been able to tolerate common wool on her dainty flesh. Like some wistful fallen angel she swayed on her tiny bare feet, and through her shame ran a quick ripple of pride. For Manfred’s start of surprise was followed by a quite unconscious betrayal of quickened sensibilities. And she was very lovely—even her little toe-nails were unmarred and pink as a baby’s.

“Well, there’s your explanation!” Greta’s voice fell like showers of rain. “Our little Josie must have her pretty games, you know! Now if it’s not asking too much, would you mind telling Manfred why you signed my name to your dear little note?”

“Yes, I will!” cried Josephine, desperately not waiting for the dark thing she read in his angry face to find words. “I *had* to see him. I knew you had him hypnotized, Greta Holmquist, as you have poor Veder all these years and that new Interne. That’s why! And I’d do it again!” she concluded defiantly.

Manfred was suddenly very calm, so calm he felt he could quite pleasantly watch her extermination. “You planned it all, I suppose? Papa’s cheerful visit? My timely arrival—Greta’s ruined career?”

“Papa’s visit, yes!” she snapped back, fumbling into the dressing-gown Greta had flung to the floor. “For the rest, Greta can blame herself—or Sarah, who sent her up here to spoil everything.”

“Josie, for heaven’s sake, aren’t you ever going to grow up?” Manfred appealed to her in helpless exasperation. “Don’t you even realize what your crazy foolishness has done? You must have heard what your father said—what he thinks. Damn it all, don’t stand there looking pathetic! You’ll have to do something about this, Josephine!”

Her reply, quite distinct yet scarcely more than a passionate whisper, startled them both. “You’ll marry me, Manfred, or I do nothing at all!” Unreasoning fury blazed in her, “There wouldn’t be anything to explain if papa had found us as I planned. He would have *had* to keep quiet.” She was shaking now and, as though to relieve her own torment by stabbing another, flashing a cruel look at Greta, she plunged on: “I should have told him about our night together—*that* would have made him glad to forget his grudge against your father.”

“Hell!” Manfred exploded, “you would think of something like that! But you’ve forgotten that slander is something we Marcussons thrive on. If you weren’t such a vain little fool you’d have known your crazy scheme wouldn’t get you anywhere—Josie, if I believed for a minute you weren’t acting—my God! I think I’d kill you—I’d kill you with joy, for anyone so lovely to look at, with an utterly filthy mind, ought to be exterminated! Well——? Why don’t you say something? Are you a coward as well as a liar and cheat?”

When she toppled over in a dead faint he only laughed. So sure he was her impersonation had merely made the logical, strategical move expected of

outraged feeble femininity. Greta's icy, level voice calling for water shocked him back to sanity.

Over the inert little figure they stared at one another in silent consternation and solemn, searching, questioning. What Greta saw was a thoroughly dismayed young man, torn with shame and pity, but certainly free of guilt. While Manfred caught, for an instant, a warm gleam of enduring faith in the wide amber eyes that affected him like the reassuring grip of a friendly hand. And at the same instant, like a dash of freezing water, the significance of Josie's accusation, as it must seem to Greta, struck him with deadly forcefulness. Oh, Lord! In acute consternation his eyes fixed on the small, dainty creature whose very stillness had now a fearsome aspect, as though some nameless doom bode there—some unfathomed vein of black tragedy lay fallow in that fair white body. . . .

Gently, Greta eased the golden head on to her knees: "You had better leave, Manfred. I'll get her home. She won't want to see you now, poor kid."

"But, Greta——" he began, and stopped miserably, constrained by the luckless knowledge that even to implore belief in him implied a caddish slur on poor Josie. After all, what did his feeling matter? Greta, alone against the world, was soon to be heaped with undeserved shame! The injustice of it made sharp panic in his normally cheerful mind. God! What *did* one do in such abominable circumstances? "Greta——" he began again, rising stiffly. "At least I can explain to Oscar—about you I mean. I'll go to him at once. He's got to understand! Oh, darling—I think you're an awful little idiot to do it—but Hartman and Oscar must know the truth."

Her quick smile had an infinitely enheartening quality. "Hartman needn't be told much. He adores Josie. Old Oscar is a brick. He won't fuss. He'll understand there's no other way—and don't let him tell matron. . . . No one—positively no one else must know about Josie—promise?"

He looked at her steadily for a long moment, something of Ephraim's cold, half-quizzical appraisal in his dark expression. "I suppose you understand what it will mean, Greta? The carping, slanderous, backbiting? With anyone but me this damn thing might have passed for a harmless indiscretion," he laughed mirthlessly, "but to spend an hour alone in a house with a Marcusson—my God!"

"I know. I know. Don't worry, old dear. If you can stand it, I can." A tiny, crooked grin appeared. "Sorry to mess up the old escutcheon. But it's grandma I'm really worried about. . . . Oh, Manfred—if you could—I mean, would you break it for me. I'd be sure to crack up and gum things

generally. . . . Poor old thing, she—she’s so idiotic about her fool grandchild!”

“Of—of course I’ll tell her, Greta,” he promised huskily. “She’ll probably throw me out—as she ought. But I’ll do my best. . . . Darling—promise to let me help in every possible way? It will be little enough, thanks to the charity of virtuous Maple Bluffs!”

“I promise. Now run! . . . I can’t stand much more,” said Greta.

Which showed how little she knew or valued her remarkable fortitude under stress. For Josephine regained consciousness only to drift from whimpering misery to almost insane hysteria and back to abject heart-wrenching tears. It was harassing enough in the physical sense to cope with the frantic young creature, for her paroxysms were those of a delirious patient. But the strain of Greta’s moral forces was infinitely harder. Josephine’s babblings put completely to rout any remaining glimmer of hope that her case was imaginary and not desperate. Actual chills raced up and down Greta’s spine, hearing her babble of André—of loathing and despair. With infinite patience, and gentleness sprung from genuine pity, she managed, eventually, to get her quieted enough to listen with pathetic meekness to what appeared the best immediate solution of her difficulty. While she hastily boiled tea over Jaegar’s smelly little oil burner, and Josephine dragged on her clothes, Greta enumerated cheerfully what should be done. The nonsense about herself and Manfred would soon blow over. Josie was not to fret about that. She was to go on as usual. Forgetting the distressing incident which had grown to such alarming proportion in her mind. After all, lied Greta, the worst seldom happened (oh, damn men! thought she) anyway the sensible thing was not to cry before one had spilt the milk. She quite appreciated that Josie’s experience had been frightful (her lack of sense, anyway!) but, really, the most frightful part was holding the thought of it so tenaciously. That way lay madness. “Let go, Josie, old dear,” she counselled, “what’s done is done. There’s a lot of patter peddled out about a stiff upper lip, but it’s fair sense. The best thing would be a little trip somewhere—why not suggest it to your father.”

“Yes,” Josie agreed, docilely drinking her tea, “oh, yes—yes.” She would have agreed to anything from sheer weariness. And she was pathetically grateful for Greta’s offer to brush her hair and bathe her swollen face, and submitted to these ministrations with the meekness of utter fatigue.

Yet the trip back to town was less difficult than either had anticipated. The air was cold and bracing. Hearts may ache, but nature works her various miracles, or mischiefs, notwithstanding. As her fires had descended upon

poor Josephine regardless of individual preference, so her vitalizing powers energized her fainting forces now.

At the gate she turned to Greta, putting out her hands like a contrite child. "Oh, try not to hate me, Greta. I—I didn't mean any of this. . . . I don't know *why* it happened!"

"Now, now! Put on the little forgetting bonnet, Josie. I guess none of us know why any darn thing happens. Don't worry about me. I'm tired of this hole anyway."

When Josephine came tiptoeing into the lower hall her first reaction was instant and awful fear. Papa came out from his room, almost running, his tasselled nightcap bobbing like a cork in water when he thumped down the stairs and his red velvet dressing-gown napping like angry wings behind him. But, when her frightened eyes lifted, she perceived he was not angry. Something she had never seen before shone in his face, a fierce light of pride and overflowing devotion. "My little one!" His voice hurt her terribly with its doting worshipful note. "You look pale. . . . Papa's little girl must remember even young bodies need rest." His arms closed round her and, oh, it was good! Good! Papa adored her so. How horrible of her to have dreamt of destroying his wonderful faith in her! She clung to him, summoning all her forces, even laughing a little lest she burst into lamentations.

He piloted her into the kitchen where the old range glowed with mellow fire and himself poured and sweetened and stirred the hot chocolate which to his thinking was an unequalled bedtime comfort. To Josie this simple act was deeply touching. Never to her recollection had papa demeaned himself with such trifles before. He had something intimate to share with her. It came, and almost threw her into a panic again. "My dear, dear child," John began as though with solemn benediction, "if you only knew how I praise God for your goodness and virtue! My darling, you did right to warn me about to-night. . . . My child, with humility I confess that for a moment I was vile enough to suspect my innocent pet of an indiscretion. I even telephoned the Priors! When Nellie told me you were somewhere in the garden with Tony, such was my relief—and such my shame on perceiving the true nature of it, I felt that God should smite me for a miserable blasphemer! It made me more gentle with the real culprit. For was I not being shown the fulfillment of our Lord's wisdom—that everything bears fruit after its own kind? Yes, yes. I reminded myself that that poor unprincipled girl had no moral resources on which to draw. Bitter criticism was unwarranted. To anyone less miserably placed I might have applied a little beneficial censure. But I doubt that Greta Holmquist would have listened—much less understood me. It seemed best merely to dismiss her."

Josephine hazarded feebly: “*Must* you, papa? I mean—she really *is* a capable girl. And—oh, papa, she does so want to make things easier for her grandmother.”

“My charitable sweet!” John’s eyes misted over. “Come now, you must go to bed. Trust papa not to forget old Illiana Petrovna if she stood in actual need.”

“Oh, dearest papa! For my sake, at least promise not to say anything against Greta getting in somewhere else? I couldn’t stand it, papa. I’d feel so to blame.”

“But I can hardly recommend her, my child. Moral integrity is what one leans on in a nurse. Nevertheless, for your sake, unless I am faced with the obvious duty to do otherwise I shall refrain from reporting the worst.”

John fell asleep in a state of grace thoroughly satisfied with his own sharp beneficence. With no blasphemous intent he was equally satisfied with the Deity (in whose likeness he believed himself made, not suspecting the reverse was true) whose remarkable wisdom decreed that figs should not put forth thorns. An elevating observation, doubtless very comforting to fig consumers, though perhaps of slight avail to the foolish worshippers of brier roses.

But John slept. Undisturbed by hints of malicious humour in a universe whose ordering had heretofore seldom interfered with his comfortable digestion.

CHAPTER XXIV

FOR GRETA the hardest thing to bear was not the occasional cuts she received during the next few days, but the almost benevolent acceptance of her escapade. It was as though each virtuous mortal wrapped his shining mantle a little closer and graciously admitted the infallibility of a God who chose that some should be destined for righteousness and others for damnation. Dr. Beaur had made it easier at the hospital. Indeed, thanks to his previous explanation, Matron Kelly frankly shocked John Boyen by flatly denying this heavy unctuousness about rectitude and virtue and moral niceties. "Rats!" exploded the lady, "a girl may kick over the traces and still be a damn good nurse!" And out she had marched, defiant as a brigand about to order a wholesale execution of peaceable citizens. This generosity in a woman she deeply admired and the staunch backing of Oscar and Dr. Hartman, made the sickening smiles and sly glances levelled at her, like so many contorted magnifying glasses, less intolerable. That is, until gossip pried out her supposed paramour and gales of glee shook the malicious. Ha! Ha! Had they not always known it? That handsome young devil was a true son of his father. And out came the Marcusson skeletons in a damning flutter of scented petticoats and scarlet sins.

To Greta, who had always fought her own battles openly as a boy, it was unbearable to sit back helpless while foul-mouthed, stupid animals attributed to Manfred sensations and desires and nasty little deeds his healthy normalcy and fine artistic temperament made impossible. And yet when Oscar took advantage of her misery to point out how easily she might stem the hateful tide, she turned on him like a yellow fury. Did he really think Manfred was the sort of stick to thank her for turning coward now? Did he imagine she could love him if he did? Did he dare even think either of them needed the approbation of miserly creatures whose souls were already dead in their putrid carcasses! Had he forgotten that despite his smug god-almightiness of manner John Boyen had really been her benefactor? Well, she was not forgetting any of it: he had helped her father, buried her poor little mother and kept grandmamma and herself for years. Yes—and to his eternal credit he had seldom made much hint of it. Fine sort of duck she'd be to reward him by turning the hell hounds on Josie!

So she was left to her desolate packing, sweetened a little by stepmamma Tillie's unsuspected kindness in the form of a knitted sweater and a box of pretzels. Red-eyed from angry weeping and with little Fritz on her arm, she came to tell Greta that neither papa nor she thought a little love

was so terrible. Manfred came every day, laughing at her dismay, and the lifted eyebrows of the village. Joking with grandmamma and helping to bring in the dahlia bulbs as though nothing had happened.

But at home he lived in dread of the hour when the whispering slander should reach his mother, now happily immersed in preparations for his departure. It came, as often happens, in the midst of cheerful occupation. They were clustered about his trunk, Isabella arguing with Leatrice about the shoe-compartment, when Ephraim entered with one of the Dupont hired men. They had just returned from a duck shooting and were cold and hungry. Ephraim wanted the man fed before sending him home. Leatrice ran out to tell Olga for her hearing was no longer dependable.

When she came back an extraordinary change had occurred. The room bristled with suppressed antagonism and everyone in it seemed in a paralysing trance. Then her father's voice rang out metallically: "You seem sure of yourself, m'sieu! That what you repeat is true? But may I remind you that we of 'Glen Haven' set small store by idle gossip."

The tone angered the foolish fellow. "The girl—she is already fired. I have it from Helene my cousin, whose leg she rubbed each morning. The whole town—she knows! *Mon Dieu*, yes. That red-head she spent the night alone with a man in m'sieu the professor's cottage. Such truth, he is not gossip. . . . If m'sieu the captain but knew the man in the case—ha! perhaps the gossip he would set more store by it!"

Manfred strode swiftly from the big windows where he had been watching the riotous flight of crows over a short corn-field. "You err slightly, m'sieu." His voice was almost gentle in its contemptuous mockery. "I deeply regret to inform you it was only *part* of the night. A very little part of the night! M'sieu will pardon the correction—I speak for the man in the case."

A queer expression half smile, half derision flitted across Ephraim's dark face. That might be himself speaking. A young, proudly scornful, edition of himself. Then he observed the grey pallor of poor Isabella's cheek, her dark eyes fixed with sudden misgiving and fear on her beloved son. Without ceremony he hustled the mischief-maker off to the kitchen and Olga's hot coffee.

Halvor's sharp voice snapped like a whip in the ensuing silence. "Now then, my proud cockerel, what's all this rubbish about?"

"Exactly what you heard, grandmother. I met Greta for an hour at the Barholme cottage, which I should think was no one's business but my own!

But the whole filthy town leaps to a vile conclusion, and as a consequence Greta gets sacked.”

“Just how came the whole town to know, may I ask?” the sly old dame pursued. “Are lovers so stupid nowadays they can’t find cover from prying eyes to bill and coo?”

“Sorry, grandmother. I’d rather not talk about it,” he shrugged. “Someone saw me, I suppose—or recognized my horse at the gate—what does it matter anyway.”

“But, my son——” pain quivered in Isabella’s voice. “It does matter. It matters terribly to me. . . . I couldn’t endure this sort of thing all over again. And I can’t believe it of you! Oh, Manfred, there must be some quite simple explanation.”

“Which no one else would believe!” Halvor interposed. “Don’t be tragic, Isabella. A young man can’t be raised entirely on sweetened pap. The world has survived worse catastrophes than this. If the boy wants to create a mystery out of a silly indiscretion, for pity’s sake leave him to his medicine.”

Leatrice darted to Isabella’s chair, her hands falling protectively on her shoulder. “I’m not caring about Manfred or his medicine,” she cried, “but I do believe in telling the truth. If he won’t, I will. For there’s plenty can be said, and it’s not so simple either.”

“Leatrice!” Manfred’s exclamation rang like a shot. “For heaven’s sake, mind your own business, for once, can’t you?”

“That’s exactly what I’m doing. It is my business seeing that mamma doesn’t suffer just to let you play the gallant for Josie!” she retorted, with quick choler.

“For Josie?” Halvor repeated, casting a surprised, faintly withering look at her grandson’s lowering features. “How comes Josephine into this toothsome family scandal?”

Before he could head her off Leatrice replied with the calm fluency of an attorney reading an irritating will to doubting and rather stupid clients. “To begin with, Manfred got a note about eight o’clock that night. Little Johnny Creel brought it. The handwriting was not Greta’s. If he hadn’t been so worked up about it he might have recognized Josie’s silly little curly-tail letters! It puzzled me at the time why he should fly to her so promptly after consistently running away for weeks. Now it’s quite obvious she tricked him to come by resorting to something about Greta. Probably used her name, knowing he’d be too blindly excited to suspect anything wrong! But

something must have gone badly haywire, and to save Josie's precious name Greta takes the sack."

Halvor sat a little more straightly in her chair. An odd light on her withered old face. "Well, Manfred, is this true? It sounds mad enough to be true."

Coldly as Ephraim might have replied, he answered her, head high. "I can hardly accuse my virtuous sister of lying. Anyone so expert in ferreting out other people's affairs must know the truth. But so far as I'm personally concerned when I say I went to meet Greta that ends it."

"Maybe so. Young men, or old for that matter, have the nice habit of finality in such things. The girl, of course, never matters! However, I am curious to know if Miss Holmquist had anything to do with this delightfully asinine resolution which you doubters believe to be nobly gallant as Leatrice says."

His smouldering anger broke leash. "That's contemptibly unfair! You know perfectly well that Greta matters above everything to me. Can you really believe I'd let these beastly things be flung at her without saying a word if she hadn't muzzled me with a crazy promise? Do you think I feel proud of myself knowing the damn Marcusson reputation would be quite enough to ruin any decent girl!"

Isabella cried out, as from pain. "No! No! It must not be. Dear God, I know how deeply some wounds penetrate! I can't have you hurt that way, my son—nor Greta. . . . It would poison your whole lives. Oh, poor girl! Poor, proud, lonely soul! Oh, Manfred, forgive me, and tell Greta I, at least, shall always believe in her."

Halvor rapped on the arm of her chair with impatient knuckles. "Sentiment is abominably cheap! What I require to know, in plain unembellished English, is whether Greta Holmquist willingly offered to make a scapegoat of herself merely to shield Josephine from a little spiteful gossip? For that, my addled idiots, is all it would have amounted to in her case. Thunders are never levelled at our little Joves and their daughters. The Joves do the thundering at common fry. Now answer me, you imbecile? Don't stand there glowering at your poor sister, who for once showed sound common sense!"

Manfred's dark eyes narrowed to cold slits and his chin set obstinately. "Grandmother, you will please excuse me. I'm no more fond of mystery and melodrama than you—but what I couldn't answer before I cannot answer now."

“Ah! Thank you, my dear. That is all I need to know,” said Halvor, waving him away with an imperious gesture of the hand, smiling ever so little.

CHAPTER XXV

JOSEPHINE had contracted a terrific chill which, in her state of mental turmoil, was a quite fortunate circumstance. It explained her red eyes, fretfulness and disinclination to rise. Papa was deeply concerned, immediately sent for Dr. Hartman, and refused to leave the house until the old doctor assured him it was nothing whatever but an ordinary cold. Dr. Hartman quickly perceived how Sarah's anxious fussing and her mother's rather absent-minded suggestions agitated poor Josephine, who wanted to be left alone. He sent them away. Ordered the usual hot drinks, no food and twenty-four hours quiet in bed.

Alone with her he sat down on the edge of the pretty bed, took her fevered little hands and, instead of troublesome questions, reminded her of the time she had had the mumps and had cried so inconsolably because she imagined she was getting fat like old Mrs. Hiner—lop-sidedly fat at that! She clung to him gratefully, her pretty, stricken eyes waking depths of pity his common sense rejected as quite undeserved. He knew all these children better than their parents, so it seemed. Josie was a self-centred little miss, he was quite aware, but so pretty—with that tantalizing, adorable appeal few masculine hearts could withstand. In that she was very like the girl Barbo, whose misty smile had blasted his own career—those seeming ages ago. Yet with something added (his hand tightened on Josie's compassionately) something of Oline's sincerity which, in diluted form, was merely an impediment: a spiritual snag strong enough to destroy yet not to save. He looked at her downy loveliness, shadowed by unfamiliar misery and what he had wanted to say about Greta he quietly dismissed.

Greta was stern stuff. Her beauty lost significance before the flaming splendour of her strong, free soul. Like the Valkyries of Norse mythology she would ride the storms of existence, undismayed by thunders of malicious fate. Victorious over destiny. One did not plead for the strong. They plunged into dark worlds, traversed thorny roads, bore cruel crosses and by virtue of their own shining divinity left behind them a light in the sombre firmament, and the imperishable fragrance of spiritual grace for an eternal benediction. One pled not for the sons of God who walked in power but for the foolish little creature lost and afraid in the darkness of its own small soul.

Josephine, struggling with a dozen conflicting desires, said in a whisper: "Is—is it true—Greta's leaving to-morrow?"

He nodded, smiling encouragement. "For the St. Boniface Hospital. With highest references," he added significantly.

"Oh, I'm glad. Glad! Doctor, please give me that box—the little silver one—on the dresser."

She tumbled out its contents on the pink coverlet and selected a pretty ruby ring. "Give that to Greta for me. I want her to have it. . . . Oh, ask her, please, to wear it! She'll understand."

Greta accepted the gift a bit grimly. Not because it failed to touch her, but because to her young impatience it represented the perfection of foolishness. Josie wept a few tears, gave her an old ring, and thought, no doubt, she had exercised sufficient retribution. But what of Manfred nailed to the cross of his father's sins? What of grandmamma, grieving secretly as she had not grieved since the days of Russian tyranny?

These and many similar bursts of irritation she kept to herself. To-day she wanted to be happy for all their sakes, for staunch old Oscar who had got her another chance: for Dr. Hartman whose air of abstraction and white transparency (as if the goodness of his unselfish soul was shining through the threadbare flesh) worried her of late: for grandmamma, who had baked a huge cake as though she were sending off a bride and not a miserable sinner with shame on her head; for Manfred who would soon be lost to her for ever; for all their sakes she must be gay and leave behind no feeling of the utter loneliness that filled her.

She had asked Manfred not to come to the train. It would only occasion useless talk which, no matter how he felt about it, would hurt his mother. They had a very gay lunch together, Oscar drinking her health and Dr. Hartman in his best frock-coat making a quite ludicrous speech to the Greta of cap and gown he envisioned for the future.

To Manfred's hundred hints for a moment alone she remained blind and deaf. She felt herself to be reasonably strong but not enough for that. Yet when he was gone, apparently reconciled to her somewhat blunt dismissal and hazy promise of meeting him in Winnipeg before he sailed for Europe, she stole into the smelly little room where old Dr. Hartman still bandaged bruises, lanced boils, and pulled occasional infant teeth, and cried there forlornly.

No one would have guessed it when, a little later, she cheerfully set about dressing for the train. Her father, for the first time hazily aware of a certain responsibility towards this golden creature setting out alone to wrest fortune from a jealous world, had, on Leona's wise suggestion, bought her a trim blue semi-tailored suit. Mistress of many accomplishments Leona had

herself made the necessary alterations. The practical smartness of the outfit (to which Leona had added a purse and gloves and neat little blue straw hat) gave Greta a quite thrilling sense of substantiality. As though she were really as brave as she made believe and bound to find, at the end of her trail, if not a pot of gold, at least an inexhaustible supply of crabby patients calling for a devoted nurse.

In the midst of tilting the little hat to its most helpful angle, where the brim best shaded her eyes, she became aware of an unusual commotion in her grandmother's cluttered domain. "God bless us, the cat must have made way with it!" Illiana Petrovna was muttering, jouncing boxes about, grey with dust from under the bed, "it's a queer world where a body's best bonnet isn't safe——"

"Why, grandmamma!" Greta gasped at sight of Illiana Petrovna arrayed in her one silk dress, on her knees poking about in a seeming mountain of boxes unearthed from the black cavern under her bed. "Grandmamma, you're not coming. I won't have it! Someone—oh, darling! Something mean would be sure to happen just to hurt you."

