

MISS
BLAKE'S
HUSBAND

Elizabeth Jordan

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MISS BLAKE'S HUSBAND

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MISS BLAKE'S HUSBAND

THE PROLOGUE

THE clock struck twelve, and simultaneously the cry of a new-born infant came from the next room. It was not a feeble cry. There was in it a brave and lusty quality that challenged and held attention. "I'm here," it informed the listeners. "Whether you want me or don't want me, I'm here. Make what you can of that!"

A woman who looked very much out of place in her present tenement setting, and who for an hour had been standing at a window gazing out into the wide-eyed darkness and frowning over the noises from the adjoining room, gave to the new sound the tribute of a swift inference.

"It must be a boy," she told herself.

Footsteps approached her, and she wheeled to meet the black eyes of a tall, middle-aged woman in a cotton gown and an all-enveloping white apron, whose face bore lines of strain and sleeplessness.

"Well, ma'am," the new-comer said, "praise be, 'tis over!"

She sent forth the words on a deep-drawn breath of relief, but on the face of her visitor there was no reflection of her emotion.

"Then there's nothing to prevent our coming at once to the final settlement of this little matter, is there?" the latter suggested.

"N-o, ma'am." The dark face of the woman in the cotton house-dress was suddenly flooded by a crimson tide that mounted to the roots of her graying hair. "But I'll say you're losin' no time," she added bitterly.

"Why should I lose time?" The visitor's voice put the woman quietly but firmly back into her place in life. "This situation concerns me as much as I choose to let it, and no more. You understand that, don't you? And I hope you realize that in helping you and your daughter as I've done, I have gone farther than almost any other woman in my position would have gone."

"You've been generous, ma'am," the other conceded, and broke out irrepressibly, "but you've drove a crool hard bargain, just the same."

"Do you and your daughter wish to keep the child?" The visitor's words were like frozen pellets.

"We do, ma'am, but we can't, and well you know it."

“Exactly. Besides, you want to protect your daughter’s reputation, don’t you?”

“An’ you want to perfect your husband’s, ma’am!”

The visitor advanced a step toward her, and under her look the eyes of the tenement woman fell.

“Mrs. McManus, understand once and for all that I will not tolerate any talk of that sort. I am not convinced that my husband is responsible for this disaster. His notes to your daughter, which you have shown me, hold no real proof that he is.”

“They’d convince a jury fast enough,” Margaret McManus sullenly submitted.

“I doubt it. A judge and jury would want to know a great deal more about your daughter and her life, and her other men friends, than I have had time or desire to learn. You have pulled me into this situation at the last minute, and I’ve let you do it because my husband is away and cannot defend himself; and because a scandal just now, at the beginning of his new life, would injure him. That’s why I’ve helped you and your daughter. I’ve seen her through. I’ve given her a doctor and a nurse. That’s why I’ll leave enough with you now to pay her expenses until she’s on her feet, and enough to pay the child’s expenses in an institution till some one adopts it and agrees to ask no questions about its parentage. After that, we’ll all forget it.”

“Will we, indeed, ma’am?”

“We will. My husband and I are poor, so you can’t bleed us. Moreover, I shall follow him next week, and from that time on you’ll never know where we are. Now sign this release and agreement, please, and take your money. It may interest you to know that I’ve had to sell everything I value in the world, to raise it for you.”

She laid the paper on a table already burdened with an oil lamp and a plush album, and opening her hand-bag took from it a fountain-pen, which she expectantly held out. Margaret McManus accepted the fountain-pen; but another cry came from the next room and as if it checked her hand she stood motionless for a long moment, looking down at the paper.

“ ’Tis like takin’ away the birthright,” she muttered at last. “But you don’t know us well if you think we’d blackmail you, ma’am. Sure, I only come to you at the very end, when I got desprit.”

“You might get desperate again,” the visitor coolly reminded her. “Here’s the money.”

Without further speech the other bent and signed the paper, in a fairly legible scrawl. The visitor picked up the document, dropped a small package of bank-notes on the table, and turned to the door.

“Good-by,” she said casually.