"Ha!" The old lady got up victorious, a sadly crushed object of sequins and lace dangling from a ribbon in her hands. "Ha! You think the gabble of cowherds and skunk-killers fills me with fear perhaps? I should run from pumpkin raisers? I—who threw good sharp stones at the fool heads of cossacks kept by the devil's favourite sovereign? Ho! You know me well, little rabbit, if you think the braying of a jackass will crush old Illiana Petrovna!"

Indeed, so fiercely militant, and truly majestic, was the old lady in her billowing, many-gored silk as she stepped along beside her slim granddaughter that few, indeed, were the onerous glances levelled at them and fewer still the captious remarks made in their hearing.

To be sure there was quite a group of idlers on the station platform, larger by far than was customary, but they kept at a safe distance. For Illiana Petrovna had the formidable aspect of a battleship pointing all guns at a pirate lair.

Leona, very handsome in grey silk poplin faced with plum, came with a gift of magazines and candy. Oscar had meant to be there, but an already tardy infant had decided now was the right time to appear. So his thoughtful gift, a complete nurse's kit, was brought by Dr. Hartman, who reduced Greta to her one shower of tears by kissing her frankly and fondly for the whole world to see. Then out from the crowd of curiosity seekers came Jennifer Dupont pushing her way nervously, a great bunch of yellow asters in her

arms. Heavy and awkward, in every way unprepossessing, her very ugliness became beauty to Greta.

“Jennifer! They’re lovely—lovely as your thought,” she cried. Then Jennifer, grandmamma, sweet old Dr. Hartman, handsome Leona and the oncoming train all were forgotten in a rush of joy delightful as a glimpse of paradise. Down the crooked road winding from the tall pines rode a splendid young god, confidence and spirited pride in the set of his fine dark head, and on his face the smile which touched some inner source of radiance and made music in her soul. Oh, but he should not have come! Every neck was craned eagerly all eyes, staring.

Much Manfred cared for the spectators! Much she, now he was beside her—grandmamma and Leona making an effective screen past which the malicious might not penetrate. “Oh, Manfred—you’re riding that brute again!” She tried to sound severe, but her eyes were pools of tenderness. A little roughly he caught her arm, drawing her close. So that they stood stiff as soldiers side by side saying nothing, nor looking at each other, yet filled with ineffable delight. Trainmen banged and clattered. Steam spat and hissed in angry spurts from the tortured entrails of the train; the engine coughed and snorted. Milk-cans, crates of chickens, stacks of boxes and shabby trunks rattled by. Children screamed and voices grew everywhere louder.

Yet for Greta and Manfred it might well have been a desert and the one sound the singing of their hearts. But now a voice louder than the rest boomed sonorously: “All a-board! All a-board!” And grandmamma had turned and her brave old face was wet with a rush of tears. Greta flew to her arms, lost for a wild moment in a warm bosom. Then was sharply repelled. “Now, my little rabbit, be kind where it’s needed! Here you are, Manfred.” She thrust upon him the nurse’s kit. “I’m much too stiff for climbing trains.”

In the precious moment they had alone in the green dimness of an empty sleeper Manfred bent and kissed her swiftly. And the shoddy old world stood still, died, and was reborn again sweet as Eden!

Laughing, on a low sensuous note, Manfred laid a little blue velvet case in her lap: “To remind you, nurse, every time you count some poor chap’s pulse that somewhere, in time and space, I’ll be waiting!”

He was gone. Lost in a blur of faces seen through the dusty pane of the slowly-moving train. Lost in the grey shadows of the little town that had cast her out yet would for ever be dear. Idly she opened the little blue case. On a white satin bed lay a platinum watch ticking merrily. The tiny diamonds decorating the rim made a rainbow through her tears.

CHAPTER XXVI

MANFRED had taken swift leave of Illiana Petrovna, promising to call shortly, and was going for his mare when the dumpy figure of Jennifer seemed to loom up like a rock in a murky mist. He knew about the flowers. Stopping sharply, he spoke to her. "That was fine of you, Jennifer," he said, smiling so that all his face seemed alight and the wonder of it made her tremble divinely. Had some heavenly dove appeared over her head singing: "This is my beloved!" it would not have filled her with greater bliss.

Her god had actually smiled at her, addressed her, commended her! For nothing more than a gift of flowers. A gift which she had made moved by some impulse indefinable to herself. A gesture to crown with flowers anyone choice enough to have found favour in her lord's eyes. Although she had not thought of it just like that or even faintly surmised that in the act she hoped to share a vicarious joy and thrilling sacrifice. Much too overcome for reply she stood staring after him, watching him mount the champing animal, with such obvious adoration in her guileless face as could hardly fail to bring cruel laughter from the loutish among the bystanders.

Preoccupied though he was by his own jealous thoughts Manfred heard the sudden laughter. So! Anger rose in him, with the fierce exultant leap of waves. A leering fellow nudged his neighbour: "Ho! Ho! A fine taste in wenches!" cried he, ogling poor Jennifer vilely. So swiftly it befell he never knew how like the winged pegasus the black mare circled, leaping the strip of platform between them. For something hot and sharp and swift as lightning struck across his smirking face. Manfred dealt instant judgment with a riding-crop, made thrice effective by his soundless fury. Which was the more terrible, the cutting fang of the whip that left a red weal behind it, or the flash of his angered eyes, the gaping idlers could not say. They melted. They fled. The swift scattering of many feet was a pleasant music to Illiana Petrovna. Her quick laughter, in which Leona joined on a soft, deeply throbbing key, and the thunder of a horse's pounding feet receding into the black forest were the only sounds left in the portentous night.

Perhaps this action of Manfred's, so ominously reminiscent of his father's former swift retaliations, inspired the studied caution found at tea-tables in the days that followed. What the older settlers would have liked to impart to the newer was firmly suppressed. Old ghosts seemed suddenly near, whispering caution. No one was anxious to suffer the fate of certain foolish Métis who long ago inspired the Marcusson vengeance. Odd, those

Marcussons. Their easiness of manner, and lightness of heart, were as moving light on boundless waters. Deep, impenetrable waters.

Other affairs engaged happier attention. The elections were under way. In the office of the *Maple Bluffs Courier* at least six proud youngsters addressed and licked hundreds of important envelopes. Teams fell asleep in the streets while their drivers harangued and argued or agreed with each other's opinions concerning the merits of the respective candidates. For form's sake Liberals denounced the Conservatives, but almost everyone secretly believed John Boyen had been raised up by Providence to put Maple Bluffs on the map. Even the constituents of Little River, largely Catholic, knew that only an act of God would prevent M'sieu Boyen winning the election.

Bulletins began to appear in windows, on barns and fences, even on the houses of such modest folk as preferred a few pence to artistic exterior, detailing the marvellous improvements shortly to befall the happy community to which John was elected. Opportunity and progress became bywords and were so often painted in black letters on erstwhile familiar surfaces, transforming the known into the tantalizing unknown and speculative, they gradually assumed the mystic meaning of Holy Writ, with perhaps an equal foundation in fact and certainly an almost equal power to kindle belief in miracles.

Special meetings were called in the town hall, in the basement of the more democratic churches, in isolated schools, and everywhere these meetings were conducted with exemplary politeness, suave hypocrisy, and just the right amount of damnation for the opposition. Perspiring farmers reeking of the barnyard suddenly became John's "brothers" and "dear fellow citizens" and nothing stood between them and an eternal life of continued bliss except the miserable, ungentlemanly, shortsighted and disastrous conduct of the Liberal Party.

Naturally to the women, who as yet might only look on with bated breath while husbands and sons exercised these divine civic privileges, the whole fracas was of slightly less concern than a similarly virulent attack of influenza. The thing would pass. In the meantime there were other items of gratifying interest. The Duponts were worried about André. The poor boy was so badly cut up over Josephine's capricious behaviour that even the elections failed to interest him. He mooned and moped or roamed the dying woods like a lost soul.

The Marcussons, true to former habit, had bidden half the village to a farewell party for Manfred. Certainly no one stayed away except Josephine, who was reported to be suffering from a heavy cold. The whole affair had

been exceedingly pleasant, a little touching too, for Halvor Marcusson had betrayed in a hundred little ways her almost tragic elation over the thought of her grandson's return to the dear ancestral acres. To the majority of their townsmen and neighbours the gist of it seemed little more than an old lady's romantic attachment to the memories of her youth. But there were others who understood better. Peter Hiner tried to explain it when he said to Hanna his fat, good-natured wife: "Ja, there are houses, mamma, in the old world, where every stone is like a tablet in the graveyard, so many are the dead remembered in each house. Ja, the very mortar is bones and sinews of men who bled to hold it safe. . . ."

Dr. Hartman expressed it more jocundly when he permitted himself to congratulate Halvor just before the train pulled in. "Well, madam, it is not given to all of us to return Adam to Eden. You are to be congratulated on a courageous venture."

She understood quite well he wished to save her from the unbearable impulse towards tears. "You flatter me, Herr Doctor My poor grandson would accept no such comparison. To him, poor boy, I am rather like the angel with the flaming sword driving him out of paradise." Then straightening proudly. "None the less you spoke truly, seldom are ordinary mortals permitted to exercise a divine principle. To give life to the dead: splendid resurrection in a strong, clean body! The ghosts of Toste will walk again clothed in goodly deeds!" Then, because after all she was very old and very little for so vast a burden of racial memory as hers, she covered her wet eyes in a scrap of handkerchief clutched with desperate courage in a hand that trembled. That Manfred saw, and rescued her by sweeping the tiny figure into a bearish embrace was evidence of their close attachment and understanding. His gay young voice mellowed to swift tenderness reassured her heartily. He would quite thoroughly behave himself, he promised. Visit every historic boulder, heath and glen and even kiss the babies in Toste village if that was the good old baronial custom.

Ephraim and Isabella saw him off with complex emotions. Uppermost in Ephraim's mind was a dawning wonderment at his own long exile in this Canadian Dominion. What, after all, had brought him here, held him here and to what conceivable ends? He had long since made a reasonable fortune out of the few thousands left him by a dissolute father. He need not have kept his mother all these lonely years from the land she loved. . . . Perhaps they might all return to Toste when Manfred finished college.

Isabella, on the other hand, said to herself almost fiercely that what those two prided themselves on in Manfred he owed to this country: strength, simplicity of purpose, and a wholesome humanness that came from a close

association with nature. He was like some choice tree, which owed its inherent grace to centuries of slow culture, and which had been transplanted from its native heath because it was grown sterile, to fields of boundless nourishment. In Manfred the Old World and the New joined forces to the end that the Life Principle might triumph over all the seeds of death sown by decadent wastrels. . . . She lifted her head proudly. In this miracle she too had played a vital part. Through her hale and wholesome rustic ancestry original virtue was returned to a sorely depleted line! Because of this comforting perception she could let him go cheerfully, confidence and peace in her lonely heart.

These sombre musings were, however, no more than soft shadows on the fabric of her brave thought. The excitement of departure, with Sarah and Leatrice flushed and merry and wildly elated, called for courageous optimism. She must not send the children away with niggardly emotion. They must embark on their bright adventure unhampered by pangs of foolish regret on the part of the old generation left standing on the banks of the past.

Happily for her, as so often happened, the comedy of ordinary life came to her rescue. John Boyen, out of duty rather than affection, drove up to take leave of Sarah, delivering in political fashion an apparently carefully-rehearsed speech about the glorious opportunities of youth, ending with a cautionary reference to the dangerous pitfalls of which innocent girls must earnestly beware. Sarah's boyish bark of a laugh strangled in her throat. Leatrice looked uncomfortable, while Manfred, to the great man's heavy disapproval, had the audacity to laugh. Actually to assure the prospective member, loud enough for all to hear, that with him along to defend Miss Sarah no amateur villain would venture near!

The laughter it raised was complex in character, as though good will towards the young sinner thus boldly defying a glorified reformer struggled against solid sanctimonious public morality. The result was a sudden wild effort on everyone's part to be brightly impersonal, waggishly silly and produced a hectic spurt of gaiety in which the young people were whisked away. Leaving behind a suddenly very quiet and sober company standing stiffly in little groups on the station platform watching the local train heading into the blue horizon.

These events were interesting to recount at dull tea-tables, leading as they always did to theoretical speculation as to the actual merits, possible cleverness, and probable shortcomings of the individuals concerned. But as each succeeding day passed as dully as the one preceding it, Maple Bluffs began to wonder if the leaven of its social life had not departed along with

the young people whose behaviour it had formerly heartily disapproved. A curiously depressing inertia seemed to be settling down upon the place, as though the energies of the whole social body were suddenly depleted and threatened with mortal illness. Even the golden tongues of the gabbling little men supporting John Boyen's successful campaigning failed to shatter these melancholy forebodings.

Illiana Petrovna, sitting in the sun with her cat on her lap and old Dr. Hartman by her side, voiced the general feeling when she said one afternoon: "If it were not for puss here, I could think myself already dead, so lost I feel in this queer, respectable quiet that's settling over us. God bless me if I like it! It's too much like the calm before a storm."

The old man nodded. He felt very tired, yet oddly at peace with himself. The long shadows of the pines in the far distance made a singularly entrancing mystery of the commonplace facts they veiled, as though just beyond their dark canopy lay royal lands of ineffable grandeur for the questing spirit.

"There will always be storms enough, Illiana Petrovna. Rumbblings of it are faintly audible to the listening ear even in dead silences. For life and death are only opposite poles of the same eternal energy. The Hindus rightly worship Siva the Destroyer, for destruction, whether of physical bodies or mental images, releases into the universe the divine energy which gave them being. And energy, released, assumes other forms again. What we know as peace, and misname inactivity, is nothing more than a breath between two struggles—a period of gestation out of which the new creation rises."

"Well, hear the man!" Illiana sighed gustily to Joseph, the cat, thinking to herself for the hundredth time that Oscar Beaur ought to warn the old man about overdoing. There was a look about him she affected not to see, for it cut to her heart with sore knowledge. "You dabble too much in learning, Herr Doctor, waste too much time on grousing dyspeptics, and eat far too little. Take a leaf from Joseph here, and learn to spill yourself out in a little rich contentment!"

His chuckle was cheerfully infectious, "That I may do, even before you realize it, Illiana Petrovna. Now I think of it, to be spilled out in rich contentment is doubtless the much desired Holy Grail the whole muddled human race is predestined to be for ever seeking!"

That same evening Josephine came home from a walk in the leafless wood. Oline smiled as she entered, for it seemed to her the girl looked unusually well, entirely recovered from her slight indisposition, and very sweet with her wind-blown sunny hair and bright blue eyes. John was away,

speaking somewhere in the country, and would not be home till to-morrow. With the old piano still the house was very quiet. Oline wondered if Josephine felt it too keenly and suggested asking someone over. The Prix girls, since Tony's new car made nothing of ten miles, or Jennifer Dupont.

"For heaven's sake, mamma!" Josephine flushed impatiently. "You know Jennifer bores me. All she wants to talk about is the way Manfred lashed that fellow for laughing at her. The Prix girls went to Beggar's Island yesterday. You might remember Nellie phoned to tell me."

"I am sorry, dear." Oline really felt contrite. It was very dull for Josie just now. She supposed that the quarrel she had had with Manfred prior to the disagreeable scandal with Greta still rankled. Sarah had diplomatically hinted of such a quarrel by way of explaining Josie's tart refusal to attend the farewell party at the Marcussons. "I was only thinking how tiresome it must seem for you. Between seasons things are apt to be very dull. But if papa is successful, as seems very likely, you will doubtless be with him in the city much of the time. That should make pleasant dreaming."

"It *should*," replied Josephine with peculiar emphasis and the hard little smile Oline had marked in her so often of late. "The trouble is, mamma, one loses the taste for dreaming. I think I'll go to bed. Leona lent me a new book. Oh, a book even you might approve, mamma!" she explained with tolerant, slightly amused, contempt. "Leona's taste has changed in literature. Simple virtue always triumphs and the villain, whom no one could possibly mistake for the hero of the piece, always comes to a bitter and repentant end. I suspect a deaconess might commend this bit of piffle for any Sunday School library. It's all one with the polite lies passed off on the young for their edification!"

Oline sighed. How queer it was the generations tolerated one another so hardly! Hated each other's pastimes, despised each other's morals, and distrusted each other's beliefs! How strange that the conventions for which one had paid most dearly served rather as hindrances than ties when applied to one's children. Here was Josephine, inwardly fuming at what Oline could only suppose was imaginary evil fate, in exactly the same bitterness of spirit she herself had suffered, fought, and conquered. Yet what was the substance of her victory if she could not impart any of its healing philosophy to her children?

She affected a lightness foreign to her thoughts. Laughing she replied: "Miss Shultz is a woman of catholic tastes. No doubt after the gay scenes of Paris and Vienna a homely tale of foolish, simple people was welcome contrast. I've heard it said quite peaceful little men dote on gruesome murder mysteries! We're all a bit odd, my dear, when it comes to pastimes."

Whether Josephine really heard her or not was debatable. A strange, brooding, far-away look was on her little face, pale now that the colour induced by the nipping air had ebbed. Suddenly, to Oline's vast amazement, she came flying to her side, kissed her passionately and, in fierce little whispered gusts of emotion, said: "Oh, mamma, you at least are dear! I love you—really I do! For all I seem so beastly I love you! There's no one in the world half so good and patient and"—a little sob choked her—"utterly *wasted* on selfish prigs of fools!" And out she ran, her small feet clicking up the polished stairs in nervous headlong flight.

Oline was destined to remember that small swift sound as the saddest and most touching in a profoundly sad world.

Although Josephine fled to her own room she found it impossible to stay there. The dainty appointments, once such a source of pride, irritated and annoyed her. It was in Sarah's ugly, plain room, that somehow breathed of her honest dependability, she liked to stay now. How amazingly lost she was without Sarah's solid presence always near and ready to comfort! How frightfully she missed her in the dreadful sleepless nights! For there were sleepless nights now—nights that dragged their fearsome length into exhausting leaden dawns! Terrible nights full of terrifying spectres. Josephine shut her eyes, shuddering miserably. How could she stand much more of it? How could she endure a seeming eternity of increasing misery with no end in view but inevitable degradation and horrible shame?

With desperate resolution she attempted to read first one book, then another. But words failed to make sense—letters danced and jumbled before her eyes. She tried to sew—pathetic occupation!—and succeeded only in pricking her unaccustomed fingers. Buttons it seemed were not to be taken lightly! She decided to write a letter to Sarah, and spent an exhausting hour composing a fantastically cheerful letter which poor Sarah was never to read without bursting into cruel tears. At last she went to bed, dozed with aspirin for the now perpetual headache, and by reason of sheer exhaustion slept fitfully for some hours. She wakened with the moonlight streaming across her bed and an eerie feeling of being called. The house was very still. No sound to be heard save the soft scratching of swaying branches against the window-pane. That, she supposed, had awakened her. The young trees mamma had planted round the new house were getting too big. . . .

She sat up with a wildly beating heart. The thought struck her with terrifying significance that everything in the world of men waxed much too fast. One's rather mild emotions sprang up overnight into demons of intensity; desires scarcely felt before suddenly flamed with irresistible fury—love once delicate and entrancing as a spring dawn lost its loveliness in

the fierceness of passion—all in one short sad hour! Beauty apparently had no meaning or purpose save to inspire lust. The face of life wore a hideous grinning, cynical mask horrible to contemplate. . . .

Greta had lied. The worst *always* happened! Not only her own case proved that. Everything proved it. The long, long nights had made her see and understand many things clearly. The worst had happened to mamma. She knew that now. Something Von Barholme had said before he left for the States had quite explained the little mystery of mamma's changed personality since his stay among them. . . .

Poor mamma! If ever a woman was made for the refinements of love, of companionship, joyous devotion and a selfless inspiration, it was she. Instead she was sold to a man who accepted her physical charms as he accepted a good dinner, incapable of conceiving any other attitude towards a woman. The worst had certainly befallen mamma, and Halvor, and Isabella, and dear old Dr. Hartman. . . . "Ah, my God!" she moaned, writhing back upon her pillow. It seemed as though everyone was made to suffer what he least could endure and what for him represented the ultimate betrayal of hope and happiness. Why? Why? Why? What was the purpose of implanting dreams and desires in the human heart only to destroy them? Ah, Halvor was right. There was some arbitrary Power in control of human affairs whose sublime disregard of the individual paralleled that of a weaver who tossed aside his broken shuttles indifferent to the small loss their final ruin occasioned. And, quite conceivably, because throughout the long centuries of his painful evolution man had found no sensible explanation of the trials that beset him nor received any answer to his ceaseless queries, he had devised a multiplicity of curious Gods, as cruel and exacting and arbitrary as the fate he suffered; created fantastic heavens to console his miseries, and depicted frightful hells to torment and terrify such others as were under his dominion.

Everything was lies, lies, lies! The entire fabric of man's conventional existence rested on elaborate deception. Seemingly the whole wretched purpose of man's moral preachments, ethics and religion, hero-worship and patriotism was to maintain for feeble, credulous souls a painted paradise in which no shred of actual truth or virtue existed. Everything she had believed in, emulated, and striven after was false. False as the conduct of the fortunate few whose exceptional genius for craft and evasion had largely inspired sacred and profane history! False as the life her own parents lived under the cloak of amity, mutual regard, and righteousness.

Helpless tears streamed from her eyes. Oh, if only Sarah were here, sleeping calmly, curled in a comical ball under the cotton quilt, as she used

to do. Sober, sensible Sarah, who was a rock in times of affliction. But Sarah was gone. Everything sweet and wholesome and happy was gone. . . . She herself—the carefree, joyous Josephine—was become a loathsome stranger.

In renewed agony of agitation she sat up clutching her bedgown. Oh, that was the horror of it! She was become strange and terrifying to herself, like some creature under a spell exercising awful powers to some undreamed, awful end. But this was madness. She must be calm. Perhaps even yet some solution might be found. Before she left, Greta had sent her a note by Sarah diplomatically reminding her of Oscar's charitable kindness—if she needed moral support and felt it too difficult to approach her own doctor. Too difficult! She would rather die than confess this beastly thing to darling old Hartman who had watched over her since a child; knew her sweet and clean and lovesome as a daughter. She would as soon go to papa! The mere suggestion turned her hot and cold, quivering with anticipated shame. Mamma? Could she go to mamma? No! No! No! Instinctively she knew mamma would blame herself for the determined ardour that seethed in her daughter, imagining that her own secret rebellion against insufferable subjection was responsible for her child's intemperate behaviour.

Oh, my God! What *was* to blame for it, she wondered? For her mad pursuit of Manfred in the face of obvious indifference, for her foolish trust in the effectiveness of feminine guile—for André's incredible metamorphosis? André! The obvious way out was André. After all, he loved her. . . . If that shocking frenzy was love! And why not? Everything else was cunningly falsified—why should love be exempt? She supposed other women supported that sort of disillusionment very well—learned to lie about it cheerfully. It was nature!

She shuddered. She had no fancy to be a handmaid to nature. What she wanted was some share in the illusive, delightful charm which radiated like an actual current from Manfred and suggested boundless capacities for complete companionship. Though all else were false she somehow knew that Manfred, who walked the earth in pagan freedom, had some quality of soul the orthodox Andrés and conventional Boyens might never know.

The young birch outside her window beat against the pane again. The wind was rising. Josephine slipped out of bed and stole to the casement. How still and peaceful it seemed out there. The denuded trees stood bathed in silver moonlight, blue shadows draped about their patient feet. Overhead a million stars gleamed in a sombre canopy of purple space. Infinite space full of infinite power!

Her little face pressed against the window-pane, Josephine looked up into those impenetrable distances as a young bird may look from its small

nest unseeingly into the fair blue sky which soon will be its habitat.

How calm and remote from the foolish furies of mortal existence were the fine white stars. . . . Like souls set free of the champing fires of the body—detached, beautiful, clean and unhampered as the wind in the sky. Quite suddenly what she must do was definitely clear. She, who in all her life had never seriously considered the rights of others, must lay down that life calmly and resolutely to save those who loved her from ignominy and pain. There was no longer even a quaver of doubt in her mind. The wonder was she had not seen it long before. Even if she could have brought herself to ask Dr. Beur's help—even if that help had been forthcoming—papa and mamma would have suffered inestimable humiliation, and she herself as surely died. All that was radiant and young and fair laid in the dust!

She began to dress, quietly and methodically, selecting a pretty fall suit, walking shoes, new gloves, and snug little cap. She spent some time over her long bright hair, brushing it lovingly, a twisted little smile on her face. . . . Strange, strange this should be the end of Josephine: a pale, frightened ghost brushing her golden hair by moonlight—a tired little wraith of wasted joy setting out on a long, long voyage. . . .

But it was best. Seeing her image in the blurred mirror the dainty, sweetly-curving virginal body still lovely to behold, she was curiously elated of her purpose. At least she would have the courage to die as she had lived—a beautiful lie! Perhaps thereby to live in memory glorified by virtues never hers, like all those other mythical maids of treasured history.

She was fully dressed now. Walking softly, she entered Sarah's room, standing for a difficult moment beside the plain, ugly bed. Then, gravely as one takes a last farewell of beloved familiars, she touched the grim-visaged bust of Liszt, brushed an imaginary speck of dust from the raging sea of Sarah's beloved picture, arranged the papers on the secretary where her long letter lay. Then swiftly she passed out, shutting the door quickly behind her with a nervous movement as though some undercurrent of desire might hold her fast against her will.

The door closed, she leaned against it wearily a moment, her hands clasped tightly, every sense alert, listening. Soft as the pale night shadows she crept to her mother's door. Darling mamma! She slept peacefully now. . . . Perhaps in sleep she inhabited some far country of fine unsullied joys. . . . Perhaps dreams were all the paradise one ever got. "Oh, dearest mamma, I too shall join your dreams!" she whispered, in tearless anguish. "Dearest mamma, good-bye!"

Once out of the house, she was strangely calm. The air was cold and bracing. She breathed it gratefully. Walking rapidly through the lifting dusk, for dawn was breaking in the purple bowl of night, she found increasing assurance that her course was inevitable and right. Her way led past the Potts's sagging cottage. Cora had once been pretty—perhaps as pretty as she. Love—the kind of love the Andrés of earth offered women—had made of her a shapeless, dispirited creature whose fearsome fertility was perpetual torment.

She fled by in actual panic as though the little house might shoot out horrid tentacles and draw her, too, into its brutal slavery. Running now, she soon saw before her the birch wood and little lagoon, which was a backwash from the lake itself, that curled like a glittering scimitar behind the Von Barholme cottage. Through the bare trees at the right Leona Shultz's new bungalow loomed bulkily like some green and yellow-clad housewife peering through the dusk.

Von Barholme's canoe and paddle were in the tiny boat-house, left for her use. A parting gift from the professor to Oline's lovely daughter. . . . Another little irony she mused, pushing the frail craft into the deep blue, motionless water. How often kindness turned to bitter bane!

It was still and peaceful here. Pale streaks of grey edged with mauve and faint orange appeared low in the eastern sky. She would watch the sunrise. One last lovely sunrise in this still grey wood. No sounds were audible except the soft dip and splash of the paddle. The song birds had long since flown southward following the trail of the sun. But a little twittering of sparrows and happy stir of wings in welcome ovation to the first luminous beams of dawn brought a catch of the breath and a sharp swift pain to the heart.

Josephine sent the paddle overboard and watched it drift away, with eyes unearthly bright. Calmly she considered how most effectively to stage this final play. It must have all the appearance of accident. Mamma knew she was expert with a canoe and that she could swim exceptionally well. The lagoon was wide and deep in the centre. If the canoe were to capsize at this point a fatal accident would not be likely to rouse any suspicion—especially since she had been ill.

Pale gold, trailing banners of amethyst, orchid, and burning rose, the sun sailed up the steel-blue sky. Pale gold the proud little head in the bobbing leaf canoe, lifted on its tender column of throat; eyes blue as the blue water searched the vaulted immensity of sky: "Whatever you are, wherever you are, Spirit and Weaver of our troubled dreams, oh, hear me! Make of my

broken bright little threads something fine in your pattern, one small fair spot to justify my being!”

In the deep jealous silence of the primal Canadian wood the slight sound of a small body striking the deep lagoon water made less impression than a bird's last frightened cry when the hawk descends in the night.

CHAPTER XXVII

IT was Leona Shultz on her customary early morning walk who discovered the empty canoe drifting on the lagoon. She knew it had been locked in the little boat-house, that only Josephine had had the key, and at once a suspicion of the tragic truth flashed upon her. That something far graver than a rather stupid attempt to entangle a young man whose sense of honour might have led him to support her under parental displeasure had led Josephine to stage her fictional assignation in Von Barholme's cottage she long since had guessed. Although Greta had valiantly denied there was anything more to hide, Leona was well aware of the affair between André and Josephine. She had seen them idling about the lagoon on many a summer night, and once or twice had seen them coming from the cottage with lunch-baskets. At the time she had thought little of it. Von Barholme was probably there, and Josie was the angelic type of coquette men seldom found heart to abuse—outside holy matrimony.

Now, as she ran to notify the police, these seemingly insignificant events cast a frightening shadow over her mind. Instinctively she felt their portent was true and frantically hoped against hope it was not.

Tidings travel fast in a small town. Even before poor Oline had attached anything ominous to Josephine's absence from the house thus early a tense crowd was gathered about the lagoon where the dragging had begun. Leona was there, not out of morbid curiosity, but because she felt that some cool-headed woman should be available if their worst fears were realized. The lagoon was still and weedless. What they sought was soon found. When the small, inert figure was carefully laid on the brown beach the silence seemed to deepen, as though nature held her breath a tragic moment and time stood still. The sigh that went up from the stricken group on the shore was sharpened by a sudden smothered cry that seemed to spring from the bordering birch-trees where other knots of men and several women were gathered. It was Leona who recognized the wild cry and hastily intercepted the distraught young man who came edging forward. With a low sharp command she gripped his arm, leading his stumbling steps away to the comparative seclusion of a rugged clump of willows.

"Young man, whatever you feel, have the good sense to control yourself!" she admonished curtly. "Nothing you could possibly say or do, André, would be of the least benefit now."

“But you do not understand, madam!” His eyes were frantic in their misery. “It is my love! I have wronged—it is I killed her! I must explain _____”

“You will do nothing of the sort! You will keep to yourself this wrong—you will forget it. You will bury it in your heart for ever, André Dupont. As the brave dead chose to bury it, that others might not suffer. . . . Do you understand me?”

“Madam, she is dead! . . . By her own hand—she has taken her so beautiful life. . . . Oh, my God! Her lovely life, and——”

“André! Now listen to me, you fool!” She resorted to harshness, convinced that nothing else could penetrate the cloud of his misery. “People of your belief, and a lot of similar faiths, seem to think God has no possible avenue of mercy open to foolish little sinners! Suicides who die in the struggle against mental torment are somehow different you imagine from the poor devils who perish in the fight against disease. Or die by slow starvation, both physical and spiritual, in the beastly battle with poverty. It’s a funny notion—and just a notion, like all the other bosh about interfering with divine laws—as if man’s whole progress was not founded on interference with what he once thought divine laws!

“Which means, my poor young man, that you are free to say as many prayers for little Josephine—for the repose of her erring soul—as you like: but on the honour of a gentleman not to blab out insults on the dead!”

“Insults—I? But you think, madam, I would not die first! I who am crucified with remorse, who cannot sleep, who cannot think of anything but how to atone?”

She was immensely sorry for him. All the needless mental tortures, entirely aside from the real essence, were screws on his heart. But she felt that their conversation might be marked and somehow she must be rid of him. Conscience such as his was as a maniac loose among men. She decided that the only one to help ease his mind and prevent further tragedy was Father Patrick.

“André, sometimes a wise silence costs us dear. Because it would ease your own burden to add to Josephine’s, would you do it? Of course not!” She patted his arm, for he had recoiled as from an actual blow. “I’m asking a hard thing—a brave thing, André. And you will do it because your love was finer than you knew. You will conduct yourself like any kind friend, with generous discretion. I’m asking it for her sake. . . . André, go now quietly and talk it over with Father Patrick.”

Her relief at his final departure was so intense she found herself trembling with unfamiliar weakness. Even the harrowing ordeal of breaking the news to Oline affected her less. Oline's grief was heartrending, but natural. Her mother's tears were a benediction for the dear dead. To share in them was to be lifted for the moment into the congregation of blessed women whose deeds were a sweet ointment.

Oline showed remarkable fortitude. After the first incredible shock her thought was all for John. Poor, poor John! How could he bear it? In all his life nothing, nothing on which his heart was set had failed him! Sore preparation for the collapse of his dearest dream. Oh, she pitied him profoundly, perceiving for the first time how continued fair fortune may spell sharper ruin by weakening spiritual stamina than a multitude of trials which sharpen and strengthen resistance.

John Boyen was just leaving the comfortable house of the Reeve of Little River after a cheerful, comfortable night following a most successful political meeting, when a white-faced messenger rode up with the news. His reaction was consistently typical. Blinking distressfully, he regarded the young man with something like vexed astonishment. "My daughter has met with an accident? My daughter? Not seriously——"

"Sir—in the lagoon—the canoe capsized," the unhappy young man blurted.

John moved a step forward, he had paled a little: "The lagoon? But—my dear young man, you must be mistaken—Miss Sarah is away——"

"Oh, sir, there is no mistake!" cried the youth. "It was Miss Josephine—she has been dead some hours."

"Josephine? Josephine—not Josephine!"

It was the Reeve came to his rescue, catching his arm as he swayed, every vestige of colour gone from his heavy face. "Thank you. Thank you," muttered John. "If you will kindly see about my carriage—please, at once." Stiffly he waited, a stubborn, stocky effigy of human woe, his whole being shrieking against this awful, unbelievable injustice, and yet preserving with hard courage the restraint becoming a man of consequence.

The Reeve was a kindly, cautious man. He wisely insisted on driving the candidate back to Maple Bluffs. Never were fifteen miles more intolerable—of longer duration. John sat in stony silence, clasping and unclasping his hands, his breathing heavy and laboured and eyes unseeingly fixed on the road. When the first houses of Maple Bluffs came in view he straightened automatically, planting his feet down firmly, as one who is determined to hold his ground. His colour was ghastly. And when the horses pulled up

before the big brown house with its tall tower pointing skyward, the Reeve thought for an instant the man would actually collapse.

He entered the house, already pervaded by that curious hush inseparable from the mystery of death, with unfaltering steps, however, and a quiet dignity. Oline, very pale, her hand to her breast came out into the wide hall to meet him.

If heretofore she had found little to love in his conventional regard and severity, she now perceived a sort of hardy grandeur in him. His first word was for her, "Poor mother—God help you, my dear."

"Oh, John, John." She found his arms good now, comforting, well-meaning in their passionless embrace. "Come with me—oh, John—it is so impossible to believe!"

How true. Entering that quiet room where Josephine lay so remote and still, yet seeming only to sleep, it was hard to believe she might not waken. To the poor idolatrous father caught sharply up on the tearing wave of his sore emotion, it was an impossible reality. The cry that was torn from his heart as he flung himself beside his beautiful dead, must have winged its way into infinite space. To Oline his agony, swiftly repressed for her sake, she knew, was at once infinitely touching and a revelation of emotional depths in him she had never suspected. Poor, poor John! That his love for her had been such a soulless thing was perhaps her fault as much as his. . . . What he had needed to give warmth to his passion she had lacked. . . .

All that long night she fought a rising sense of fear for John. If only he would let himself go—give way to the terrible agony of his suffering—forget for once his duty as husband and father. But these Victorian attributes were fast woven into the fabric of his being. If he had often irked her by a display of paternal rectitude in trivial matters he now overwhelmed her by the strict application of his principles. He dispatched wires to Veder and Sarah, telegraphing money for their fares; called in the undertaker and gave orders for flowers from the city; arranged for the Episcopal and Methodist minister to officiate at the service, and lastly, to Oline's added concern, called in the young attorney who had charge of his legal affairs.

It was after midnight before he retired to their pleasant bedroom, walking on leaden feet that seemed scarcely able to support his sagging body, and finally consented to rest. Affectionately concerned, she fetched him his customary chocolate, for which small service he seemed pathetically grateful, patting her arm awkwardly, "Oline, my dear, you've been a good wife. A good wife! Our Josephine—to have had her even this long—was worth it all. . . . She was such a shining baby. Do you remember, Oline, how

her little curls used to bob about like fluffs of gold—my lovely little daughter. . . .”

“Dear John, you must try to rest now. So much depends on you. . . .” She tried to find comfort for him. “We all depend on you, John—the children, I, your fellow townsmen——”

“Yes, yes,” he agreed heavily. “I must rest. To-morrow—heaven help me! All to-morrows hereafter will be hard days to bear!”

It was perhaps three o’clock when she wakened and started up in instant fright. John’s heavy figure was not beside her, breathing audibly, the quilt tucked under his chin, giving him the petulant small-boy attitude which had often amused and oftener annoyed her. His dressing-gown and slippers were missing from the chair. And the big house was dark and silent as a tomb.

Shivering she fumbled about for her own things and with hammering heart hurried down to the back parlour. The door was slightly ajar and a dim light burning within. She crept forward noiselessly. In the doorway her limbs almost failed her. The light from the bed lamp which he had set on the mantel fell directly on Josephine’s quiet face. Smiling, she seemed in her lovely dream world. A fair dream girl with clouds of spun gold about her head—oh, how could anything so sweet be snatched so ruthlessly away! was Oline’s inarticulate complaint. Yet the crumpled, ungainly figure beside the sorrowed child was what fixed her frightened attention. “John!” she whispered, “John, John!” But John did not move. Once again, as in far Sunholme when she had faced Jaegar and cut their young lives asunder, the familiar world seemed to drop away. Time stood still. While she, curiously detached from corporeal being, lived on in a strangely burning consciousness—once again she seemed to have died in the body and knew herself constrained to go on—to enter yet another world whose portals gave out on her dead.

CHAPTER XXVIII

IN all their history the districts of Maple Bluffs and Little River had never suffered anything to approximate the shock the Boyen tragedy occasioned. Public memory is singularly representative of the feelings found in the average home. In times of affluence and health criticisms and carping are rife. When disaster falls only the virtues are remembered. John had not always been liked. But those older settlers who still remembered his former autocratic powers—never unprincipled and never humanely lax—preferred at his death to recall his paternal benevolence. For he had, in true medieval fashion, been a paternal despot, jealous of the rights and powers his position granted and in equal proportion conscientious in the exercise of social and civic duties. Yet, perhaps, even if none of this had been true, his death would have absolved him of a thousand errors.

Old Illiana Petrovna, who at once moved in with Oline to take charge of the ruptured household, wept copiously on the good man's bier. God rest his soul! She had derisively named him the Little Tzar, and all the while he honestly owned the more beautiful derivative, Little Father!

Veder, home after so many years, deported himself with efficiency, courteous, quiet charm, and amazing dignity. Yet no one was astonished. He was John's son, nodded the old ones. How else would he behave but as a loving son and brother?

What depths of hidden powers the human heart commands! Oline could not have believed herself capable of enduring with any degree of self-command the ordeal of that double funeral with its well-meant but torturous speeches, mournful music, and endless streams of people. Yet she lived through it all, moving mechanically as ordained, replying to meaningless condolences (meaningless because the real Oline was suspended in that other consciousness and could not comprehend them) expressing gratitude for acts and courtesies which seemed utterly irrelevant. When it was over she let herself be led to bed by Illiana because it pleased her; and because it pleased him, accepted a sleeping draught from old Dr. Hartman.

But it was not until hours later when she wakened to a new sound, a beautiful, healing sound coming from the old piano in the remote back parlour, that she found relief in generous tears. All that the kindly neighbours had failed to put into words or reveal by their goodly deeds Sarah offered now in her grand, exultant music. Worlds died and were reborn again in that music. Worlds of human aspirations, loves, hates,

sacrifices and sorrows all converged in the one grand, inevitable death, which summed in chords of cosmic grandeur, was not death, but victory. From the beginning Life had in it these strange dark seeds whose blossoming was as the wind, and God the reaper.

Plain, unprepossessing Sarah made all this clear in the cold blue dawn of a chill autumn day. Outside, a restless wind rustled the leafless boughs of her beloved maple-trees and sent athwart the sky-knotted clouds heralding snow. Autumn had banked her fires for the distant spring. The land would soon be wrapped in winter snow—dead winter some called it. Quite forgetting that glowing summer lay in that quiet, uncomplaining womb!

When Sarah came upstairs a little later she found her mother in Josephine's room sitting quietly by the window overlooking the barren garden. The face she turned to her troubled daughter was curiously radiant: "Come here, darling," she said softly, and pulled the girl down beside her. "It is a miracle, Sarah, to have found speech for so many wonderful things through a medium all alike may understand. . . . What do the sisters say about your playing?"

"They are very kind, mamma. They have hopes of my ability."

Oline smiled: "I know your ability, child. You shall go on as far and fast as talent can take you. I am leaving Maple Bluffs when your father's estate is settled."

"But, mamma—all your old friends—the house?"

"Friends survive distance, Sarah, and houses were made to shelter, not enslave us. Veder has accepted an offer in Australia. He sails for Sidney in a month. It would be pleasant if we had a few days together in the city before he left. There is Greta——"

"Mamma?" Sarah's tell-tale face blanched. "Wouldn't that seem—odd now?"

"Sarah, I have known for a long time that Greta was not the only girl in that cottage. Josephine——" Her voice choked sorely. "Josie was so insistent on apologies for her—I suppose the poor young things were frightened over nothing—papa would have been displeased, naturally, but not to the extent they doubtless thought. That's the pity of it, Sarah. The young generation stands in constant terror of the old, and the reverse is quite as true!"

Sarah breathed a vast sigh of relief. "I—well—I think it was something like that, mamma. Nothing, really—nothing!"

Oline had moved to Josephine's crowded clothes press. Fortified and resolute though she felt herself, the sight of those butterfly garments,

breathing of faint perfume and sunny airy graces for ever stilled, brought on a paroxysm of grief. The pity of it, when the frail stuffs of silk and cotton outlive the loveliness of the delectable flesh!

“Sarah,” she found strength at last, “Sarah—pack these away for me. Whatever you think Greta might use she must have—Josie’s fur coat, for instance—anything else that might help her—Josie would like it, I know!”

Two weeks later Oline handed the keys and the deed to the big brown house to Illiana Petrovna. The old woman was for once found speechless, but not without ample show of gratitude in her wrinkled face and expressive eyes. Oline felt a little like weeping herself, so good it was to be effectively benevolent after years of repression. Nor had she pressed upon Illiana a gift which might only become a burden. Mary was to stay on and both doctors would be domiciled there. Their generous allowance in return for her sedulous mothering would more than maintain the house. “Now that foolish old man will have a room befitting a gentleman!” cried Illiana, wiping her eyes. “Little Mother, often and often have I said to myself: ‘Illiana Petrovna, it is shameful a fine man like Herr Hartman should worry his old bones on your lumpy mattresses!’ God be praised, he can die now in comfort!”

Oline knew this was only a manner of speaking, yet she thought: “Yes, he will be next!” How strange though that young Josephine, whose baby ways had delighted her physician, should have preceded him. How like a problem play—incomprehensible to the average spectator—their lives had been: the Boyens, the Marcussons, the Holmquists, and Hartman and Beur. Now the first act was finished, some of the actors dismissed, others waiting in the wings. . . .

John had indeed played his part well. His affairs were in meticulous order. His business, although less lucrative than formerly, was sound. Oline arranged for Anton Holmquist to take over the Emporium on long term payments. Leona accepted major shares in the rest. John’s life insurance was entirely settled on Oline and carefully planned to safeguard against any foolish feminine move. The children had several bonds, Veder sharing equally here with the others. And even those old foreign investments made before they came to Canada had prospered. Oline would find herself in the enviable position of a comparatively wealthy woman with all the world yet to see and free to see it, at something over forty. Poor John! His heavy sincerity and fixity of purpose had borne much fruit, both bitter and sweet. Yet how paradoxical that its sweetness should only be revealed through pain! That living, neither he nor she had seen or tasted any of its goodness—or had they? Those early years of bondage to passion without love were fast receding like mist from a morning sky. . . . There were fairer memories. John

bringing home the children's Christmas tree, because he loved to do it! Lighting the candles and, heavily paternal, beaming on their little joys. How blind she had been to doubt his sincerity there! Yes, John had played his seemingly dull, commonplace role inordinately well!

Her last day in Maple Bluffs was spent with the old friends under her own roof. So many guests had not gathered there at one time since those long gone days when the old log house had served for public meetings and church worship. It was all intimate and treasurable, and everyone tried his best to be enhearteningly cheerful, yet the undercurrent of sadness was there from the beginning.

An hour before train time a delegation of citizens arrived at the house to present to the widow of John Boyen a silver plaque depicting the tiny group of buildings which formed the nucleus of Maple Bluffs. Inscribed on the reverse side was the almost incredible record of its progress, gratefully attributed to the foresight, diligence, and conscientious stewardship of its founder, John Nathan Boyen.

She was to see much more. At the station it seemed the whole district had forgathered. The crowd almost frightened her with its cheering, which had in it something at once joyous and melancholy. She tried to smile, and tears leaped to her eyes instead.

A light snow had covered all the little town. Yellow lights danced in the windows and comforting smoke curled upward into the steely sky. Over there, facing back from the lake shore, the brown bulk of her home seemed to peer at her from between the leafless maple-trees, its high tower lonesome against the sky. Nearer still, the big Emporium smiled at her with a dozen blinking eyes, and behind her in the more remote shadows, rose the huge bulk of Boyen Sanatorium, where the sick were made well and the weary were comforted—where little lives came into the world safeguarded by precious science, and where that same science made the crooked straight, the halt to walk again, and gave length of days where strength and hope had vanished. All this she saw as the visible pattern of John's labour. Plain, dull, unimaginative John, driven by nothing finer than a little man's ambition—all this the invisible Weaver had spun from a small soul's small endeavour!

She had come to a wilderness, sick and resentful, where none there was to meet her, and the impenetrable forests terrified her every hour, with a man whose every act she disliked, whose every caress was unwelcome, so had she come. Yet this was the splendid recompense. A town of happy homes sprung up like fine flame from the ashes of her misery, from the years of her disquiet patience. A habitation of men, made pleasant by the benefits of civilization, and safe by the gifts of science, had flowered in the bitter

wilderness through the persistent husbandry of a plain man, true to himself and the light that was in him.

That light had not been far-searching nor very fine. No high-souled altruism had stirred the earthy depths of his nature. Only a patient subservience to the energies that moved towards quite ordinary ambitions: security for himself and his dependants, a little power, a little wealth, and respect for the divine image he conceived within himself. From these small threads of human ambition so much had been made, so wide a pattern of ever-enlarging human activities to which no end was in sight. Yea, even from her own grudging, niggardly giving young life, young hope and immortal tragedy had sprung! Unwilling, she had been pressed into the Weaver's service to light and darken, with shafts of joy and sorrow, the dull firmament of John's placid world.

In the beginning everything was taken from her that his life might be enriched and motivated and sustained in its destined orbit. In the end it was he from whom joy was taken, and that full life's endeavour laid at her feet.

Such strict balancing of measure for measure, pressed down and running over, left little room for sore complaint and abject despair. There was in it an awesome quality of justice beyond finite comprehension which halted the fleeting mind as the Burning Bush halted Moses on the mountain. It rebuked her fears, and they were still, and a new light of comprehension broke in her. Though her eyes were dimmed by tears, Oline's senses stirred as they once had stirred to the magic sunrise on the snow-capped mountains of Sunholme. The follies of men, their strange, inconsistent vanities, their futile ambitions, broken hopes, and petty hates and jealousies, all were utilized to some rare purpose. Quite conceivably, to the Dark Weaver of the universe, the golden threads of altruism, scarlet glow of sacrifice, and the fine white silver of ascending genius, were no more precious nor of greater majesty when viewed in the finished pattern than the blacks and browns and purples of deceptions, and sins, and senseless tragedies.

For here was the key to it all: the measure of success in life was not individual achievement nor personal happiness, but the measure of one's impulses towards perfection, the intensity of one's urge towards a larger, more humane and intelligent existence. Who, then, dared speak of wasted efforts, defeated ambitions? No furnace of the senses forged sharper urges than affliction! No joy provided as keen an impulse towards spiritual liberty as did suffering. The lash of the Law, some wise men had called it. True. She saw it clearly in this curiously enlightening moment, while her puppet body moved and smiled and wept, and went through all the required actions of her last performance in this long, long play. The lash of the Law, by which the

brute in man was sensitized into divinity, that the lovely earth might one day be justified of her children.

When the train thundered up she could scarcely hear it, for a noise as of many waters was in her ears nor could she see the wet upturned faces smiling tearful farewells, for the light of a great faith accomplished lay upon them.