“Good-by, ma’am.”

The door opened and closed, while Margaret McManus stood staring at it, fierce-eyed. Then she drew a long, shaking breath and spoke to the listening room: “And she never even ast,” she rasped out, “was it a boy or a gurl!”

CHAPTER I

PRESENTING MARJORIE BLAKE

MARJORIE BLAKE replaced a letter in its envelope, absently added it to the pile of mail before her on the breakfast table, and cast a cautious glance at the door between the dining-room and the servants' pantry. Reassured by the fact that the door was closed, and by the absence behind it of footsteps, loud breathing, or rustling linen, she spoke to her sole companion.

"By this time, Penny dear," she said lightly, "it may have occurred to you that we are celebrating an Occasion."

Hannah Pennington, who was seated opposite her at the breakfast table peacefully ruminating over a slice of buttered toast, started slightly. Miss Pennington usually started slightly when any one suddenly spoke to her, and this was but one of a number of habits which were getting on her young employer's nerves. She followed the start with an apprehensive glance—another habit that was becoming annoying. In short, Hannah Pennington, fifty-two, after eight years of close association with Marjorie Blake, twenty-three, was beginning to feel the strain of her life and to show that she felt it.

In defense of Miss Pennington, to whom God had given a mild and forbearing nature, it may be mentioned that almost any other person holding her position, first as governess and then as companion to the temperamental Miss Blake, might have felt the tension more than she did. Miss Pennington showed the effects of the association principally in her little starts, her air of perpetual apology to life and to Marjorie, and by a certain expression which suggested that her ear was constantly strained to catch the voice of Duty. It was: though usually, as in the present instance, the voice it caught was Miss Blake's.

"Yes, dear," she agreed, coughing nervously but beaming on the girl with affectionate pale gray eyes, "it's your birthday. And a very happy one it ought to be," she earnestly pointed out, "with so many people loving you and telling you they do, and wishing you well and sending you gifts."

"Humph! That sounds all right."

“Dear child!” Miss Pennington was shocked and showed it by choking over a bit of toast. Choking was a habit she had recently formed. “You must not be ungrateful,” she reminded her charge as soon as she could speak, “when you have so much to be thankful for!”

“Have I? I wonder.”

The girl checked with a gesture an impending outburst from her companion’s lips, and settling back in her big carved chair went on thoughtfully, her eyes on a fruit-knife she was idly fingering. The sun, entering the room through windows behind her, seized its chance to focus on her bobbed bronze-toned hair.

“Let’s be serious for a moment,” she suggested. “You know that being serious isn’t much in my line, Penny, and you’re so incurably frivolous yourself that I have no inspiring example before me—”

“My d-e-a-r!”

“But I’m going to be serious now,” Marjorie placidly announced. “And you’d better pay close attention; for there’s no telling when the impulse may seize me again. . . . No, Annie, nothing more, thank you. And please see that we’re not disturbed for half an hour.”

With another gesture she eliminated the waitress, and the latter, who was the domestic barometer of the household, faded through the butler’s pantry and into the kitchen, where she mentioned to the cook that Herself was on her high horse this morning. Pressed for details, she was unable to furnish them; but, moved by a desire for knowledge, she returned to the pantry, where she vaguely polished a silver cream-pitcher and kept an avid ear close to the swinging door between the pantry and the dining-room.

“I have often wished,” Miss Pennington faltered, “that your outlook were a little more serious. You may recall my speaking of that, occasionally.”

“I do. You’ve spoken of it at least three times a day, every day I’ve been home, for the last eight years; and while I was at college you wrote about it every day,” her hearer handsomely admitted. “You’ll be glad to hear that it’s serious enough just now. Also,” the girl added moodily, “I don’t mind mentioning it’s a bit mauve.”

“Mauve? Just what do you mean by that?” In her interest Miss Pennington dropped a bit of buttered toast which was on its way to her mouth. This was fortunate, as she would undoubtedly have choked on it a few minutes later.

“Lilac-toned . . . lacking in brilliant color. Like your usual attire, Penny,” Marjorie explained.