Here she stood—Oline Boyen—so many years lonely, bereft in her heart, crowned in ineffable riches, taking last leave of a kingdom she had served against her will, and seeing it good. Good as the sear old earth whose mysteries are legion! At one side was her son, amusingly serious in his dear untried youth, wide worlds to conquer in his shining eyes. At the other stood her daughter, grave, and as deeply endowed as hush at even before the nightingales begin to serenade the stars.

This, too, was John's gift to her, and back there, where the maple-trees burst into tender bud in the spring and flamed with dying colour in autumn, lay her dead. Small Olaf, the unwanted. Josephine, the beloved, and John, father of them all.

Waving blindly, waving, waving, waving! This was Oline Boyen, taking leave of her long-time audience. These fading cheers were her final curtain call—this was the end.

At her side Sarah spoke gently, her husky, impassioned voice beautiful in the dusk, "Look, dear, Maple Bluffs is like a small bright star in the blue distance."

"And ahead lies the mysterious dark!" Veder concluded, smiling. "The dark I used to fear as a little chap until old Illiana told me it was just a blanket for the stars, and if I doubted her to look up into the sky and see for myself. That's what we will do now, mother, look up and find our stars."

BOOK THREE

CHAPTER I

FOR GRETA HOLMQUIST the months were no longer endless. She had earned the good will and trust of her superiors and was happy in the knowledge of good work faithfully performed. Thanks to Oscar's former instruction, she had almost at once been assigned to actual nursing duties, escaping much of the usual probationer's dull drudgery, and, as time passed, her interest in special cases attracted the attention of the head surgeon.

Now she had less than a year to serve. As another girl might write of romantic conquests, Greta wrote to Manfred of the marvels in the operating-room. Beautiful amputations, lovely bone grafting, exquisite transfusions! It was fascinating and inspirational, wrote she. Why, only last week Dr. Bradley had literally reconstructed a leg!

"So help me!" Manfred replied, "your letters remind me of Edgar Allan Poe. My adorable idiot, do think of something besides amputations and abdominal mysteries. Here it is spring again, and all the world on tiptoe with that indefinable urge towards self-expression, and all you remember are bones! The antics of a pair of swallows (they may be wrens) down on the bit of green below my window might teach you something really important. Oh, darling, you are frightfully chilly on paper! Chilly as your precious little kisses were hot that last frantic minute when we said good-bye.

"You are very silly, too, my dear young lady, always coming back to poor grandmother's potty little objections! The only objections that matter in the least are your peculiar insistences on cracked cases instead of nice young men—one nice young man, I mean. For really, I'm very nice if you'd only take the trouble to analyze me with the same loving care you apply to a goitre!"

For the twelfth time, at least, Greta reread her letter, a smile on her face Manfred might have trembled to see. How wonderful he was, she reflected. Two years had not in the least altered his affection. Two years spent in wonderful places with wonderful people, and his heart still sang of her. For really, she told herself exultantly, the fine flame of his feeling had exactly the same effect as music. Wonderful, vibratory power that caught her up on strong wings into regions more real to the mind than the world of sense would credit, and must hold her his for ever.

Ah, she loved him, loved him! Yet month after month her crisp, friendly letters deliberately aimed at discouragement. She had only consented to wait for him because it seemed incredible he should ever wish to return to claim her. For who was she to outshine all the eligible beauties whose graces were infinitely more suited to his future station? Of these fortunate girls she heard enough from Leatrice, who sometimes came to see her. Sometimes from good old Sarah, who evidently could not quite forgive her for refusing to fall in love with Veder.

Greta sighed, glanced through the window, and saw that here, too, it was spring. The ragged trees in the hospital yard looked quite gay, almost giddy, in fact, with their shining, pale green baby leaves whisking about in the warm breeze. And not so far away, the old river ran deep and dreamily through greening banks where children played. Yes, it was spring again. . . .

She was free to-day. Earlier her thought had been to visit the Boyens, who were shortly to leave for Chicago, where Professor Von Barholme was teaching and Sarah was to continue her musical training. But now she decided to do as was often her habit—to take her precious letters to the river-bank for delightful communion with Manfred.

On her way out she ran into a young doctor whose interest was not professional. “How lucky!” said he, “my car stands at the gate——”

Greta’s golden eyes mocked him. “Now isn’t that singular! The same thought struck me. You ought to be running along Dr. Phillips. Don’t let me keep you!”

Sister Monica, somewhat critical supervisor, was near enough to overhear. Her wisp of a smile encouraged the rebuffed young man. “Sister, that girl isn’t human! I don’t believe she ever thinks of anything but work!”

Sister Monica’s dark eyes might be said to have laughed. “Nurse Holmquist is exceptionally devoted to work. For a pretty young woman, I agree that is very odd.”

Meanwhile, walking fast and lightly as a young boy, Greta reached the winding river and found a familiar spot where a few straggling willows afforded privacy. Stretched out before her was the amazing panorama of Winnipeg. A city of busy thoroughfares, fine buildings of concrete and stone, and a steady stream of traffic in all directions. Yet in actual years this phenomenal growth measured little over two decades. To this town, when it was little more than a muddy frontier village, her grandmother had first brought her, carried in a blanket like an Indian baby.

Where only willows had stood in ruddy beauty, weaving shadows on the river’s breast, now drowsed the splendid houses of the rich; monstrosities of

stone, some of them set like giants in toy gardens to the everlasting envy of the poor. The hapless poor, whom ironic destiny had not chosen to lift from penury by grants of land, cheap city lots, scrap iron, or political pilfering! Greta smiled cynically. How many of the elect in this prairie capital had the least claim on actual prestige by birth, brains, or quality? How many Manfreds were there in those fine crescent homes? How many Halvors rode out behind the now obsolete victorias, in which, long since, they had awed the natives? How many of the “best set”, busily bustling to maintain its shallow superiority, could even dream the fine, fair thoughts that stirred the souls of men and women in whom the grey old centuries found happy voices?

She opened the first letter Manfred had written from Heidelberg.

“DARLING,” she read, “there is something in the past all right. Something deathless, I mean, which comes upon one with the forcefulness of living memory, and makes clear a thousand gifts and benefits. I used to laugh at grandmother, in our funny backwoods garden, over there under the young Canadian trees, dwelling so insistently upon the merits of her mouldy antiquities. Now I know it was not the concrete evidence of those ages as recorded in castles and battlements and the ivy-clad old cottages under their frowning protection she was seeing, hearing, and feeling, but the majesty of spirit bestowed on a land where centuries of human striving have left behind the imperishable ghosts of their hard endeavour.

“Everything here has a dual aspect: as of an actor whose performance, however good, reminds one of countless others, and behind these, most keenly still, of the fine spirit which gave life to them all. The ghosts of Heidelberg are many. In the square old castle, on its tree-clad hill above the Neckar, gleaming legions linger to march on moonlight nights on missions strange and many. Old vanities, long vanished pomp and fearful circumstance, breathe from its crumbling battlements.

“Yet, on my first visit to the ruins, a red-faced chap whose papa manufactures woollen goods in Mannheim, was most anxious I should see the great wine cask of a capacity of forty-six thousand, seven hundred and thirty-two gallons! A cask like that one would not find anywhere outside Southern Germany! Which naturally brought on a rhapsody of beers and wines and the rare revelries that must have gone on within the castle walls. Listening

to this friendly chap, whom I really like, it suddenly struck me that perhaps what made us different in enthusiasm and reaction was merely the difference in our past—as though those things I had heard with boredom in our Canadian garden had that moment taken new life in me, and, quite without my personal sanction, condemned the jolly fellow for his healthy unconcern with harsher splendours than bubbling beer. Queerer still, as I looked out from the battlements and saw below me the sleepy little town with its one main street, nestling houses and fine old Gothic church, ancient and hoary as the oldest part of the castle, I found myself hearing grandmother’s silvery old voice singing to herself:

‘Herr der ich tief im Herzen trage,
Sei du mit mir.’

‘Lord of my inmost heart’s recesses,
Abide with me.’

And I understood why it had comforted her in the rude wilderness to sing that. . . . That such mental concepts were responsible for the carrying forward, through flood and fire and tribulations, all that the races of men had reaped from the travail of the centuries. . . .”

Greta looked up from the oft-read page with shining eyes. How rich she was to have him even this little. And perhaps, since he found her lovely, some excellence shone in her. Perhaps she was not quite like the jolly chap enamoured of the wine cask. . . .

Manfred went on from there in lighter vein, depicting a dozen humorous incidents, teasing her a little with descriptions of the pretty German girls—so plump and huggable—so warm and friendly! Then followed details of the university itself, the staff and students, and a bit about its venerable history.

“Of the many famous men who taught here,” he concluded, “to me, at least, the most interesting are Samuel Von Pufendorf and Gottfried Gervinus. Both were historians, whose progressive views earned them exile and imprisonment. Pufendorf, who had been tutor to the Swedish minister at the Court of Copenhagen, was flung into prison when a potty little war broke out between Sweden and Denmark. Yet later, in the funny way of human duffers, he was made historiographer to Charles XII of Sweden! Gervinus got the usual prison honours for protesting against his king, putting aside the Hanoverian constitution, and defeated in his fight for German unity, turned to literature. The point of which

seems to be that doing one's best for others most likely leads to a ball and chain, while doing what one likes best leads to immortality. For which excellent reason I shall apply myself diligently to strategic policies for the complete conquest of a red-headed tyrant whose delightful possession (i.e.: uniform bad temper, uniform heartlessness, but utterly dazzling eyes, lips, and hair) are something I won't do without!

"Which ultimatum I issue this year of grace 1912, from Heidelberg Castle at high noon in the spring. To which witness legions of knights and bebies of dames and clusters of maidens, all clothed in the power and glory and wisdom of the dead. You see, darling, it's quite useless to hope to be rid of me! For the longer you are away, the dearer you become, the clearer your true image. Honestly, I'm beginning to believe we must have lived before, loved before, and all this business of fighting one another now is due to the strange new forms we wear—or perhaps some mistake we made before. This time we shall not make it!"

"Oh, but that's just it!" Greta whispered to herself with burning intensity. No matter what it cost her in terms of happiness, Manfred's glorious future must be safeguarded. He must not throw himself away on a common girl like her—he, with those rich ancestral urges pressing for fulfillment! When the right time came—when he had justified himself in that grey old university—she would simply fade out of his life, quietly and for ever. Until then, knowing his temperament, she must appear to abide by their tentative engagement. . . . His letters would be something to treasure, something to hide away against the loneliness and heartache and hunger of the empty years.

Sensible resolution! Yet how often she had been forced to remind herself of it. Not always bravely. For there were other letters of Manfred's. Quite gay, sparkling letters that frankly told of marvellous pastimes, wonderful trips into the fertile valley of the Rhine, innumerable trips along that noble river taking its tortuous way between battling crags where crumbled castles drowsed peacefully under the summer sun; that told of new friends especially one Herr Fredrik—officially known as the Count Gottleif, Fredrik Von Elberhoff, and affectionately called Ricky by his pretty and properly adoring sister, Marguerite Louisa. Followed long accounts of Elberhoff Castle, near the precincts of Mannheim, where the family lived in one modernized wing, and bats and rats and birds of all description cavorted in the others. The Elberhoffs (wrote Manfred) were democratic to the extent of adopting friends if it pleased them and owning machine and chemical

factories in Mannheim, and aristocratic enough to feel obligated to God and country and all their various and sundry dependents for the grave privilege of being Elberhoffs.

Madam Elberhoff, the Countess Elizabetta, was a fair counterpart of grandmother, he elucidated—a small, dainty person, with somewhat awesome dignity, caustic wit, and great charm. She was not so old, of course, but ill health and a large family had drained her forces. It had quite staggered him for a moment to be ushered into the presence of a tiny, black-clad lady whose six-foot courtiers numbered five, and were “some of my family!”

There were two other sons and three daughters, all married except Ricky and Louisa. But heaven alone could number the grandchildren and the dogs, cats, ponies, and goats with which they amused themselves while on the ancestral acres.

“I am not at all sure I shall ever entirely lose my awe of the little countess!” he had written whimsically. “A tiny person who can multiply her energies so effectively is not to be taken lightly. The count, on the other hand, strikes me as a little to be pitied. He sleeps and snores, dons a fine uniform now and then, and nods through sober meetings where other uniformed gentlemen enlarge on the expanding power of the army, and shake their heads at the purported asinities of Austrian statecraft. His sons see to the business, his steward to the estate, and madam to everything else, from the latest grandchild whose teeth need straightening, to the family tombstones in Elberhoff Church, which every so often require careful attention lest time, with its mischievous mistresses, Wind and Rain, obliterate the sacred records of the Elberhoffs, large and small.”

There were more troublesome aspects to his leisure than the delightful hospitality of Elberhoff, where Manfred became accepted as a welcome son. (For had not some Captain of Guards in Gustavus Adolfus’s train been a Marcusson and fought with Elberhoffs for the liberty of Germany? And had not a Toste somewhere in the dim past taken holy orders because a Fräulein Elberhoff had firmly and flatly refused his suit?) There was this inconceivable craze for flying! Even to think of it brought Greta’s heart into her throat. Every spare moment—and she could imagine how such moments might magically expand—and the most of his considerable allowance went into this maddest of mad pursuits. Apparently to Ricky and Manfred the earth was no longer a natural element! They must fly hither and yon, erratic

as birds in summer, giving no thought to such obvious possibilities as broken necks and craniums.

Once, when a week passed without a letter, she was actually on the point of borrowing money from Sarah to cable, so sure she was of the worst. And he had had the audacity to write her a glowing account of a frightful flight over the Schwarzwald Mountains where Ricky and he had been lost in bad weather and cheerfully cracked up their horrid machines making a forced landing! "But it was worth it!" wrote he, "the ladies of the Black Forest are worth seeing—especially in their Sunday hats!"

Good heavens! Greta flipped away an inquisitive insect. He had no right to gamble with his life that way! His poor mother would not sleep of nights if she knew—for of course she did not know. He admitted that shamelessly. To her frantic objections he replied with maddening logic. Men died every day, wrote he, strangled on fishbones, slipped in bathtubs, fell over dog-chains, under tramcars and cart-horses, from cables and hencoops, which, to say the least of it, was far less picturesque than a nice spinning drop from the clouds. Besides, what had he to live for anyway, except the hope of becoming a chronic cripple whose fractures and graftings and pitiful moaning might eventually appeal to her?

Sitting there by the lazy old river, she tried to visualize this thing as he saw it. The conquest of space! Dominion over the air! Oh, it was wonderful! Perhaps the only wonderful adventure left to man in the physical world. The trail of science led nearer and nearer the mysteries of spirit—that, of course, remained a white, unexplored country. But on the good earth little remained for her children in the way of rare questing except in the air. She closed her eyes, and the warm rays of the sun beat upon the lids like tiny hammers of vibrating energy. How little man knew, after all. Sunlight—what powers dwelt in it, medicinal, emotional, spiritual. What did one know, actually, of the physical universe, or its real significance in terms of eternal reality? The most familiar aspects were accepted as seen. Electricity one took for granted, the tremendous energies of water and its component parts were almost totally unguessed, save by the patient, uncrowned scientists who year by year fought ignorance and superstition and stupidity with the divine ammunition of their tireless curiosity.

The most humble beginnings point to majestic ends. In the first hollowed log that carried an adventurous spirit on some weedy pond reposed the image of the last proud ship ever to sail the seas. This conquest of the air—to what might it not lead? Already distances were vanishing, silences obliterated, and who could even faintly guess what marvels might eventually be made possible because of man's first rude conquest of the air? First, as

was true on the earth, it must bear his physical body, accustom it to speed and space, a fine detachment from the denser world. . . . Then it would intrigue his mind—set him searching the magic ether as he had searched the earth. Not for minerals, or rare jewels, or strange and potent chemicals for corporeal gain and advancement, but the deeper mysteries on which the mind and spirit of man might enrich itself to God-head.

The thought came to her, with something of that exultation the dreamers and seers of the ages must have experienced, that, just as nothing in the so-called corporeal world was ever lost, or really dissipated, so it was unthinkable anything of man's spiritual strivings was ever lost. Somewhere in time and space every thought, every idea, every dream, every defeated hope of man still existed in all its essential parts. The supporting medium, the driving power, the regenerating force, all were still here in the air one breathed, in the blue distances one conceived of as empty space, skies, firmaments, heavens. Somewhere, every pain and each joy, and all acts cruel or divine lived immortalized in some etheric substance. Perhaps that accounted for all visions, and so-called spiritual phenomena. Certain types of mind—either more truly primitive, in which the ancient intuitions were less dull, or more sensitized, and therefore keyed to finer vibrations—sensed these things and, according to their development, translated them into visions true or false—into divine inspirations or diabolic deeds.

The fancy intrigued her. She conceived of herself in the fine quiet of some grand mountain under the eternal stars being so still and profoundly detached from physical sense as to see, riding by on the wings of night, the long legions of the ancient dead. To be so truly tuned to the universe as to find unrolled before her spiritual eyes the panorama of the ages. She smiled. And why not? It had been said that every one of man's inventions has its prototype in nature or himself. That in fact he invents nothing, merely stumbles upon a fact or a set of principles already in perfect operation somewhere. Well, man had invented moving pictures to record his foolish fancies—vagrant conceptions of art and beauty and pointless inanities. Through that curious medium lifeless shadows assumed reality, and one's heart went out to their foolish, ghostly pains and pleasures. . . . Everything was vibration, sound, sight, hearing, colour, light. What was so fantastic, then, in supposing that life itself cast eternal shadows on the etheric screen of the universe?

Oh, she could well believe those grey old castles were magnetic centres for a million dreams. That someone like Manfred, whose physical instrument was sensitive and fine, thanks to heredity, and whose mind was just as fine, thanks to a correlative evolution of spirit, might readily capture

in moods and feelings a thousand truths to which the brutish and obstinately sceptical were insensible.

A small group of youngsters came scampering by, laughing and leaping in carefree abandon. Children of the poor, to whom the fates gave so much, at least, of imperishable treasure. Greta noticed in their midst a tiny tot with floating yellow curls. Suddenly Josephine, with her dancing grace and bubbly laugh, seemed very close. Moisture stung her eyes. How shocked she had been to hear of her death. How more than shocked to find herself thinking, perhaps it was best. . . . Queer, one always distrusted the dispassionate thought—was deeply ashamed of voicing reality. For it had been best. Josephine had preserved the illusion of her loveliness for those who held her dear. Her father had not been stricken down by ugly grief, but lifted out of mortal tragedy by the overwhelming flood of his love. And to Oline and Veder and Sarah, she had crystallized into an image of everlasting beauty. Perhaps death was not so great a price to pay for that.

Greta looked at her watch—the precious timepiece on which she told the hours of her lengthening separation from the giver. She ought to go back to her room, dress, and make a call on one of the nurses who was indisposed. Indeed she ought—Dr. Phillips was quite right in accusing her of negligence in social niceties. But there was Manfred's letter from Toste. She must read that. Even though she knew every word of it, and its contents were ineradicably impressed upon her mind and heart, she must read it again.

Manfred, coming to Toste for his first vacation, expressed himself as always with whimsical tenderness.

“Wonders never cease. Now I know how Alice felt while tumbling down the well. The nearer I drew to Toste, the faster my heart sank, bumped, and span about idiotically. I suppose I was really afraid grandma's fairy country might prove itself an empty myth, and wildly hoping all the wee folk would still be there, dancing under the silvered leaves of moonlit beech-trees. Although distances are negligible here as compared with the vastness of Canada, the time seemed endless. But at last I was confronted with the waters of the Aero, an arm of which I crossed in a queer skiff to a low beech-clad projection of land, which I was politely informed had once belonged to the Barons of Toste before they took to prowling about foreign parts neglecting their God-given duties. Not even marrying, as was true of the late baron, said my boatman, or worse still, mixing up with savages, as was true of the late baron's sister. Only the saints knew, said he, whether the reputed heir was half Indian or not!

“It seemed hardly the auspicious hour for confession, and besides we were landing in a quaint village, where grave and dignified mortals watched the procedure cautiously. To reach the hamlet of Toste I engaged a queer contrivance piloted by an elderly druid whose yellow whiskers made a lively fan in the breeze. The land was low and undulating, with peaceful little farms, tidy as toy-shops, dotted here and there. Leaving the water behind, we entered a beech-wood, dim and quiet, and coming out after a mile or so, the little hamlet lay before me. A village of small, neat houses, all painted alike, built alike, and looking for all the world like a child’s dream. All round were green pastures, where cattle grazed in the summer sun, and little garden enclosures with patches of flowers brightening the rows and rows of vegetables and carefully watched haylands. The little houses blinked at one another under their queer roofs, the all-important barns stared boldly—and over where the beeches began again, the church, with its sad old graveyard, lifted a white spire into the soft blue sky.

“What I felt, I know not. Some odd constriction of the heart, an impulse to pass from house to house, pressing the old stones with my young feet, hearing my Canadianized accents addressing these people as grandmother had done forty-five years ago, before her Swedish sea captain drew up the Aero and stole her heart away.

“But my conveyance waited upon no such vagaries. If I wanted to get to Toste Manor, I had best proceed. The ancient horse was unaccustomed to such long junketing, said his driver. True, I quickly agreed, and was soon lost again in the trees, in their stately and unsurpassed beauty. For nowhere are there beeches as fine as in Denmark.

“So we came at last out from their ancient shelter into a clearing, depressed in the centre as though it might formerly have been a great moat, and on a rise beyond, banked by the ever-present trees, stands the Manor—a huge, nearly square, stone pile, with four stout chimneys rising from each wing, low roofed and many windowed, and densely overgrown with vines. There is rather a fine drive, and an iron gate (with no gatekeeper now) which the whiskered gentleman opened with great groanings. And soon we were at the old door of the house itself. A massive, iron studded, oak affair, which seemed especially designed to shut out

the terrors of the world and safely enclose the small frail joys we cherish.

“Darling, you’ll laugh at me, but, standing there, such an odd feeling of returning home came over me that it seemed I must have entered here unnumbered times before. Each rusty nail and weather discoloration, the way the wooden bars sat in their iron locks, even the sound of the creaking hinges seemed familiar. And when a stout little person with a funny little cap on her head bobbed out from the dark cave of a hall to curtsy a welcome, I felt as though it were a play, familiar as some persistent dream, and that I should know exactly how to proceed if left to these queer impressions. That I should turn sharply to the left, mount a long stair, and find myself in rooms appointed—and here’s where you will laugh, my pretty science-worshipper—that’s just the way it was!

“With many elaborate apologies, Christine, the housekeeper, led me into a set of rooms on the second floor, in one of which a fire burned in a huge open fireplace, and cast a warm glow on the dark wainscoting and smoky oak rafters; there was a deep, sad quiet here which even my foolish attempts at humour and Christine’s equally foolish attempts at conversation failed to disturb. While we babbled in mixed Danish and German (for the good woman apparently could not quite decide which I spoke worse) in frantic attempts to understand each other and establish the proper relations, the impression of some once familiar mood, sorely felt and sadly missed, deepened. As though I should know—or at least, remember with sympathy—much that had gone on in this room for generations, where Tostes had thought and joyed and suffered.

“Fantastic, of course, yet what do we know of the actual power (possibly indestructible) of human thought, whether measured in terms of genius, villainy, or simple, homely happiness and quite common griefs?

“But you scold me now for being serious, who once battled me properly for lack of it, and fiercely object to my commendable interest in the newest of sciences—the heavenly science of the air. So for your comfort I hasten to assure you that the next morning found me healthily hunting waterfowl, eating it for dinner, and drinking sour wine with a longish, lonesome-looking individual who happens to be the nearest gentleman neighbour. The

lonesome look was unjustified, I soon discovered for Herr Johannes has a bouncing wife and four plump daughters, the youngest of whom shyly offered to show me the proper way to go ‘fowling’, but was instantly squelched by the eldest. The upshot of which was a picnic with all of them, and a devil of a headache when it was all over.

“For the rest of Toste, its great hall and the musty library, where surprising likenesses of surprising individuals glower and grimace and smirk and smile down from the walls, you must wait to discover for yourself. For that, too, I knew when I entered the dark old hall: here stepped a maiden in gold and silver to her marriage strain—a proud, slender, ineffably dear and difficult girl. And what was once accomplished in Toste may certainly be successfully repeated! So resign yourself to inevitable fate with a sporting spirit. For I assure you, neither the squire’s four daughters, oceans of waters, nor your pigheaded determination to freeze me off with medical anecdotes, nor yet your amusedly obvious discourses on one’s changing tastes, habits, environment, and duty have the slightest effect on my equally obstinate purpose. One day (and that day comes nearer with each twenty-four hours!) I shall carry you over the threshold of Toste. And from a room I now inhabit as futilely as a shadow you shall see a fair sunrise over mottled moors, where clouds of waterfowl wheel sharply up from glimmering reed-grown pools—but their ascending flight will be less keen and swift and beautiful than the joy I shall have in you, my darling!”

Greta shut her eyes. The rapture that filled her was an exquisite pain, a quick, hot yearning towards this precious lover separated by continents and seas, yet close as thought. How could she bear to put him from her? Where would she find the strength to deny him anything if ever she touched hands with him again? Suddenly it seemed to her that this prairie river flowing deeply, strongly by was another Jordan, in whose mystic properties she was baptized as with spirit and fire.

Clearly, as though he were beside her speaking in his dear remembered voice, so vibrant and warmly moving, she seemed to hear him speaking from the old grey castle walls where the legions of the illustrious dead moved in the moonlight:

“Lord of my inmost heart’s recesses,
Abide with me!”

And she went home, walking resolutely, as the strong walk the hard hills, knowing her strength would be sufficient.

.....

When she entered her room she saw that the wind had blown over her little desk calendar. Setting it erect again, her eye observed the date. It was the twenty-ninth of May, nineteen hundred and fourteen.

CHAPTER II

GRETA let fall the letter she had just received and sat perfectly still staring at the pink and yellow wallpaper of her new bed-sitting-room. Manfred wrote gaily as usual, but between the lines she read something that frightened her.

“Much as I admire the Elberhoffs,” he wrote, “I am beginning to find their attitude of thought in some respects a little singular. For example, Ricky and I have had several jolly runs into France, where we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves in the queer, noisy cafés and heartily agreed that the beauty of the French girls was largely mythical. We have nosed about villages and watched the peasants (just as dirty as our Galicians back home!) in the fields, and seen flocks of apparently peaceable people going piously to church. For it seems to me now that churches scream at one from every available vantage point over here. And the bloodier the history and poorer the district, the bigger the cathedral!

“To my impartial American eyes the French and the Belgian and the German poor appear very similar in their poverty and illiteracy and subjection to their particular fetishes and fool beliefs. But to Ricky, every Frenchman at least, is a possible enemy. His peacefulness is a mask for patient scheming and his piety an affectation, for what else could it be in people who steadfastly pursue a policy of vicious conquest? Darling, it’s really funny, and perhaps a little dangerous, too. Ricky is certainly a charming individual, clever and intelligent and kind. But for some strange reason people over here seem utterly incapable of an impartial analysis. They think within prescribed orbits, any departure from which would be social and moral ruin. Poor old Ricky nearly blew up when I said that, judging by what I had so far seen of Europe, there wasn’t a particle of difference in the general status of the people, and that the Germans were just as bigoted, and probably quite as unchristian, as all the other Cathedral devotees the world over!

“What a storm that was. It raged so furiously that madam the countess came in from the garden to make peace. Said madam: ‘But Fredrik, you must have patience! Our dear Manfred had the

misfortune to be reared among savages—dear boy, he will see things in better light shortly!’

“And that settled that! Madam, like everyone else over here—and that goes for England, too—finds it impossible to conceive of Canada as other than a land of wigwams and trading posts and isolated villages, where half-breeds are kept in order by policemen in scarlet uniforms. That must look impressive against vast tracts of snow! Of our progress, which nothing in European history can equal in rapidity and benefit to the common man, they refuse to hear. That our cities are marvels of engineering with hospitals and schools and universities and libraries, and homes both convenient and beautiful, they propose not to believe—or so it certainly seems. For I find a mild condescension under all the kindness of manner, and a decided intolerance towards anything coming out of America. Culture? Save the mark? To suggest that the arts flourish in America is worse than doubting the authenticity of the ark, the apple, and the tree of knowledge!

“My dear Greta, we are too young to have any art! Despite the fact that those geniuses, of which the good people over here most pride themselves, all lived when their respective nations were comparatively young, and far more primitive than our most backward districts (all inhabited by European importations, by the way) our youngness is against us. Apparently heredity and education are not sufficient to get us over the obstacles of a young country, beautiful and spacious, and free of racial intolerance! Because our poor are happier, cleaner, better informed and decently housed, we can’t create art! Nor are we patriots. For to be a patriot one must violently hate the little fellow whose flag has a different design. The Elberhoffs are losing patience with me.

“Last week the elder sons came home from a military gathering at Mannheim, and almost in a body confronted me. The Fatherland was being menaced on all sides, said they, her foreign trade was being viciously undermined, her policy of necessary expansion viewed with malicious disfavour, and there was no doubt France still had her acquisitive eye on the sanctified Rhineland. So what of my sentimental French bias, and questionable contention that the other European powers were as highly evolved as the Germans?

“That I had no French bias was useless to affirm—as useless as it would have been to deny a German bias in France. But this

time Ricky rescued me. We were to try out a new plane for a military attachment near here, reference to which instantly restored general good humour. The inference of course, being plain: if I risked my neck for German aviation it absolved me of many sins—especially the sin of being born in democratic America.

“But to-day I am leaving for Toste. I am much too fond of the Elberhoffs to risk a definite rupture. But the tense atmosphere since that Sarajevo assassination (of which you will have read a short, diplomatically falsified, account) is decidedly uncomfortable. From what I hear in the streets, opinions differ about the late Archduke Ferdinand. The Conservative statesmen of the Dual Monarchy regarded him with suspicion for his leanings were definitely towards a more enlightened form of government. For his announced policy was to break up the dual system and establish a federation of the various states of the Empire. That may explain the attitude of Vienna towards the murder—a sort of Pontius Pilate business, shunting the entire blame on Serbia although the assassin was an Austrian subject. . . . But not until to-day was the significance of it really alarming. To-day, July twenty-third, Austria sent an ultimatum to Belgrade relative to the crime, demanding among other things that delegates of Austria-Hungary take part in the judicial investigation, and giving Serbia forty-eight hours in which to reply! The unreasonableness of the time limit—obviously an excuse to start trouble—is what made me start packing my bags.

“Good old Ricky is desolated. We had planned a glorious holiday through Belgium and Holland with our reconditioned and vastly improved planes. It’s nothing short of a miracle what German mechanics can do! And speaking of planes reminds me that Ricky’s pet cat, a big yellow creature which actually takes off with him on little jumps, very modestly had kittens in the cockpit while the plane was being painted. Ricky was so touched by this maternal trust in him he swore to paint yellow cats on all his planes hereafter!

“I shall miss him. Except for the blind spot, created by environment and training, Ricky’s a delightful chap, not yet hardened into the fierce military mould popular with his brothers. After a day together in some rural spot, I find it hard to remember that our essential beliefs are so different that for Ricky the State

comes first, and no will of the people must interfere with its divine authority—that for me, Toste notwithstanding, the People come first, and the mission of the State is to serve them.

“Darling, write to me at Toste. Somehow I have a feeling I shall need your crisp medicinal letters, preferably with a touch of honey to make the cure sweeter.”

Greta sat very still. Could it be possible the unbelievable things old Hartman and grandmamma so often recounted were about to be repeated? Could it be possible that nations one had been sedulously taught to accept as the final authorities on culture and intellectual attainment were secretly preparing to fly at each other’s throats? Was all that babble about European superiority founded on a Satanic myth? For what did it benefit man to rear stately cathedrals, museums, libraries, opera houses and belching factories if none of these things raised the quota of human happiness and security of life and liberty?

Oh, Captain Marcusson was right! They should not have sent Manfred back to the poisonous soil of Europe. That pigsty of racial prides and bigotry had no humanizing contribution to make. On the contrary, the charities of those people were as artificial as their boasted culture. It was all for effect and the enjoyment of the privileged few!

What amazing speculations the destruction of one’s favourite theories evolved! She had been so enraptured with the mythical portrait of the Romance countries. She had thrilled with the heroes and wept with the crucified saints! She had believed the awful events of recorded history had created a social consciousness in the respective peoples—a sensitivity marked by an intelligent comprehension of the common interests of man. . . .

But like all faith founded on glorified myth her belief was unfounded. What her grandmother had often said was true. . . . Over there, where all those splendid cathedrals flourished like fungus in hate-ridden places, maintained in splendour by the squalor of the poor, the worship of Christ was a diabolic mockery. Clearly, those countries richest in religious lore were no whit less fearful of the “morrow” than savage races. And in nothing were they like the Christ they worshipped in such heathen splendour. They neither forgave nor forbore, nor loved peace for its own sake. In everything they were like His murderers. For they slew, and lusted after power, and put the blood of their sacrifice upon innocent people. . . .

Suddenly she started, her slim, proudly-erect form freezing into death-like rigor. Through her open window she heard a newsboy calling:

“Extra! Extra! Germany declares war on Russia!”

So it had come! The little quarrel between Austria and Servia over an ill-fated archduke whose progressive views were dangerous to the Hapsburg megalomaniacs was only a pretext.

“Oh, my God!” whispered Greta through clenched teeth. “War! War. . . .” Those steel-helmeted, iron-conditioned, grey-uniformed ranks, of which Herr Hartman’s Berlin papers wrote with such pride, were mobilizing for action. . . . For *action*! What unspeakable horrors the word implied! Oh, grandmother was right! So long as despotism prevailed in Church and State the common man had no choice but to gamble his all in a game designed to enrich others, no choice. And then suddenly she was seeing Ricky not as a cog in the cold grey unit of destruction, but as the companionable boy who had laughed and teased and tramped the Black Forest with Manfred. Ricky and his yellow cat—Manfred’s friend—by to-morrow, perhaps, his enemy. . . .

CHAPTER III

THE drums of war had swept away the last vestiges of national sanity. Men no longer thought in terms of common sense and equity. Propagandists, confronted with the dire need brought about by their folly, saw to that. The horrors of war were represented as proceeding entirely from the enemy. In pulpits, on street corners, in parks where the birds still sang, middle-aged orators, often quite sincere, shouted and raved, calling upon the young and the beautiful to lay down their lives for the nation. For democracy—for the rights of man to continue in security of life, liberty and happiness. In the fury of the moment very few discerned, and fewer still dared voice, the sad paradox. That democracy had already failed when peace-loving people were hounded into war for causes they neither understood, nor which in any particular concerned them. To confuse and enervate such clear thoughts as remained, orator and Press, politician and business man, belched forth streams of manufactured hate, as the munition factories belched forth deadly explosives.

The central powers were hell in human garb! Germany's arbitrary stand over the picked quarrel between Austria and Servia had, indeed, precipitated a war (which the world now knows was planned for the ensuing summer) but they had yet to discover why England replied to M. Sazonov, the Russian Foreign Minister, as she did in the beginning. Peace concerned England—so her statesman admitted—but the Austro-Servian quarrel did not affect her interests, and she wished a free hand to act in future.

Did not affect her interests! How truly even fallacious tongues sometimes speak! It was not in England's interests to threaten Germany from the start with her massed fleet as Sazonov suggested. Peace greatly concerned the democratic powers, but not sufficiently to inspire forceful measures in maintaining it against the megalomaniac William and a doddering Hapsburg!

But with the whole world ablaze with publicized intolerance, stupidity and fear, no one dared question the sanctified utterances of impotent and vain-glorious statesmen. One must believe the divine thunder and be prepared in ecstasy of patriotism to throw oneself before the deified chariots of Mars. Even in peace-loving rural Canada neighbours began to eye each other coldly. The Schmitz became Smiths and under pressure many a poor soul forswore the historic Rhineland. Charwomen who had proudly

advertised their claims on German cleanliness became Belgians overnight. For one must eat, and bitter bread is better than none.

To Greta, whose thinking was naturally coloured by implanted ideas from Illiana Petrovna, the violent change in public behaviour and opinion was even more terrible than the ghastly reports from overseas. It was so terrible because it betrayed a lack of genuine stability in human thinking, an almost savage embrace of superstitious fetish in place of rational measures, and total disregard for actual fact. She could never forget her surging pity and astonishment at the cheering, tramping, yelling crowds that thronged Portage Avenue on the day war was declared. It was such noisy betrayal of the Divine Principle for which America, alone of continents, had courageously stood. It struck down, as with trumpets of brass, the strong walls of peace patient thousands had built with heroism and the long courage of quiet lives cast in humble places. It laughed in the face of God, who had set aside this good continent for a new Canaan for the exile and the refugee. . . . Nor could she help a shudder of revulsion at the unctuous prayers “for the success and safety of our armies!” For always she remembered Ricky, now flying his magic craft loaded with death for the Fatherland as Manfred had been flying for England since February. To send one’s own into battle girded with hate and pray for his safety seemed to Greta not only obnoxious mummery, but an actual spiritual offence—a denial of the Christ Principle in religion and in man.

She said as much to Leatrice not long after the aeroplane assaults upon the naval base at Zeebrugge and Bruges by the Allies, where Manfred had received his christening in the new art of destruction. They were alone in Greta’s room, and Leatrice had been enumerating the boxes she had packed for overseas in the I.O.D.E. Club rooms.

“I wish I could feel there was some sense in it!” Greta began, walking about restlessly. “You’re really to be envied, Leatrice—with your quaint idea of Divine justice. Oh, don’t misunderstand me! I suppose my heartache is a sort of crazed prayer too. But these public prayers for the safety of our armies—if it weren’t so typical of all our beastly Christian hypocrisies, it would be funny!”

“But, Greta—Christ said he came not to bring peace, but a sword!” Leatrice rebuked her, in a hurt voice.

Greta’s golden eyes flamed dangerously. “Oh, go back to your boxes and bandages, Letty! If it makes you happy to cling to those diabolic arguments cleverly devised to support a militant church, that’s your affair, but I might remind you of the more direct warning: ‘Whoso taketh up the sword must perish by it!’ ”

Leatrice was a true daughter of the Church. “There are many things one cannot understand,” she retorted coldly, “which makes faith necessary and beautiful. I can’t see how anyone could endure the uncertainty of these days without prayer.”

Greta laughed, a hard, shallow sound, as of water on sharp stones. “Perhaps you couldn’t, Letty, but I propose to endure this nice Christian hell upon earth by jumping into the midst of it. I’m sailing for France next month!”

Leatrice underwent an extraordinary change. Her dark face assumed a fanatical glow of exultation. “How glorious! Greta, forgive me! I see how wrong I was—you will be there—an angel of mercy, doing God’s work! Oh, do forgive me! I thought rather badly of you for taking part in these private theatricals, even if the money did go for disabled soldiers. I’m so proud of you, Greta!”

“Well, you needn’t be.” Greta kicked off her shoes and began looking for her slippers. “I’m not going because I think it’s God’s work to patch up wonderful human bodies that have been wrecked by human vengeance, just to send them back to hell! I’m going because I’m a good surgical nurse with a strong head and stronger stomach, and I dare say there are too many sentimental young ladies flopping at the game. Now go home and let me sleep. I’m going on a case in the morning.”

So the day came at last when Greta sailed from Quebec, and saw with tear-dimmed eyes the blue Laurentian hills fade out of sight, as the fair blue hills of her youthful dreams were faded, lost in an ocean of mystery. How hard it had been to say good-bye! To take leave of grandmamma, bravely smiling, and of Oscar—kind old Oscar, who went about in a queer mental fog ever since the outbreak of the War. Oh, she was glad dear old Hartman had died quietly in his sleep before the old neighbours began muttering about the damn Germans! She would always love Captain Marcusson for his swift defence and sensible control of the silly hysteria against the German settlers in Maple Bluffs when the courageous stand of Belgium was being made a crusading cry. It had been terribly hard to take leave of them all—especially Isabella, with her brave dark eyes, so like Manfred’s, smiling a kind farewell. Of course she had innumerable letters and little gifts for him. When she saw him in Paris, they had said—If she saw him, was what they meant!

Well here she was embarked on the great adventure. Behind her lay the beautiful shores of a young peace-loving continent, betrayed into carnage by the duplicities of the old world. Ahead lay the bloody arena dedicated to the slaughter of the innocents!

CHAPTER IV

WHEN at last she saw him actually standing at the door of the funny stone house where she was billeted, Greta thought her strong young limbs would fail of their support. “Oh, Manfred! Manfred——!” And his laughter when he leapt up the three rough steps and took her in his arms, was as melodious as ever. The wonder of it made her cling to him, wordlessly, weepily, like all the other silly fool women she professed to despise.

“But, darling, it’s very thoughtless of you to weep on my spruced-up uniform!” he said, and held her the closer. Then he must look at her at arm’s length. “You’re very prim, mademoiselle. I’d like you better in something fluffy—like the yellow dress you had at our first big shindig in Maple Bluffs.”

“Don’t let’s speak of it! It seems such ages ago—like something out of history with no bearing on present reality. Let’s be gay!”

His laughter was music. “Well, you didn’t suppose I could be anything else? Darling, you’re much too lovely for a military hospital. The poor devils won’t want to get well!” Quite unconsciously a troubled shadow crossed his face. “I wish you wouldn’t—it’s rather beastly, you know. . . . Greta, why don’t you marry me instead?”

They had started walking and were now nearing a little park that seemed deserted—not very attractive to the critical senses, but any place with Manfred would have seemed beautiful to Greta. They found a fairly green spot under some ragged trees and sat down, sublimely content. It seemed as though just being together, seeing each other, being able to put out a hand and touch each other, making sure of the dear reality of the flesh, was a spell-binding miracle. And so it was, thought Greta, with a catch at her heart. For already she had seen seeming miles of stretchers bringing in the shattered, bloody remnants of what had once been wholesome, beautiful bodies, a-brim with divine life.

While she told him about “Glen Haven”, about Isabella’s War work (she had organized the whole district into a perfect working unit) and his father’s political activities to which he was pressed on John’s death, Leatrice’s social service, and his grandmother’s remarkable energy, he watched in silence. Watched her in a way that made strange quivers of ecstasy in her blood, and brought an unwonted flush to her pale face. And suddenly she found herself silent, too, held in thrall by the tortured beating of her heart.

When he began speaking, the vibration of his voice, soft, intense and full of suppressed yearning, set up a trembling she thought he must see, and hastily masked it with professional immobility. "You are as lovely as I dreamed! Lovelier. And I wonder if you can ever guess how lovely the girl he adores seems to a chap—alone, cut off from her by thousands of miles and seeming centuries of time? Oh, Greta, haven't I waited long enough? I've a short leave due soon. We could slip off somewhere and be married. . . . I'm not trying to scare you into pity for me, but, darling, I'm human, you know. It's hell sometimes, with all the world making love in a frantic effort to forget to-morrow. . . . Sweetheart, I love you so!"

He hadn't touched her. That was what made him so wonderful and so hard to resist. He took no advantages, and yet the sensible things she had meant to say died on her lips and nothing at all seemed to matter but the hunger in his eyes and the terrible need to comfort him. Nothing in all the earth could possibly justify letting him die with that look in his eyes. She shook so that even her tumbled words seemed to quaver foolishly, like blown leaves in a wind.

"Manfred, to marry you now would seem like taking advantage of the War craze. I won't do it. I can't do it, for the same reason I've always known I should not do it. . . . But, Manfred—I love you too—if you want me—take me, like all those other lovers trying to forget to-morrow!"

He didn't move, and his silence had an awesome quality. Even when she began to cry into a practical linen handkerchief he lay perfectly still, stretched out at her feet, staring up into a grey, smoke-heavy sky. When her little paroxysm was over, and the bright bronze head lifted haughtily again, he put out his hand and rocked her knee, laughing a little. "Sometimes you're an awful fool, darling. Now listen to me. There are plenty of cheap women. For some queer reason I don't want them. I suspect my chief reason for wanting you is because you're so damnably hard to get—because I know your kind of woman should be paid for in spiritual currency. That's why I'm going to marry you, my dear—some sweet to-morrow."

The tenseness had broken in her and an odd quietness possessed her spirit, as though she had passed through some furnace of trial and come through triumphant when, in matter of fact, it was he held their little craft safe in still waters. The gaze she turned on him was wondrous soft.

"Oh, Manfred," she laughed shakily, "you do make awful hash of everything! When I'm sensible you make me out a fool, and when I'm foolish you make me out as sensible. . . . You're sweet! Take me in your arms and make me out a saint."

“Thanks, no. You can wait, my good woman, till you promise to marry me on my first leave. I’m an exclusive piece, and have spent myself enough already!” he teased her, kissing the round little knee so provocatively near.

“Please, Manfred—let me get my bearings first. I’ve got to see things more clearly. . . . I promise to think of it seriously—since you’re so stubborn.”

“Perhaps that explains it,” he laughed. Then quickly sobered, “But see here, I’m no stainless he-angel. Frankly, it’s been hell, dear lady! Amusing business! Are you listening, Greta?”

“Yes, I’m listening,” said she, running her fingers lightly through the thick black hair of the handsome head on her knees. “Confess away, old dear, if that’s what ails you.”

“There’s nothing to confess. That’s exactly what ails me! But once—well, you had written me one of those friendly, medicated letters—absolutely reeked of the operating-room—and in the same post Letty mailed a long account of her spiritual rebirth, or some dashed fool thing intended for my salvation. . . . I could have drowned you both! Especially you. I had just come in from a pleasant little job blowing up a factory I had once visited with Ricky. I had a few hours leave, and one of the boys had a particular café in mind. It was all a bit boring. The unnatural gaiety, crazy songs, and those overrated French beauties plying a brisk trade. Stringy dark women don’t appeal to me. But then a little dancer popped out from somewhere, and my heart nearly stopped. She was very young, with hair almost the colour of yours, my cruel Salome, and she danced with something of your artistic restraint. And she had the daintiest little feet imaginable. And a soft little smile that seemed natural.

“It wasn’t very difficult to meet her, yet I nearly perished of impatience. I wanted to see if her eyes were flecked with gold and would snap at me like a dear little cat’s. They were blue. That was a disappointment. But when we danced, her shining little head on my shoulder, and the softness of her body flowed into mine, I went a bit screwy. I paid a nice sum to a greasy proprietor to get her away. We drove around in a cab and ended up in a little flat——”

Greta had thought herself very sophisticated—tolerant she called it. Now a chill began to creep over her, and a slow sort of rage. He instantly sensed the mood, broke off in the middle of his sentence and sat up abruptly, the old mischievous smile on his face. “Use that hard little head of yours, darling. Would I be telling you this if I’d had sense enough to behave normally?”

Relax, my girl. The victim of your cruelty was saved from a delightful indiscretion in the nick of time.”

Watching him from under drooping lids she saw his face darken. “Heaven knows what I was saying,” he began in a strained voice, “to that charming little creature, I mean. Apparently it pleased her—or amused her—for she laughed. . . . A silly little rippling giggle that dashed my fool ardour. Lord! I seemed to be plunged, hot and panting, into an icy pool, and emerged like a boy from a dip—oh, frightfully sane! That silly little sound reminded me of Josie. Of the gay little Josie I use to chase about the woods in ‘Glen Haven’, and that other Josie white and still—God! I can’t explain it, but suddenly that kid in my arms was a pitiful little thing. Another Josie, playing a game too big for her, and behind her the legions of miserable women broken in varying degrees by this beastly thing.” He laughed, shifting about uneasily. “Well—that’s all. Except, as I don’t mind admitting, I went out and got properly stewed. . . .”

Her reaction was delightfully erratic in expression. “Well, you needn’t think you’re the only one to suffer,” she snapped at him in the familiar manner. “Do you suppose I shouldn’t like dancing about in silk slippers and cooing into shirt fronts——”

She finished the rest of her complaint in happier circumstances. And in his arms all the vexatious problems seemed to melt like her anger, swept away by the sweetness of the rising tide of their changeless devotion. She didn’t want to think any more—just to feel. To thrill with rapture which nothing could take from her, for love like theirs was eternal.

In the gathering dusk of the grimy little park, so like an isolated island in a sea of city sounds, the difficult past and the doubtful future lost significance in the immensity of the everlasting realm of mind. Whatever happened to them in the world of men, the strange bond which bound them, against all arguments of logic and sense, would endure, a golden thread in the sombre majesty of their souls’ endeavour.

As though her thoughts were merely a dim reflection of his own, Manfred said after a little: “Sometimes when I’ve been alone up in the blue and seen how like a tiny checker-board the cities men build actually are, I couldn’t help thinking life down there was a funny sort of game. A play with different rules and costumes and scenic backgrounds and special noises invented to please the temper of the times, but not real. That reality was up there in the fathomless quiet, a timeless, indestructible energy out of which all those fantastic plays proceeded. And then the queer thought struck me that none of this was new, or strange, that I had known it all ages ago, and everything I should even do in the present game I had done before. That the

thing in us we call spirit always was and will be inseparable from the universe and has expressed itself in a thousand forms before.

“Sounds crazy, I know, but up there it seemed so clear. I could almost image that you and I had stood on a high hill somewhere when the world was very young and marvelled at the littleness of the life we had left behind. And that each time we had made such a climb out of the valleys we had discovered some new aspect of reality——”

“Oh, Manfred, you frighten me. Let’s go somewhere to a horrid little smelly café where everyone is foolishly engaged in dear silly little pastimes. To-morrow I’m to be sent to an evacuation hospital, somewhere in the zone of the advance. . . .”

The dark mask descended again, and his grip on her hands hurt. “Greta—I wish you wouldn’t. It’s horrible. The thought of you so little and young in all that beastly welter of hideous suffering will drive me crazy. Let us be gay, you said. Well, why not! We won’t be young long—lives are told in minutes in times of war. It’s all mad and purposeless and totally devoid of the redeeming features of the ancient tribal struggles. Let’s get something for our own before it’s too late. I’ve a week’s leave coming soon—reward for bombing a quaint old town full of quaint people! Let’s go off and live before it’s too late! Sweetheart, say that you will?”

Her lovely eyes were wet. “I can’t break my word. The doctors are sending me because I’ve made good and there’s a poor girl out there desperately in need of rest. I must do that much at least. After that—— Oh, Manfred, don’t you see I’ve got to do something big enough to prove to myself I’m worth your having? I can’t come to you beggared of self-respect.”

“Very well, my lovely little mule. But I warn you, I’ll not wait too long for that precious vanity to sprout. And now, sister, let’s go find the smelly little café and the silly pastimes which are to make us forget to-morrow!”

CHAPTER V

GRETA had been three months in the frightful shambles of the zone hospital, in a row of hastily constructed huts with roofs of corrugated iron, behind a slippery road that resembled a river of grey mud in a vast desert strewn with shards of iron, tangled wires and scattered stones. The road seemed to leap up from nowhere, out of a vague horizon blurred in smoke, and to fade away in middle distance obliterated by an uneasy humping of the desolated plain. All day and all night horses and men floundered back and forth on the breast of the grey river, and after them and before them wagons and motor-lorries that shook and rumbled.

It was almost dusk when such a complaining vehicle had spewed her out, with several old men who she supposed were orderlies, before one of the huts. Her reception was in keeping with the grey, bristling reality round about. Someone pointed out a cubicle for her cloak and belongings, and a minute later she was called by the same voice. She was wanted in the partition of the hut which served as an operating-room. It was not a large room, nor, for the moment, manifesting its sometimes fearsome activities. A short, grizzled surgeon and two orderlies stood vulture-wise over a contorted figure on one of the operating-tables. At Greta's approach he swung round eyeing her with swift disapproval: "Lord! Why don't they send us women——" he snorted. "You're much too pretty. . . . Well, grab his leg! He's just been found—poor devil. Ha! Thought so! It stinks! There's no good waiting. Give him the chloroform!"

The seemingly dead man opened tragic eyes. Out of the fearsome inertia of his agony he cried with sudden childish terror. "For God's sake, save it!—doctor—for God's sake——"

"Now, now, what's a leg, young man," said the surgeon, noting with relief Greta's expert knowledge of his requirements. "You're lucky—give him the chloroform, sister."

But the patient lurched up screaming. Let him die then. He had died a thousand deaths in that hole already! One more wouldn't matter! But to live a cripple. . . . The orderlies strapped him down. And Greta, to the surgeon's astonishment, launched into a flow of words, a soothing river of consolation in a voice so curiously freighted with power it acted perhaps more swiftly than the quieting needle she thrust in the patient's greyish body. But certainly he must not throw his beautiful life away for a mere leg! So of course he must breathe deeply—deeply—and soon it would all be over.

It was only when the patient had been assigned to his bed that Dr. Mallory suddenly remembered that the girl had come many weary miles in a driving cold rain and possibly without food.

“When did you eat last?” he growled at her, and was rewarded by a wisp of a smile, a little impudent, he suspected.

“About six hours ago,” said Greta. “And that was very bad. But I’d rather get my bearings. I was told you expected a drive shortly.”

“That’s why you’d better eat. Come with me. This way, young woman, we dine in the raw here! You’ll learn as you eat.”

Which was true. Dr. Mallory cleared a corner of a table in the sterilizing-shed, pushing aside stained bandages, bottles, splints, and thrust out of sight a basket of suspicious-looking bundles in stained rags and paper. And to the steady hissing of boiling water in huge tubs on the stove he added the rumble of his growling voice as they sipped chocolate in tin mugs and ate dried biscuits and cheese.

It was a good beginning, Greta knew that now. Her cheerful acceptance of the frightful world to which she was thus introduced won his confidence. Which in turn helped her through the nightmare that was shortly to follow. Those unspeakable first hours with the wounded just in from the lines. Rows and rows of shapeless, mud-encrusted, bleeding bundles deposited like butcher’s cargo on the floor outside the operating-room. Doctors and nurses and orderlies flying in and out, now the groaning living the burden of their care, now the dead, cast off hastily to make room for still others. . . . Blood, and stench of rotting wounds, smells of disinfectants and mists of sizzling steam were the natural air of that hideous arena devised by Christian charity to salvage Christian sacrifices. Arms and legs, and fetid bits of flesh, and queer, pulpy substances that once had been brains conducting thoughts of happiness and love and little precious hopes; these, like the gruesome offerings of cruel savages, were carried out under the steely sky in sweet libation to the lustful God of War. To the one God in whom Christian nations really repose any trust.

For this glutton, whose iron band and sword of fire was to keep safe the homes of all his various hosts, no lovely human thing was too fine a sacrifice. For the glory of statesmen, whose sly scheming was the chosen gospel of aggressive ironmongers, oil magnates, industrial barons, and a thousand and one opportunists, the young and the swift, the dreamer with his latent talent, and the poet with his immortal heart were sent up in smoke, riddled with lead, and stuck through the entrails in Christian warfare!

In the terrible nights when comparative peace reigned, when the tortured remnants of men once splendid and virile slept and moaned like children in their sleep, Greta sometimes thought with near hate of Leatrice—all the million stupid Leatrices who prayed to distant deities and thought their duty done. Fools! Fools! What women needed was sterner gospel. They, to whom God entrusted his dearest creation, should wake to the holy mission—stop murdering God in their sons. Stop bearing men in pain and sorrow for the hosts of war, erroneously conceived as the protective arm of state, and the jealous power of organized religions all shrieking their exclusive rights in the kingdom of God. All of them wilfully forgetting the luminous words! —“the Kingdom of God is within you.” In the hearts of men, betrayed by fallacious logic, for ever stilled, trampled in the foul mud of battle-fields.

But out of all this pestilential, useless torment perhaps a new consciousness of God would waken in man—recognition of the crime he committed by attributing his own paradoxical reasoning to the Universal Father, clothing in habiliments of godliness frightful deeds and thrice frightful beliefs. The dead records of history revealed one thing clearly. All those forgotten dramas, both good and evil—more particularly the evil—had conspired to kindle new concepts in mankind. Not the preachments of men, whether just or bigoted, had induced a degree of religious tolerance, but the unspeakable tortures practised by the righteous upon those who differed from them. Out of that welter of butchery, those beacons of burning human flesh, carried on with indubitable sincerity for the glory of God, had finally broken the first flickering light of tolerance. Who could say, then, that this hideous carnage, as falsely instigated and sincerely supported, might not, by sheer brutality and horror and aftermath of ruin, engender wider wisdom in the nations?

So she tried to believe for her own heart's comfort. Sometimes it was not easy, as, for instance, when some patriot began recounting the reputed atrocities of the enemy. Childlike old priests dragged through the streets, stabbed to the heart while quietly reading the breviary, insulted in those offices dearer than life to them. Such things, if true, were vile indeed, but that the courage of rare spirits should be used to increase hate was viler still. And the fantastic glorification of death was horrible! A hideous hangover from savagery when man instinctively defied what he most dreaded and, to ward off its malignant power, offered up sanguinary sacrifices.

But again, even in this grey land of dead and dying and death-in-life, there were oddly elated moments. Splendid moments, when some almost spent life was miraculously saved, when horrible agonies were quieted, and a white peace lay upon the ugly, reeking huts. Such was the day when Dr.

Mallory, grey as a ghost himself, sank down on a stool in the sterilizing-room and, glancing at Greta quietly mixing cocoa, said curtly: "You're a queer girl, Holmquist. If anyone had told me three months ago you could lift out a man's brain with his broken pate and not turn a hair, I'd have laughed. More sugar—there's some in the can over there. I've watched you like a cat. You're thin and white, and sometimes to see you one would think a stiff wind might blow you away. Yet you have nerves of steel—which wouldn't be so strange, perhaps, if I had not caught a look in your eye now and then which betrayed a keen sensitivity. One learns not to feel after a bit. But until then it's hell—that's why you puzzle me, Holmquist!"

Greta sat on a can, stirring her cocoa. Her reply, given with the crooked wisp of a smile he knew so well by now, was characteristic in its implied irony, "I'm part Russian, you know. That may explain it." Her voice was coolly professional, but the eyes she fixed on his had an added depth of brilliancy, as though for a moment the burning intensity of her ardent soul defied the sensible logic of reason. "Perhaps centuries of suppression and cruelty have bred a resistance to horror in Russians—instinctive callousness towards pain. Perhaps that's why I can see men wriggling like angle worms and tell myself it doesn't really matter. That most likely they'd die of cancer, cough out their lungs with T.B., or suffer some one of the thousand industrial casualties. Death, my grandmother used to say, is no great matter. It is life that counts! To live it fully while one may."

Dr. Mallory wrinkled up his face in what might have been meant for a smile. "You don't exactly justify the whole of that excellent logic. It's hardly the fullness of life—this mess!"

"But why not?" Her tone had a just perceptible edge. "When the whole order of existence has been overthrown, when suffering and fear and bigotry and hate have replaced all the seemingly impossible things one used to believe in, isn't this as full a life as any? As hideous and hypocritical and pointless as any?"

"Rot, my dear, rot! Drink some more chocolate and get some rest! It's too damned quiet to suit me. Means a beastly drive brewing. More angle worms. Poor devils!"

Greta took off her soiled apron and threw it with a pile of similar linen. Her face was drawn and pale, but the pallor was becoming, because the flame of her spirit glowed like a lamp through the flesh.

"Doctor, have you ever thought that perhaps history does repeat itself—with slight modifications of major evils, and slight advances in good? Sometimes I think so—that I have lived through, and beyond, all these

things before, and know, therefore, how short-lived is each human epic—all the little dramas of our little lives lifting us up by the boot-straps of pain into the divine stature of enlightened humanity.

“Crazy, you will say. Perhaps none of us are quite capable of sanity. We’re too near the jungle. But I must believe that something eternal, some quality of excellence very splendid in its ultimate aims and final end will come of our cruel blunders, our furious strife, and intermittent search after new forms of beauty.”

CHAPTER VI

IT was ominously quiet. The big guns a few miles ahead had given up the constant thunder to which Greta was now so accustomed that cessation provoked a faint reaction of apprehensive fear. In the fertile womb of those silences frightful monsters of destruction hatched to swift maturity. They sprang out in showers of iron hail, behind pillars of leaping fires, and clouds of greenish gases. They mowed down the living with a million sickles, and stamped on the dead with a multitude of spiked heels. The silence and the lascivious dark were like harlots crouching about the feet of men, insatiable and cruel, and their gateway led to Hell.

The quiet disturbed the troubled peace of Greta's patients—eight men in the little hut farthest from the road. Not many. Yesterday ambulances had borne away, into the middle distance of the grey horizon, the fruits of their salvaging. Of the eight in her special charge, only one was seriously injured—legs, arms, eyes, these were not serious.

But the boy was an Abdomen. That's how he was labelled when he came in from the field hospital: Abdomen. He must have been beautiful: a fair-haired Russian, who had been in Paris studying art, dancing in cabarets sometimes when the larder got too low for genius to flourish. To hear him babble was torment. For she understood him when he spoke in Russian, and a queer lump grew in her throat. He babbled mostly of Anastasia. A little dancer with gold-red hair. "Like yours, sister!" he tried to smile at her, and she felt that nothing had ever been so hard to bear.

Because he was wounded in the stomach a perpetual thirst tormented him, and only the smallest doses were granted his tortured lips. But despite this painful caution and expert care, it was evident these things could not prevail. His fever mounted, and his half-hysterical babble increased in its sore intensity.

Since her rounds were now not so heavy she had time to watch him. Something she failed to understand drew her constantly to the little hut where the eight young men lay so patiently, and one cried in his anguish. About midnight when she slipped to his side, she thought he had fallen asleep, for his eyes were closed and he lay quiet. But at her light touch he started up on the pillows, a wild light of joy in his face. "Anastasia! Anastasia!" he cried, holding out his wasted arms, "Glory be to God, my prayers are answered!" With the eyes of the startled men opposite fixed on her, Greta received that embrace, speaking softly, lightly: "But why not,

little dear one? How should I stay away,” she smiled on his mad delusion, grateful for the Russian Illiana had taught her.

“Do not leave me! Do not slip through the window into the dark as always before!” He clutched her frantically, “Stay, Anastasia, let me hear your voice! Tell me you love me! It has been long and long since you wrote—still, you love me?”

She had managed to ease him back on the pillows and an orderly, who understood such things, had gone to fetch the priest who watched the souls of men as they came and went, some to life, some to death, in those squat grey huts.

“Dear Alexis, most certainly I love you. Am I not here? Rest now, and to-morrow we will talk of lovely things—the so dear things you want to hear!”

He still clung to her desperately. “But you are real, Anastasia. Yes, yes, your hair is the same. Gold shines in it softly as sunshine. And your beautiful eyes—but you do not sing! Why don’t you sing, Anastasia? I must hear your voice to be sure—dreams have no voices. But you have a voice! You must sing, Anastasia! You must sing!”

“Yes, yes, Alexis!” Greta knelt by the narrow cot. “Only be still now. I will sing, softly, my Alexis, just for you. The dear Russian song of the Little Yellow Bird, that is very sweet. Be still now and listen——”

Her voice, always possessed of restrained power that gave it a melodious depth, had now something infinitely tender in its vibration. To the lean dark man, in the cot opposite, she appeared in remarkable light. These things she said to the poor demented boy were true on her lips. She was no passionless nurse doing a painful duty. She was Anastasia. Love sang in her low, sweet voice, and a light of inner ecstasy shone from her pale face. She had put from her completely the cool professionalism which gave her strength to endure her dark duties, and had assumed the impassioned form of the girl Alexis dreamed and desired. And the man watching Greta had seen in her face the swift, incredible change from one character to another as when a true artist goes from reality to unreality and makes truth of fiction.

Almost as though she had spoken he knew when her conscientious profession stepped aside and the pity in her heart took command of the situation. It was an incredible performance. For when her song ended the boy began to weep, pitiably, as though his joy were a crown of thorns that pierced his troubled mind. God was good. He had granted a miracle. But there was one thing more he wanted. Anastasia had always danced like the angels, her shining hair a perfumed wing in the night. If only he might see

her dance once more he could die at peace, certain of the blessed resurrection and the forgiveness of sins.

The priest had entered and stood quietly near. A grave, ugly little man, whose ugliness had a hidden beauty that grew on one. He seemed neither old nor young, but eternal like his amazing mission, like his deep understanding of the perplexed and fainting hearts of men. When Greta rose swiftly and with a quick movement cast aside her headdress, loosening her cloud of burnished copper hair, he made no sign to stop her. He had come to shrive a poor sinner, but God, he knew, chose many ministers of comfort. He could wait.

So there, in the dim little hut, with the wounded roused from fitful sleep to witness a strange, unheard-of thing, Greta danced on her tired feet; in her stockinged feet, that ached with cold and countless hours of tireless duty, lightly and delicately with scarcely a sound, and the white moonlight making a golden wing of her heavy hair. And on his pillows, the thin, wasted face of Alexis broke into smiles, into radiance that made the dark man opposite dash a hand to his eyes. And made the little priest suddenly to remember the good St. Francis preaching to the birds. . . . There were many services, and many servants, and all doubtless acceptable to the Divine by reason of the spirit impelling each act. . . .

Alexis dozed off into a little sleep, Greta's tired arms around him, the grave priest on his knees by the bed. After a little, he roused himself. With Anastasia holding his hand and his small sins confessed, he was not afraid to die. No! No! There was nothing now to be afraid of—nothing!

"Nothing, my son," the priest repeated after him, and began his holy office.

But when it was over, Greta staggered a little as she rose and was glad of the friendly hand held out to her.

Amid the usual clatter of kettles and pans, boiling instruments, hot-water bottles, and all manner of pads and tubes and medical paraphernalia, they had a hot drink, watching in silence the dawn break above the desolate plain. Dr. Mallory, who seemed rarely to sleep, entered in his brisk, noiseless fashion, and stopped with a frown at sight of Greta, "You're a nice object—glad I'm getting rid of you!" said he. "And you've no say in the matter either. I've written for your leave. You're going back to-day. We need fresh nurses for the crop our little peace will hatch."

Perhaps it was the suddenness of it, the astonishing knowledge that there was a way back out of this grim place, but suddenly Greta covered her face in her apron. Not weeping, but shaking in a silent paroxysm of over-strained

nerves. They left her alone. After a bit she said, in a small, shamed voice: "I'm sorry, but I'm really quite all right. I should very much rather stay. There's nothing for me to do in Paris—or any other place for that matter."

Dr. Mallory lifted bristling eyebrows amusedly. "No? Yet I'm informed a couple of handsome officers have been making frantic inquiries for you—in fact, one of them happened to be on hand when my message arrived. I shouldn't wonder if you had an excellent escort back, my girl!"

He left as hurriedly as he had come, and it remained for the priest to discern her great agitation. Her face had taken on an ashy hue, and her hands trembled although so tightly clasped the knuckles showed white.

"You are not so clear on duty to yourself as to others," he said, with his quick, observant glance.

"Tell me, am I a coward do you think?" she countered.

"After to-night, would that be possible?" he answered quietly.

"That is not what I mean—there are harder things. I have reference to spiritual cowardice. The attitude of mind which makes reasonable excuses for failure in observing the finer rules of conscience. It is so easy to justify selfishness in the name of tolerance and common sense."

"True, but I should hardly call it selfish to rest for future labours." He was watching her covertly, drawing her out before the place should be astir and no privacy theirs. She had need to relieve her mind, that brave one.

She looked up quickly. "Surely that's a motor? Father—I'm afraid. It's the young man Dr. Mallory mentioned. I love him—but I should not marry him. I am not fine enough. It is very difficult, father!"

How difficult he was shortly to see. For the sound of two or three machines halting in the yard seemed to have deprived the girl of all action. And when a tall, uniformed figure, one arm in a sling, appeared in the low doorway the good father thought she would faint.

"Greta! Greta!" What magic sang in that voice! How splendid the young creature who strode past him and caught the girl with his one good arm to his firm young breast!

"Manfred—you ought not to have come. . . . Oh, my dear, my dear, you are wounded!" She clung to him a tremulous moment, then, in a voice she strove to make casual: "Father Le Jean, this is—" she hesitated, her eye observing a significant detail of the uniform, "—Captain Marcusson."

They exchanged a few commonplaces. The father had heard of that bold young flyer. His exploits in the Verdun Sector were news. It was there he had risen in the service, had won a medal, a broken wrist and a well-

deserved leave. Manfred turned to Greta, that unforgettable smile on his face. “Young lady, I’ve come for my spoils! It’s all settled. We’re going to fly to England, and, by special arrangement with the dear governments, from there to Toste for sixty days of life!”

That foolish uncontrollable trembling seized her again. “Father!” she appealed to him despairingly, “what can I do? Look at him. . . . Look at me—a common girl of common people—and I love him!”

Manfred flushed a little, but his one good arm was most efficient. From the depths of his bosom she heard the father’s quiet voice speaking, as to himself, rather than these two so nobly made for each other. “There are doubtless relevant answers to your question, my daughter, but I was thinking that the mother of our Lord was not chosen from the great according to this world.”

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A little later she had taken leave of her fellow-workers, not one of whom begrudged her a well-earned rest and joy of her captain. She slipped into the last hut, where something divine still lingered. She had a cheerful word for the seven who remained. Perhaps she might see them in Paris, who could tell? The world was full of strange complexities.

Before she left the dark man who had watched her so intently at her tragic impersonation, called her.

“Mademoiselle, were you ever on the stage?” he wished to know.

“Oh, no, but I have danced all my life. I am Russian—it is in my blood.”

He scribbled something on paper and gave her. “When this mess is over you may have had enough of pain. That’s a theatrical agency—my business. Keep it in mind. You were made for beauty, mademoiselle. . . .”

CHAPTER VII

A WEEK later she was driving to Toste with Manfred, in a soft blur of ascented twilight. Indeed, everything was vague and indistinct in this wonderful world of clean, unfrighting silences. Sweet as Eden at the first dawn, and they alone in it. They had just been married in Toste church by a most astonished and equally elated minister. Their names stood now for all time in the ancient register, where so many Tostes had left a like record. Hastily summoned neighbours had come to wish them well, the red-faced squire and his four amiable daughters among them. But none of it was very real to Greta.

The dear reality was Manfred. So adoring, so ardent, so unbelievably thrilled by the merest touch of her hand, her little timid kisses. His obvious pride in her beauty, which she had always a little despised, made her deeply rejoice—glad for his sake, and a little proud also.

He had insisted on what she considered a sinfully extravagant wardrobe. Everything as unsubstantial and impractical as the somewhat depressed fashions permitted! He had seen enough of her in blue and white primness. He must see her in floating, filmy, beautiful things in the silver twilight of Toste.

The experience was incredible. She rode out from death and damnation into a glorious region of beauty and light. From a world full of hate and fear and muttered vengeance, she had come to a quiet backwash where life basked in delightful homely pleasures. All the way to Toste the gentleness and sweetness of it burned into her heart, made her eyes glow moistly, for only now she knew how great a prize was life, how infinitely precious the pursuits of pleasant peace.

“Look there, darling,” his voice against her cheek murmured, “a strong old house—full of memories. You’ll love it, Greta!”

How brightly the lights burned in the windows, like so many watchful eyes keeping guard over an ancient sanctuary. How lovely the dark beeches stirring their old branches in the little wind!

The old housekeeper was already at the open door, dressed for the great occasion in national custom, her bright bodice a patch of warm colour in the dark deep hallway, “Welcome! Welcome, my lady!” The old voice vibrated with feeling. But Greta was not to enter that house prosaically. Manfred caught her back joyously: “My lady, put your arm round my neck, and I’ll

manage the rest!" he laughed. And lifted her up the old stairs and over the ancient threshold.

Christine was transported, "That was beautiful, sir! I've been told all the happy brides of this house entered so. The rooms are ready, Herr Baron. I made bold to engage a village girl for my lady, a nice little thing, called Tina."

The rooms were indeed in readiness. Flowers scented the air, and long candles flamed softly in brass holders. Christine would not tolerate modern lamps for such an occasion. A little fire burned dreamily on the hearth, for the thick stones of the old house made for perpetual chill, even in early autumn. But the deep peace that closed round them was the best of all.

"Oh, Manfred—it's so beautiful I don't see how it can possibly be true!" she said, moving about the huge chamber like a person in a dream. And that's what it was, she told herself silently. An exquisite dream, to treasure against the dark days of reality. A paradise of gracious gifts for her inmost treasure.

He was very gay. A little straightened in his gaiety, perhaps, because of the long banked fires in him. They made a charming couple at their festive mahogany table, and Christine kept wiping her eyes every now and then. Just to look at them was to relive the magic joys of youth, and realize the inevitable tragedy of its swift end.

But when young Tina in her pretty peasant garb came to light the fire in the big bedroom beyond, blushing from shyness and a prideful self-importance in her task, a sort of panic seized upon Greta. It was not fear, nor the confusion of ardent senses, but rather a kind of spiritual ecstasy both tragic and divine. As though she knew in advance that against the gates of her little paradise the angel of the flaming sword stood waiting. . . .

Tina bubbled with pleasure over my lady's lovely trousseau, her little honest face proclaiming a rapt admiration of the slender young bride in her white satin *négligée*, and the glossy, copper-coloured hair mantling her exquisite shoulders. When all was done the little maid bobbed her curtsy. "Baroness, God give you joy!" she said shyly, in the good country fashion, and added in a little rush: "There never could have been a lovelier bride in the Manor!"

Oh, she hoped so! She would have wished to be thrice lovely and thrice deserving—but perhaps so deep a love as hers must count for much.

She was standing very still by the open window when he entered from his dressing-room. The look of her face sent the blood from his heart in a rush. She was like the radiant saints of the Middle Ages. The glow of

deathless beauty shone around her, and love incarnate burned in her beautiful, luminous eyes.

In a rapture that needed no words, they watched the silver crest of the moon mount the sky. The stars stood still above the brown marshes, and the old, old trees murmured contentedly in the grounds below. And, behind them, like an actual living presence, powerful and mighty, stood the huge four-poster bed canopied in blue velvet, the crest of the Tostes above the headboard. A mysterious thing, made with hands, that had survived the generations which had been born in its embrace, joyed, grieved and died there. Under the crest, in faded letters was the ancient motto of those dead generations: “To the Strong There is No Defeat!”

CHAPTER VIII

OF all these exquisite days perhaps none were more memorable than the last, spent on the moors, where an eternal quiet possessed the land. These brown places, lonely to the casual observer, were full of rushing life—little sweet things pursuing innocent destinies. The whirl of wings, gleam of white waterfowl rising from the blue pools hidden here and there, made a perpetual music. And to this music the ghosts of Toste tripped, out in the twilight.

She knew so many of them now. The knights who had fought for mistaken causes as stoutly as those whom the generations justified. Staunch Catholics who had seen the cross of Christ in the midst of battle; grim Protestants, in whom the beginnings of cold reason outran the mystical beauty of spiritual vision. She knew by heart their struggles, their ruthless climb to fame and royal favour, their sins, and their charities. A little oddly, she found the fragrance of humanity more strong in the sinner than the saint. For virtue had a harsh, unnatural quality in those stern old days. And out of the gallery of fading portraits in Toste Manor one stood out so boldly she felt an odd thrill to meet his painted eyes. A dark, sardonic young cavalier, the last to subscribe to the old Catholic faith. A reckless, beautiful creature whose escapades were legion and charities a byword. His lady he had calmly abducted from a frowning castle on the Rhine, and cheerfully spent the remainder of a short life in defensive warfare against her enraged relatives. The lady was hardly worth it, said Greta, which raised an instant defence for her pale beauty from Manfred. "Why, she's lovely. With her hair out of that queer coronet of crazy stones, and a decent dress, she'd be very like you. Look at her stubborn little chin, and that fine nose, and that frightfully firm mouth! I'll bet she kept the poor old chap jumping!"

But now it was over. They sat alone on a little rise overlooking a small reed-grown lake, and the joy they had of each other was as a sunset about them. The future held no intolerable terrors, despite its grim shadows, for it could not rob them of the imperishable loveliness of this short sweet lifetime. Neither one mentioned to-morrow. In the blue dusk of this endearing place the temporal seemed merged in the great Eternal as gently and sweetly as consciousness merged into sleep. Yesterday and to-day and to-morrow, these were one in the great eternal—and whether her pleasure or her pain were of the one or the other it would shortly pass and merge into eternal memory. Into dreams beyond dreams. Like the little lady in the faded canvas her heart's joy and agony would soon be nothing but a tale told softly by

some other—all this dear love of theirs pass into myth, into pale ghostly memory, sweet for retelling in some far future silver dusk.

How strange. Yet how good to know that seeds of far splendour slept in one's heart. That whatever else failed love endowed one with a shining immortality. Oh, here in this old, old hush of a land grown quiet and peaceful, it was possible to hear the great heart of nature beating, rhythmically and deeply, and know that all her ends were tending towards some infinite grandeur beyond the final stars.

Manfred's hand sought hers. "Darling, when you look like that my poor heart goes down in the dust. As though I'd rifled paradise of a serene angel, and must face the wrath to come. . . . Honestly, you frighten me sometimes by your loveliness—not just your beautiful body or the adorable ways that catch my breath away, but something intangible. The something I always sensed dimly and wanted for my own. For my innermost heart's recesses—that's what I really wanted to say that night long ago, when I told you about the girl in the cab."

"I know," she said. "I know. But you're very wrong, dearest. I'm a poor sort of angel. It's this heavenly place and your love make me seem less ordinary."

There was a slow, endearing light in his dark eyes as he watched her, every delicate feature of her face engraving itself indelibly on his mind. "There's another thing—a queer sort of thing keeps bobbing up. . . ." His smile faded, and the little thin lines appeared more visible round his lips and eyes. "It happened when Ricky and I went over the Black Forest. It's a rugged, severe sort of place, and the people are very simple and poor. Good souls like our Hiners and Schmitz back home, but their houses and customs were different—or seemed different in their ancient background. But one day Ricky and I came through a stand of heavy trees into a little patch of plateau. A comical effort at a farm, it seemed to me, recalling our huge Canadian places. There was a funny little house there, quite new, it seemed. And under the trees near by a young woman sat nursing her baby, the whiteness of her breast unashamedly exposed, and the little one sleeping. She was quite undismayed, smiling in a broad, genial fashion, a kind of ancient dignity about her plain figure. In the little field her husband hoed away at the vegetables. A little black dog slept in the sun, and a few goats grazed in the clearing. It was like the pictures one sees in old museums, given new life and power of suggestion.

"I wondered then if those two had any idea how happy they were. The man, and the woman, and the little child, in a new little world they had just created. I wondered if their closeness to nature gave them any feeling of

permanency—any knowledge of their actual destiny. And I found myself thinking that perhaps that small one might end up in some fine clearing in Canada with a little wife performing her lovely ministry under our kinder skies.

“It made the whole world seem very small, and nothing of much consequence, except the simple business of living. Yet here I am, dedicated to the arts of destruction—the desolating of little quiet homes!”

“That isn’t true, Manfred! We’re all like people in times of plague. Someone was to blame—someone started the contagion. Now we’re fighting for our lives! Perhaps the aftermath of this frightful War will drive us all back to simplicity——”

“Or quite obliterate us!” he caught her up, his eyes on the deepening shadows that were almost purple where the beech grove loomed against the sky, and the chimneys of Toste stood up like stout spires on a dark parapet; “Wipe our stupid civilization out of existence with the sharp sword of increased hatreds, and give the good old earth a Sabbath of enduring peace!”

“Manfred, do you remember what you said when you gave me my watch?”

“Something exceedingly foolish, I’ll wager!” He lifted her to her feet and turned towards Toste.

“You said it should remind me every moment of the day that, somewhere in time and space, you would be waiting for me. I believe that—I know it. It is a fact of being, like the sun, and the stars, and the cosmic dust. Our dear, earthly joys may be shaken like the sweet-scented blossoms from a fruitful tree, but the springs of being are eternal—a divine essence inseparable from the divine universe. These things I know, for they came to me out of the dying hearts of men—out of their misspent sacrifice, which, none the less, was an act of grace. The sin of it and the shame of it on the heads of those who knew its falsity. So—whatever ‘the stern Recorder register, or quite obliterates,’ that precious truth remains: somewhere in time and space, you and I, and all the lovers since life began, remain steadfast, fixed as the stars in the heavens of our love! What else can possibly matter?”

He caught her close, this wonderful love of his—this passionate being of fire and ice, whose dear flippancies had veiled such depths of feeling, such infinite capacity for profound reflection. His voice was a little husky. “And I know now that, with you in my heart, I have everything—the power and the glory. Oh, Greta! God made you lovely as a light in dark places!”

And so they went home, silently, over the quiet moor, under the still stars of Toste, where the ancient beeches murmured disconsolately, as though

their thoughts disturbed them.

CHAPTER IX

MANFRED'S wrist was troublesome, the fingers slow in regaining their marvellous flexibility, the whole hand subject to muscular contraction and moments of insensitivity. It annoyed him, for he hated staying on the ground coaching novices and young flyers. The bedlam of the War seemed so devoid of all those elements of sportsmanship and sometime chivalry which characterized those more remote combats to which his ancestors had subscribed. The cold, calculated science of modern warfare robbed it of those few redeeming features which formerly characterized it. In terms of cold logic, it was doubtless wise to secrete pompous generals in safety behind the bleeding troops, but there was something grand in the follies of a Gustavus Adolphus and a Richard the Lion Heart—something sublime in the madness of a Joan of Arc—of all those proud, just souls who asked no more of their soldiers than they themselves were ready to give. And the memory of the stolid grey troops he had seen, marching with machine-like precision to the volley of expertly-barked commands in the German towns he had known, haunted him miserably. Doubtless there was a vicious practicality in reducing living, feeling men to this insensible subjection—doubtless Frederick William I, the founder of the Prussian dynasty, had a definite end in view when he said of the troops: "What use is honour to them provided they are formed and maintained in fear? Let them fear their officers to the point of dying at the first sign of their will!" But it was not the sort of spirit the old Sea Kings of the north required in their warriors. Discipline, to the point of taking all initiative, all heart and charity out of a man was Satanic wisdom, and its end damnation.

Frankly, to Manfred the War had no patriotic bearing. It was butchery by mechanics, death by scientific deduction, and all the shouting about glory by statesmen, paid orators, and fierce old women was sheer hypocrisy and hysteria, as far removed from truth as the Judas boasting of business men, "doing their bit" by doubling their profits and employing women in poison factories. He was in it because it was part of the crazy world to which he had been born, and no more to be avoided than evil weather. So he had written to his grandmother when he enlisted. And if she failed to understand him, his father hadn't. To Ephraim, evil had always seemed inseparable from good—a kind of dark shadow in which the fainting and feeble shoots of new virtues took stronger root. He had replied to his son by quoting the old Norse injunction to the effect that a man has not attained full stature until he has stood upright against overwhelming odds.

Manfred smiled at that a little. Those old Vikings had lived by a different code. But how would it serve them in a commercial war where men in multitudes were shot to shreds by unseen enemies! It was all madness! Only in the air was there any slightest vestige of dignity, of equality of opportunity, and sombre romance. And of itself the mere act of sailing the heavens as his forebears had sailed uncharted seas had an aspect of grandeur even his dark mission could not quite obliterate.

He was impatient to be gone, yet the few extra weeks with Greta were a perpetual delight. Perhaps his impatience was born of an innate hope that the inevitable separation from her might, somehow, be shortened through his eager haste. His orders came quite suddenly, in October. He heard that Munich was to be bombed—Munich! Where he had spent a carefree winter's holiday with Louisa Elberhoff and Ricky.

Greta sent him away bravely enough, but when he was gone she found it impossible to compose herself with slight, seemingly insignificant, duties. She reported for service in her old hospital and by November was back of the lines again, in temporary quarters in an old store building, which had formerly served as municipal quarters in the quaint old village. The inhabitants had been ordered to evacuate, for the fighting on the line was sporadic and severe, and a heavy drive was anticipated. The old routine quickly claimed her, the endless doing of little things, scientifically timed for the salvaging of suffering flesh. All the agonizing sights were repeated, wagons lumbering up with loads of crumpled bodies, labelled and tagged—not Christian names, but their most unchristian wounds: Heads, Lungs, Abdomens, Eyes, Fractures. . . . In less than a week the shadows of this charnel-house had almost obliterated the white glow of Toste.

Yet not quite. Sometimes, in the lonely night, in the leaden hour when the world's pulse beats feebly, the pale moonlight slanting in to touch some white, drawn face as if with infinite pity, those eternal essences of which she had spoken were very real to Greta. Something indestructible lay there in those beds. Something neither pain nor hate nor any foul thing might destroy, for its birthplace was beyond the stars, and its power the breath of God. These movements gave her strength.

Manfred's occasional letters were touched with the same dear whimsicality, although now and then a faint undercurrent of loathing for his exploits marred their tender humour. But his last letter had been delightful. He had run into Veder—Lieutenant Boyen, of the engineers—and it was quite like old times. Veder had tried to locate Greta before her flight to Toste. Oh, he was the best ever, wrote Manfred, and sent Greta a thousand felicitations. Good old Veder!

So here they all were—the carefree youngsters from Canada, the last frontier of peace and good will—serving the fierce old gods of the fierce old countries, their own shining God forsworn. It seemed to Greta that the ancient world was a dark forest of jealous fears, jealous faiths, jealous devotions, jealous hates. This huge emotional forest had completely enmeshed the little human beings under its shadow. And if anyone escaped for a moment of life in the sun—as they had escaped into the charitable airs of America—the angry forest shot out a tentacle of irresistible power, and drew them each into its cruel depths. Exactly as she had seen young foxes leap at the slightest sound back into the black timbers of Little River!

So came the last week in December. The little village was almost deserted, except for a few old stubborn peasants who refused to be parted from their ancient stones. Early in the morning of a clear cold day, orders for immediate evacuation of the little hospital arrived. By noon most of the patients were on their way in the compact ambulances. But even the hardest arrangements could not facilitate them all. Perhaps a dozen poor fellows were elected to remain behind until a van could be rushed back for them. Greta volunteered to remain with them. It was an unforgettable experience, not by reason of the furious bombardment in the rear, the gigantic barking of the great guns, perpetual roar of cannon, and whistling of shells, to which they were all accustomed in varying degree, but by reason of the cheerfulness of those wounded men whose hopes of release from hell were doomed by a blunder—by the single mistake in dispatching ambulances. Greta listened, and contributed to the sad jesting of her little squad of souls, and she wondered if the reason for man's acceptance of defeat was an inherited fatalism. From time immemorial men had fought and women prayed, with sorrow their inevitable portion, and death the one certainty. This knowledge stared out from all their eyes, yet their lips lied gaily, and their ears denied the evidence of the sounds which all of them understood too well.

But it was dusk before the thing they most dreaded came out of the gloomy heavens—fleet-winged monsters gleaming defiance as the wavering lightning of restless beacons searched them out for an instant—swift monsters zooming overhead with death in their magic bosoms. So swift! So sure! So terrible, thought Greta, and with quickened maternal solicitude passed from one to another of her charges. Her hand touched the shoulder of a young lad, blue-eyed and serious, like the Veder she had known in Maple Bluffs seeming ages ago.

And all in a moment, in a furious, murderous blast, the earth heaved, the walls split asunder, the roof burst off like the lid of a boiling pot. The solid

floor rose like the sea.

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When she recovered consciousness, everything was quiet. The stars were very bright in a dark grey sky. Nothing moved. Nothing stirred. She was very cold.

But how strange! She struggled up to a sitting position, and blinked in the cold winter air. Now she had another sensation. A dull pain in the left arm, which increased violently when she attempted to move it. Her face felt queer, as though it were stuffed with straw and smeared with dark honey. And this awful solitude—this frozen quiet—what did it mean?

Struggling to rise, but falling back to her knees, Greta fought against threatening oblivion. There was something she must do—something to be remembered. . . .

And now it all came back to her, in a frightening tide of horror. Oh, God! Those poor boys—those brave, smiling men! Wildly now she stumbled to her feet and looked about, her senses clearing under the stern demands of a desperate will.

The whole village was a desolate pile of jagged rock. Not a living creature moved in the ghostly moonlight. Not a stone remained standing of the little hospital. Where once she had applied her healing science only a great hole yawned, like an open grave.

Perhaps she fainted. The whole face of the earth grew black. Everything became mercifully confused, as in the sleep of the very ill. It seemed good to sink into this cold coma. Yet something kept shrieking for life, some irresistible impulse not to be denied that tore her little frightened peace asunder, and set her screaming feebly. The sound of her own voice startled her back to complete sanity. By some miracle she was saved. She alone—no, not she alone. She remembered. She understood.

She was going to have a child. She had known it for a month now. Manfred's child. That was why she had been saved. That was why she must live. . . .

She started to crawl in the direction of the road—in the direction the wagons had taken. It was dreadfully painful. Something was wrong with her leg, and her left arm was certainly broken. But she had something more precious to save. There was nothing to do but wriggle on, hitch herself along, like an angle worm—like the other human angle worms she had pitied and pitied. . . .

After a seeming eternity, a little sound as of falling stones frightened her intolerably. And a moment later a human head popped up from a near-by hole, a ragged body following after.

“He! He! He!” laughed this creature, the light of mild idiocy on its mud-caked countenance, “He! He! He!”

Greta spoke to him gently, her poor heart racing in her breast. She spoke to him soothingly, and he came and sat beside her, willing and pleased as a lost child who has just been found. He was deranged, poor creature, but adaptable, and apparently unhurt. A simple peasant, perhaps never quite normal in his mind. But how thankful she was to have him there. As though it were a pleasant game, she instructed him in her faulty French to tear her apron into strips, and with these to strap her useless arm to her side. It would be less painful. He was really astonishingly intelligent in his hands, even gentle. And his strength made little of half carrying her along.

Another eternity of tortuous progress ensued, over an endless, soggy road, strewn with rocks and bits of iron, and ragged shreds of cloth, with all around the dead plain snaked with tangled wires, and perhaps legions of swift death about to swoop from the sky, or some ambush on the grim horizon. But at last a familiar sound came from somewhere, falling on her fainting senses like sweet music. The sound of approaching motors in the distance. . . .

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It was many days before Greta regained consciousness, waking in the quiet of a hospital to the infinite kindness of a middle-aged nurse, whose smile in itself was healing.

“Sister——” Greta’s voice sounded odd to herself, a feeble, foolish sound in that substantial place. “My baby—I——” Her thin hand closed convulsively on the firm white one held out to her.

The sister looked at her very gently. “You are very strong, madam. For a little we feared. But that is over.”

Greta would have liked to express in words the boundless gratitude that warmed her whole being like sunlight. But her tired mind had no mobility, no resilience. She could only lift, to the kind, grave face above, her eyes, golden as stars, and soft as those of pleading doves.

“You must think of nothing now, madam, except to get well. That is most important.”

“Oh, yes,” Greta smiled mistily. And because her weariness was still very great, she missed the look of sharp pity that for a moment tinged the

other woman's gentleness, and trustfully turned her quiet face towards the window, where a little star dimpled in the distant sky. Oh, yes, she would sleep and grow strong, and Manfred's precious baby would grow strong with her. . . . And one day, as she had written him in her last letter, they three would be back in Toste, under the old beeches and the eternal stars.

Out in the corridor the nurse stood very still, her brave serenity overborne by sore emotion. How would they ever break the truth to that fair young creature? How tell that high-heart what the inscrutable fates had written for her while she fought so bravely for the new life under her heart!

CHAPTER X

ON the twenty-third of December Manfred reported to his superior officer. A squadron of planes was to proceed in the morning towards Mannheim. In actual figures, their Christmas greeting to the ancient city would be something like a ton of high explosives. For a moment Manfred stood stock-still, like a wooden man, his weather-beaten face grey in the uncertain light. "But, sir——" he began, and sharply recollected himself. The War had no place for sentiment. What if Mannheim was familiar ground? What if madam the countess was there in the house of her children, with her grandchildren about her with their innumerable small pets? What if the old city was very dear because its people had accepted him into their fellowship, and made sweet his first loneliness in a foreign land? What if it was Christmas, and all the little children making brave cheer under the brutal shadow of war? The twenty-fourth of December was possibly the destined hour, the scientifically timed hour to destroy a troublesome base. These thoughts, so many and so swift, consumed no more time than the rough catching of the breath. Sensibly impersonal, keenly alert as ever, he received his instructions. . . .

The assault was completely successful. The squadron, flying in beautiful formation with expertly timed grace, as if on parade before some exacting deity, swept over the ancient town, showering down its hail of death, the roar of its passage like the rushing wind in a forest of burning pines. And even before these incredible monarchs of the air had wheeled in their flight, the quaint old city seemed to leap in the air like a stricken animal, to cry out with a loud voice, and crumple down in shapeless ruin, the rivers of its life rushing out in tongues of flame.

Yes, a most successful exploit! Once again Mannheim was laid low, the work of generations wiped out in moments. Well, there was that to be said for modern vandalism. It was not tortuous and slow. There was a Satanic grandeur in the way villages and towns, with their treasured symbols of man's slow toil, were swept from the face of the earth in blasts of thunder. Manfred thought of this in dull, helpless despair, as he pitted his wits against anti-aircraft guns, guiding his ship with a practised hand back to the base and safety. . . .

That the Germans had, under orders from superior officers, deliberately instituted a reign of terror in Belgium, burning and killing unresisting towns and terrified civilians, did not appease the torment of slow wrath consuming

his mind. Wrath against the everlasting stupidity of the races, and against the Satanic genius they had for glorifying their own past to the exclusion of reason. The whitewashing of past atrocities, the creation of saints out of victims of malice and bigotry, the bland assumption of superiority merely because the present carnage was (supposedly) instigated by another—it was all horrible. As pitifully hideous as the extreme veneration of Joan of Arc, centuries after her martyrdom, by the church who had betrayed her trust, and the nation whose soul she kindled from the dust.

But for this vicious habit of self-justification through poetic and petic licence, mankind might progress in the humanities as it had progressed in the sciences since its happy escape from the destructive arm of superstition. Up there in the blue he remembered the fine treasures of Elberhoff; the old masters on the walls, the rare old books in their dark cases against which sombre background the young children had frisked about like gay kittens. That these things were no more was not justified merely because similar horrors prevailed elsewhere. It sickened him to think of the clouds of human hate rising up like a black stench from these suffering people, and believed by them to be a sweet incense to their special gods.

Vandals! Brutes! Barbarians! Monsters! So shouted the desolated French when their treasured architecture, their museums, their precious libraries went up in flames. And neither Frenchman nor German apparently remembered that ages earlier another race uttered similar anathema on Christian vandals destroying the treasured glories of antiquity. But the heavens remembered. The same golden sun and silver stars and outburned moon looked down upon the mechanized brutalities to-day as had looked with like cold aloofness upon the snarling gnats of men fighting tooth and claw for some jungle prize. History repeated itself. And thereby mankind reaped as it had sown, hate from hate, destruction from destruction—for the wages of sin is death. Queer how manufactured phrases clung to one! Flying high, and proudly as an eagle, Manfred tried to laugh at himself. No use getting morbid. His personal feelings had no place in this business. Mannheim was a vital point. That, not the little lives in the little houses, was what entered into the question. The machine-shops where Ricky and he had watched so many wonders, and the huge chemical factories—these were the things which, if not destroyed, would in turn destroy the Allies. Common sense. And however much he loathed the War, he none the less felt, in some vague sense, the allied troops at least represented an advance in human progress. France, with her fierce nationalism, was nevertheless an indefatigable defender of human liberty. And her proud soul, complex and unreasoning as that of a woman, was immortalized in her great cathedrals, in

those concrete creations which seemed in some mysterious fashion to etherealize, to leap up with liquid, flowing grace into the azure skies. While England, her old enemy, stood steadfast to her word—like the Norsemen whose blood ran in Norman descendants—a good friend and a clean foe—as clean at least as any foe sworn to dark deeds may be. And surely there was a certain sublimity in Belgium’s small forces holding back the grey sea of German invasion. Or was it the price she paid, at long last, in retribution for all the blood of tortured martyrs that stained her fertile soil?

Futile speculations! He was a fool to think at all! One ought not to think. To torment the mind with nice distinctions, when one’s business was simple as a butcher’s, was the height of idiocy, a painful waste of energy needed for duty. He was almost at the base now—one of the last to arrive. The landing field and the huts in the distance had a rather friendly aspect. The British flags waved gaily above the wintry grounds like bits of coloured leaves surviving dead autumn. Well, this was his home. Here, in moments of leisure, he might dream in peace of Greta, of the old home at Toste, of the garden at “Glen Haven”, which so wondrously expressed the calm soul of his dear mother. In these rude barracks miracles of memory transpired daily. Love sat there with warm, devoted eyes, transforming loneliness and sore intuitions of impending doom to a garden of dear remembrances.

The mere sight of the familiar runway lightened his heart. Perhaps there was a letter from Greta waiting there. The thought made his pulse quicken. There were such precious things to be said now. How like her to break the news as she had! The War just had to end, she had written, for she must get back to Toste. She must sit under some old beeches, unashamedly, her baby asleep. And he might lean on a hoe, regarding the cabbages of Eden! And after a line or two had come this: “Oh, Manfred, it seems so long to wait—I must see, I must make sure it looks like you. But of course it will. For, no matter what my hands are doing, my physical eyes beholding, I really see nothing, hear nothing, think of nothing in my innermost self, but you!”

Even now, with the reality fixed in his mind, an agitation of the senses seized him whenever he thought of it. Quite as though the commonplace event were a miracle strange to earth. His anxiety became an obsession. The thought of her in the shambles of a zone hospital made him sick. He wrote in batches, demanding her return to safety—to a fitting way of life. And when she replied that she expected to be relieved in two or three weeks, his elation was boundless. At that rate she should be back in Paris by the new year. He might even see her. Successes such as to-day’s provoked generosity in official breasts. . . .

He was smiling when he entered his quarters, so absorbed in his musings the usual banter and gossip going on failed to register. He knew pretty well what the chaps would be saying, grousing good-naturedly over trifles, boasting about aerial acrobatics, or a girl of no consequence. Or sometimes showing a new picture of the real thing—the little girl back home. Cursing the Bosch, in most part without venom, and blasting to bits the blankety generals and the blinking War. Fine chaps, brimming with life—the beautiful zest of youth turned to bitter ends. But as he passed down the long hut towards his own particular niche, a single word seemed to detach itself from the general babble, lodging like a barb in his breast. He stopped.

“What’s that, Jefferys?” he said sharply, fixing narrowed eyes on the young man who seemed holding the floor.

“Ho, there, cap’n!” Jefferys grinned, “didn’t see you come in. Congratulations! Mannheim shot to hell, I hear. Good work by you and the boys!”

“What was that about Little Rouler?”

Jefferys made an eloquent gesture. “Bombed. Not a stone standing. Beastly, rather. Just in from the line—saw it myself. Some of the wounded were sent up in the morning. Yesterday. Someone got wise, I guess. Had to leave behind a dozen or so. And a nurse.”

Manfred’s face had set grimly. To those who watched him, the sudden austerity which enveloped him as in a frozen mantle, through which, none the less, a terrible intensity radiated, was as startling in effect as his voice. “You are sure of this? And—the nurse? You heard her name?”

“Why, yes!” Jefferys was a little affronted. The captain seemed to regard him with frozen scorn, as if his word were doubted, and he a babbler of old wives tales! “She was well known. They are a bit upset about it at the base hospital. That’s what makes the thing so rotten. . . . She stayed behind voluntarily with the wounded——”

“Her name? Her name, you fool!”

Jefferys perceived at last that here was uncommon interest. He paled a little. “Sorry, captain. Holmquist they called her—my God, man, what is it? You know her?”

Men are no less sensitive than women in moments of stress. Not a comrade there but felt his heart turn to ice. Their quickly-lowered glances had no need to reaffirm what instinct told them. Captain Marcusson stood there before them, stiffly erect, not a muscle moving in his splendid frame. They all felt as though a dead man stood there. The chill of his swift demise was in their bones. For an instant something flaming and fierce had leaped

into his eyes, to die, blown out like a candle in a gusty casement. He stood there regarding them with black, lustreless eyes. In a clear, cold, detached voice he answered presently:

“She was my wife—— Thanks, Jeff. I had to know. . . .”

Abruptly he swung on his heel and out of the long, now silent, hut. No one made a move, said a word. But when the muffled whir of a plane taking off reached them, they all went to the door. Perhaps the same dim knowledge stirred in all of them, a faint foreshadowing of an inexorable destiny both tragic and divine.

“Well, there he goes!” said Jefferys, as the pursuit plane took off in a graceful, ascending glide. “Damn the damn War! Give’s a light!”

“Ships need refuelling,” was the comment of a thin Irishman, whose wet face testified to a hastily abandoned wash-basin. “But it’s a grand day overhead!”

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To Manfred, soaring swiftly with death in his mind and rage in his heart, neither the clear weather nor the lonely splendour of the desolate fields below had any meaning. One thought alone was clear: he must escape for a little from the haunting horrors of an earth where such unspeakable things were commonplace. One desire was uppermost: a savage, atavistic longing to strike with his own hand, as he had been stricken. Hate, which he had never known before, or even understood in others, surged in him fiercely, as the plane surged under his skilled hand.

So now it was plain at last. All those finely bolstered sentiments of patriotism were rooted in nothing more complex than man’s swift retaliation for private indignities suffered. The larger issue was personalized through the smaller. Frenchmen hated Germans, not because the statesmen plotted for commercial supremacy, but because a wife, a child, a home once held so dear, was ruthlessly and senselessly annihilated. He laughed. Well, now he knew on what sanguinary basis the national spirit rested, on what the splendid power of potentates and kings. Murders! Murders that festered and rankled in the heart, and, however old of duration, were quickly inflamed by the simple feat of recalling to mind the murderer.

What availed principles in the face of something old as man’s being? Old as his oldest fealty, as his first little glimmer of regard for something outside himself? Madly, his thoughts raced, erecting sharp walls against the terrible thing he could not quite face. Greta, of the exquisite soul—her wondrous white body desecrated, broken, and mutilated——

The plane soared on, nosing into the blue like a distraught, fear-driven thing. He thought of Pervyse, where ten thousand German shells fell in the ancient churchyard alone. Where the dearly beloved lay in consecrated ground. He thought of the stricken faces watching their church demolished. The proud, domineering, militant Church—so he had thought. Well, that was true. But something else was there. The consolation of stricken hearts, the symbol of a Divine Comforter made concrete in those walls. That too was there. Men had many altars, and all were dear. They were perhaps most fortunate whose altars were humble: a rude hut in the fields—a place made with hands.

For him there had never been any altar but Greta, but a slim, chaste girl with incredibly loving hands. A most dear living creature fashioned for divine ends. . . . And now, despite himself, he remembered there was another—the little dear one Greta had dreamed of seeing sleeping on her lovely breast in the quiet peace of Toste.

Oh, God! Even hate could not ward off the torment now. A frenzy of agony tore him as a strong wind tears a feeble sail. He was alone in a horrible reality of suffering, without a single rationalizing principle, completely lost in uttermost darkness of soul. Alone, in indifferent space.

Suddenly a sound familiar as breathing fell on his distraught ears. A black-cross plane flew out of the sun, swooping down with the menace of death. Ripping flyer! Knew his business. Well, let him come, the devil!

His head was clear now. Devilishly clear. In all his brilliant career he had never been so coolly calculating, or pursued a more deadly and desperate course. The bullets whining past his head Manfred put his whole being into one determined effort to shake the German off his tail. He made a brilliant side-slip and went into a headlong, roaring dive, throttle open, the enemy following, like a vicious, flame-winged shadow. But when it seemed he must have lost control, must crash to earth, his plane shot upwards with such velocity it seemed the strain must tear the wings off. Anticipating this, the German thought himself prepared yet none the less was thrown off a little by the manœuvre and the suddenness of the counter-attack. The British plane, responding like a living thing to its master's command, climbed with incredible speed, and making an amazing twist, shot straight under the other into the teeth of his gunfire, raking the enemy ship from nose to tail. As the German passed over, Manfred strained his ship in another desperate climbing turn, the madness in his soul exulting at the fierceness of his attack. The German seemed to hesitate as he began to climb. To falter weirdly in mid-space. Then a sudden burst of thick black smoke told the victor his bullet had struck the enemy's gasoline. But in that weird faltering

before the doomed plane began its long spinning dive into eternity, Manfred's quick eye caught a strange, fleetingly visible symbol. Something unfamiliar, yet familiar. Some grotesque, yellow caricature on the blue body of the dying war-bird. And suddenly he knew what his keen eyes had transferred, at first without any impression, to his maddened brain.

A yellow cat! A cat! God in heaven, that was Ricky—Ricky, with whom he had sat at the family table, whose severe little mother had regarded him almost as a son—whose house had been his own!

"I have killed my brother!" cried Manfred. . . .

He had lusted to kill. The altar to the savage, to the brutal and the cruel, secreted in every human heart, had cried out for a blood offering. For pain to ease its pain—a life for a life! Ricky, his friend, was the supreme sacrifice. And the fierce old gods were appeased. . . .

There was no longer hate in his breast. Neither fury nor vengeance. His heart seemed to contract in one last agony which ejected all earthly feelings. His mind grew curiously still. In that stillness a new perception awoke in him. Those principles of which he had spoken too glibly—as one recites from vanity some rare poem, little understanding the agony of spirit which engendered its creation—those principles were true only in proportion as man personalized them in his heart. He perceived that now with singular clarity and quietness of spirit. To discern the everlasting principles more rightly, to express them in acts of increasing beauty, was the aim and end of tortuous evolution. Man became man by the sore process of analysing oft-repeated pains, disasters, and calamities. The smallest virtues had cost a million pangs.

He remembered his mother. This strange peace breaking in him she had known. It had been in her garden, in the splendid calm of her spirit which flowed out to all his childish fears in healing comfort. Wonderful mother! Out of her ruined kingdom she had created happiness and security of mind for Letty and himself. Quiet for his father's restless spirit—for his grandmother, a splendid hope. That hurt a little. For that hope was himself, who should have returned the glamour of great deeds to Toste. But the hurt passed like a small cloud before the face of the eternal sun.

What a beautiful day it had turned out to be. Still and fair, the heavens filled with peace, as upon that first Christmas Day, fabled or real. Real enough in the hearts of men. He looked down on the troubled earth. No sign of belligerents—no sign of cruel havoc. He must have flown far in his crazy agitation. Below him lay a stretch of wood—a dark, irregular mass

intriguing to the eye, through which a white stream industriously wormed its way, to flow in easy curving grace through the level plain beyond.

It might have been the forest of “Glen Haven”, and Little River, whose winding waters had called the settler and put an end for ever to the dark dominion of the wood. A small, indeterminate stream, yet of such vast importance to the life of man and beast. It had fed itself on rich sources, drained the marshes, and worn a deeper and deeper path through the black forest. Like the spiritual consciousness in man, which although a feeble thing at first, was greatly destined, for its source was divine, and all its indeterminate windings of inestimable value.

Queer to be thinking these things now, with his own joy dead, his altars for ever broken. Or were they? Those essences of which he had spoken to Greta were very real up here. More real than ever. He could almost hear her lovely voice as he had heard it at Toste: “Somewhere in time and space we, and all the other lovers since time began, will remain steadfast as the stars, in the heaven of our love!”, and he had answered rightly. In having her he had indeed had everything. They two had been the rich flowering of all that had seemed lost to their parents. They had completed a circle. Their lovely blossoming was done. . . .

More by instinct than thought he glanced at his instrument-board. Fuel almost gone! But the knowledge brought no sense of shock. A great elation seized him. His ship soared up, up. Into the golden sun. Into the glory of its eternal fires, which gave to earth beauty, and life, and ceaseless fruition.

He was no longer alone. In that light Greta smiled at him out of her luminous, amber eyes. His love was here, closer than thought, inextricably woven, like a fine golden thread, in the scarlet meshes of his eternal being. She was here! And all the legion of high souls were here! the sacrifice of their little earthly joys transmuted into eternal glory.

Like an eagle sailing towards the sun, the plane soared on and up.

Dark forest and shining river were an indistinguishable blur now—a misty pattern of some outworn play which no longer concerned him. Beyond that something shone like a huge silver shield. A lake? The ocean? What matter?

Long since and often, his forebears had sailed into the setting sun, their little craft afire. Dying fire to eternal flame! They spoke not of death, those old Vikings—they knew it not. “To the strong there is no defeat.” They sailed under banners of flame into the Other Light. Peerless concept! No clutter of Oriental heavens, no feeble prayers, but a sure and certain knowledge of the majestic grandeur for which the soul was made. . . .

Higher and higher. The sun overhead. Nothing but light. Light in his mind, and the beauty that was Greta in his heart.

“Greta! Greta! Greta!”

1937
AUTUMN FICTION



THE CROOKED FURROW
Jeffery Farnol

In *The Crooked Furrow* Mr. Jeffery Farnol returns to the vigour and discursiveness of *The Broad Highway*, but here the material is handled more surely and with a deeper understanding of life. Mr. Farnol has a magical touch for minor characters. In this new book they crowd together full of instant light and colour to form a background for a story, grim perhaps, but none the less tinged with romance and warm with the love of living. In this, his latest novel, he gives us warmth, colour, drama and intense human sympathy. From these he has built a story which, with all the attractions of his earlier books, has an added power and a new sureness of touch. The reappearance of Mr. Jasper Shrig, of Bow Street, is doubly welcome because he is accompanied by a host of new characters. The quick movement of its incidents, its deft mingling of comedy with creeping horror, its strong and vital handling make *The Crooked Furrow* a book instinct with the spirit of youth.

MEN ARE SUCH FOOLS!

Faith Baldwin

New York is a magnet! It draws to itself thousands of gay, talented young men and women, each determined to make a niche for himself in one of the myriad skyscraper offices where the drama and conflict of big business is enacted. Sometimes they conquer, sometimes they fail, but always it is life lived at high pressure and played for big stakes.

Lina Lawrence and Jimmy Hall were like that. They loved their jobs, and they loved each other. So, when they decided to get married, Lina kept on with her career in a big advertising agency. And she began to succeed, too, faster than steady-going Jimmy could keep up.

Miss Baldwin's story sweeps along without pause, tracing the steady disintegration of Lina's and Jimmy's marriage under the impact of too much success and the strain of trying to make two competitive careers work out into happiness. The final, dramatic solution of the problem is as satisfying as it is ingenious.

Faith Baldwin, you will remember, wrote "District Nurse," "Weekend Marriage," "The Office Wife," "Beauty," "The Moon's Our Home," and many other successes.

ESTHER VANNER

Chris Massie

Esther Vanner has for its background that most stirring episode in all feminine history, the militant suffrage campaign; but in a more exact sense it is a novel about women in general and one in particular. The horrors of hunger-striking and forcible feeding, and the daring exploits which led up to them, though these are described with meticulous detail, are of secondary importance to the issue of hearts and minds, and the impulses and vagaries which sent women into battle.

Perhaps Chris Massie has not done anything finer than the portrait of John Venables who died for love without declaring it; but there is a gallery of feminine portraits of "women in their secret hearts" which once more compels attention to the author as a brilliant psychologist.

And here is the London of the time, its very bricks and mortar, brought into being with the peculiar intimacy of touch which gives it a living reality.

A novel of political passion and strong personal emotion not easily forgotten.

Chris Massie will always be remembered for his "Hallelujah Chorus," "Portrait of a Beautiful Woman," "A Modern Calvus," "Floodlight," etc.

LOVE'S PILGRIMAGE

Henry St. John Cooper

Judy Frensham had lived for years under the guardianship of her aunt, Rachel Garton, and she had always wanted to rebel against the gloomy atmosphere of her aunt's home. Yet she was loyal, and fought against her inclinations. Then, a breath of the past, came Peter Manning, handsome and debonair and a splendid companion.

But it was Peter who fell in love first, with the lovely Judy, who seemed to have no desire to look on him as more than a friend. Peter told himself he was a fool.

Then Jules Renauld, a mysterious friend of Rachel Carton's saw Judy and fell in love with her. Renauld was unscrupulous, and although Judy knew nothing of it, held her aunt completely in his power. But Rachel Garton, although her life was shadowed with the sin of the past, fought hard against Renauld when he demanded her niece's hand. She felt desperate, and at last she appealed to Peter Manning to woo Judy, to sweep her off her feet and force her to marry him before Renauld succeeded where he had failed.

Judy had little suspected the intrigue going on about her, but she was suddenly aware of her love for Peter. Nothing mattered, no one mattered, but Peter Manning. A whirlwind courtship, a few brief days of incredible happiness, and then Renauld began to work his cunning plot, and only misery and unhappiness seemed to face the lovers, their lives would surely be ruined by misunderstanding brought about by Renauld. But Peter Manning was a fighter. . . .

No introduction is needed to this popular writer who has well over twenty other titles to his credit.

SCANDAL'S CHILD

Richard Starr

Magda Burke appeared mysteriously in Connah's Wood with her little crippled sister, Blossom, and where they came from nobody knew. Nobody cared in the neighbouring village of Glentire; all they wanted was to get rid of them. Tramps were not welcome in the parish, especially when they were young and beautiful and rebellious of authority as Magda was. The influential ones of the village did their best to drive the undesirables away, but the owner of the wood gave them permission to stay—and stay they did, living in the wood like gipsies. And the things that were said about them over the tea-tables of Glentire were plenty.

So it is not difficult to imagine the state of mind of the village, when it was learned, on the excellent authority of a prominent lady who had seen it with her own eyes—that the young vicar of the parish was paying secret visits to the wood by night. That started the storm. Whispering tongues eagerly forsook the two waifs of the wood and fastened with enthusiasm on the vicar; and the unexpected way the Reverend John Gale dealt with this piquant situation when it came to his knowledge, made local history.

The further adventures of Magda and Blossom make a pleasant, well-told story of village life, with an absorbing plot well sustained.

By the author of "Susannah the Dauntless," "Peggy Leaves Home," "Looking After Leatrice," "Joan and Garry," and many other well-known novels.

SECRETARY TO SIR MARK
Adelaide Heriot

As girls in other days have longed for a husband or a fortune, so did Juliet Grey, twenty-four, slim, dark and creamy-skinned, long for a job. The story opens energetically with her escape from a life of repression into the world of big business. Juliet's adventures as secretary to glamorous Sir Mark Selby, owner of a chain of luxury hotels, make entertaining reading. Despite her ignorance of the sophisticated world to which he introduces her, she does her work well, and wins something more than his respect—with the result that she makes an enemy of Suzanne Lemaire, who is bound to Mark by some mysterious link, and also imperils her dawning romance with Ted Thurston, an irresistibly likeable young man whose grey eyes are “nice triangles of good humour and honesty.” But Juliet, who has good sense and good principles as well as charm, manages to avoid the wide and glittering “by-pass” which life with Sir Mark represents, and makes her way back, via paths not always easy, to the arms of Ted.

Light and readable as this modern romance is, its underlying theme is serious, and the denouement, whereby Ted's clean young heroism appears in shining contrast to the dark complexities of fear-warped Sir Mark, has a dramatic strength that is satisfying.

Author of “That Sweet Passion.”

SWEETS AND SINNERS

Aceituna Griffin

The situation becomes awkward when Chadland dies suddenly in a London nursing home. But this is nothing compared with the difficulties that arise when Lucille Innes, the beautiful but irresponsible victim of Mrs. Griffin's latest murder tale, pays the penalty for her weakness for chocolates after she receives a box of poisoned sweets from an anonymous donor at Christmas time. General suspicion falls on handsome young Gerald Grant, the object of Lucille's attempts at blackmail. But his fiancée, Mary Brooke, who is also Chadland's niece, is convinced of his innocence, and she sets out to clear him.

Author of "The Punt Murder" and "Commandments Six and Eight."

THE TERROR OF THE SHAPE

Christopher Jude

Boyd Flemyng arrives in Kijaka with an introduction to the District Commissioner, Don Cresswell.

The Cresswells invite him to the Residency and on their wedding anniversary have a dinner party, at which their guest imbibes rather too freely.

Later he is discovered with half his face blown away from a shot fired from the shot-gun in the gun-rack.

Some information, unwittingly given, sets John Molyneux on a trail leading to numerous disclosures, a startling confession and a totally unexpected denouement.

THE SUPER-CINEMA MURDER

L. A. Knight

A new cinema is to be opened in a provincial town. Before the official opening takes place, the film which is to be shown is viewed by the Watch Committee. During the showing of the film a councillor is murdered, and one of the dozen or so people present committed the murder. The author has played scrupulously fair. One of those present did actually commit the murder! You may be sure of it.

So you can indulge your powers of deduction to their utmost capacity and back your fancy.

But you will get an added thrill out of the terrific sense of strain which pervades the book.

No introduction is needed to this very popular writer of murder stories and thrillers such as "Redbeard," "The Creeping Death," "Deadman's Bay," "Man Hunt," "Death Stands Near," etc.

THE DIAMOND RACKET

Norman Anthony

The Illicit Diamond Buying racket on the diggings has developed to alarming proportions. Who controls the racket? The authorities are particularly interested in the activities of the Welgedacht Syndicate and the beautiful young girl, Joan Somers, who flashes about the fields in her blue sports car. All attempts to trap her have failed. Ned Manners, a big game hunter from the Congo, takes a hand and volunteers to assist the C.I.D. His search for adventure brings him in contact with the underworld of the diggings and the Rand, and he encounters many perilous situations in which the girl, Joan, plays a prominent part.

BAD END VALLEY

W. B. Bannerman

What is the secret of Bad End Valley, and its strange inhabitants locked away from the outer world by the Arizona mountains? What fate has overtaken those who have gone to the valley to find that secret—and never come back? Danny Seaton, living in the place itself, had no more than an inkling as to the truth, but even that inkling is enough to spell danger for him. The valley is a place of horror, dominated by the iron personality of its ruthless overlord, “King” Carrick.

With the murder of Danny’s grandfather, matters come to a head, and the aid of Domingo Santos is enlisted to clear up more than one mystery and to save an innocent man from hanging. How he does so, in the course of which he has to match his wits brilliantly against those of “King,” and the even more dangerous Cal Barker, the professional gambler, makes a narrative that bristles with lightning movement, suspense and vitality.

From the moment when the reader sets eyes on the sinister valley, until the terrible pursuit across the desert that resolves the ultimate mystery, he will find it hard to lay this book aside; and the reappearance of Domingo Santos, the humorous and surprising Mexican detective, who made his bow in W. B. Bannerman’s *The Whispering Riders*, is in itself enough to ensure that the entertainment will not flag.

MURDER AT MULBERRY TREE COTTAGE

George Norsworthy

When William Littlejohn first opened the wicket-gate of Mulberry Tree Cottage, one peaceful, summer's evening, he little thought that a murder would be committed there within a few hours, and that he would take an important part in solving the mystery.

In *Murder at Mulberry Tree Cottage* George Norsworthy has written a story which will stir the reader's imagination from the first pages, and his interest will be held until he finally closes the book. Littlejohn who, of his own volition, has led the life of a tramp for the last five years, is a philosopher in his own, unassuming way. As he hoes the borders and paths—in the absence of the indisposed gardener—he turns his attention to the psychological aspect of the case while the professional sleuths are building up alternative cases against two suspects.

By the author of "Casino," "The House-Party Mystery," "Crime at the Villa Gloria," "The Hartness Millions," etc.

THE WOMAN IN WHITEHALL

Rowland Walker

This, the author's latest novel, tells how, embittered by the war deaths of her three brothers, Fräulein von Bahn became a secret agent. And towards the end of 1917, her daring and resource, her fierce patriotism, her pre-war residence in England, coupled with her easy command of our language, made her for a while, a very dangerous enemy to the Allied cause.

Her landing from a U Boat on the East Coast one dark night, slipping through the lines of defence in the guise of a British War nurse, even nursing wounded Tommies in this country, dining with a brigade staff, posing as a young lady aristocrat, and even using a British staff car to further her nefarious designs, read like a fairy tale.

Her best work was done in London.

Absolutely fearless in enemy territory, hourly expecting the same tragic fate as that of Mata Hari, Sir Roger Casement, and Carl Lody, she sold matches in Whitehall, posed alternately as a British nurse or a Salvation Army lassie, changing both her guise and her personality when hotly pressed. But she was never taken though she was present when one German cipher was arrested.

Her escape from England, after collecting from the German key men the information required by the High Command, was little less than a miracle.

Author of "Death Flies High."

I KNEW MRS. LANG

Glyn Barnett

There were watching eyes in Braxley—curious eyes, venomous eyes, searching, probing, whilst all the time, underlying passions were spreading a deepening shadow.

Here is the inside story of the case that ruffled the imperturbable Chief Inspector Gramport and wrecked certain romantic illusions of his handsome young assistant, Detective Sergeant Landers. Here is something that will grip your imagination—maybe even disturb your conscience. Did *you* know Mrs. Lang. . . ?

Do you remember "The Call-Box Murder," "Death Calls Three Times," and "Murder on Monday"? Well, here is something better still.

SPANISH ADVENTURE

Jackson Budd

Jackson Budd's new book is the story of a man who through an infatuation for a woman, entangles himself in a Continental political intrigue. He goes to Spain, blunders into a net of suspicion, is hunted by both sides, is caught, imprisoned and eventually finds himself facing a firing squad.

It is a fine, gripping tale, competently told, leading steadfastly and inevitably to its climax. Not the least attractive feature of it is the picture it paints of Spain as she was on the threshold of the war, and of those grim weeks when the sword was first unsheathed.

Author of "The Princely Quartet," "Three Jolly Vagabonds," etc.

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 was created for this eBook and is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *The Dark Weaver* by Laura Goodman Salverson]