Miss Pennington sighed.

“I shall never understand you.”

“You never will, dear.”

“Here you’re twenty-three to-day,” Miss Pennington went on, “and you have everything your heart desires—”

“Have I? You interest me strangely, Penny. Tell me what I have. Let me see if I recognize my possessions, when listed in your inimitable way.”

“There’s no need to be sarcastic about it,” Penny suggested in a hurt tone and with a sudden pathetic droop of thin lips and thin shoulders that was another irritating characteristic. Miss Pennington’s figure—always clothed, as her employer had mentioned, in neutral tones—had length and breadth but little thickness. It subtly suggested that it had been flattened by a steam-roller—a phenomenon Miss Blake’s friends openly attributed to the effects of her life with Marjorie. Without compunction that young person proceeded to flatten her again.

“For Heaven’s sake don’t stop to feel hurt!” she impatiently urged. “There isn’t time. I’m waiting for the list of blessings you were to give me.”

As the other did not reply, but merely sat and looked at her with lips compressed, she sighed, rose, and, hurrying around to her companion’s side of the table, lightly kissed Penny’s left cheek.

“If I’ve really hurt you, I’m sorry,” she said contritely. “Even if my birthday doesn’t make me happy, there’s no reason why I should have a grouch and take it out on you. So smile prettily at the lady, Penny. You know I love you.”

Penny smiled, a sudden, unexpected radiance coming through the plain mask of her features; and Miss Blake, as accustomed to this phenomenon as to the little starts and the hurt looks, absently kissed her companion again and returned to her place at the head of the table.

“My blessings are . . .” she prompted.

“Dear child, it’s shocking that I should have to remind you of them.” Penny returned to her first charge: “It seems so ungrateful.”

“Go on. What are they?” urged the exigent Miss Blake.

“Well, first of all, of course, there’s your youth. Twenty-three to-day—”

“And I feel a hundred,” the listener muttered.

“In perfect health,” Penny continued, ignoring the interruption.

“I don’t know about that, either. I had a slight headache only a fortnight ago, . . . but possibly it was due to the intellectual strain of helping you to decide between the white serge and the gray poplin. Go on.”

“And dozens . . . no, hundreds . . . of devoted friends—”

“Humph!”

“Don’t say ‘humph,’ Marjorie. It’s such bad form.”

“All right. Damn!”

“And this beautiful home, with its lovely grounds and garden,” Penny hurried on with a sigh.

“I do like my garden,” Marjorie admitted, and dropped the fruit-knife to turn and look out at the sweep and swirl of autumnal colors that lay beyond the dining-room windows. Though the season was late autumn, the beautiful old garden was still a flamboyant mass of bloom, among which shone the mellow tones of bird baths, marble seats, and a sun-dial. Fat squirrels scampered up and down the trunks of her favorite trees; and as she watched them one intrepid adventurer, doing his best for her, made a flying and spectacular leap from the branch of an elm to that of a neighboring oak, slipped, clawed, caught a twig, held on, and scrambled to safety. Then, briskly forgetting his momentary peril, he sat up in a crotch and refreshed himself with an acorn. Through the open windows came the scent of flowers mingled with the acrid tang of burning autumn leaves and the clear whistle of her Dutch gardener as he piled more fuel on his bonfire. Off to the left, where she saw it only with her mind’s eye, lay an orchard. Far in the rear of the big old house were the kitchen-garden, stables, a new garage, and the gardener’s cottage. Her house, a red-brick structure, old and rambling and beautiful only in the impression it gave of comfort and shelter, lay basking in the warm October sun, its numerous eyes open and smiling at the world. She experienced a prophetic pang of homesickness. Why was she planning to leave all this?

“Go on, Penny,” she abruptly directed, under the urge of the unexpected emotion.

“And all the money your dear father and mother left you—”

“I’m glad you mention the devotion and the dollars almost in the same breath. Your insight does you credit. Now go up in the air again. You’ve got your cue,” the speaker languidly added.

Miss Pennington’s flat body stiffened and she spoke with sudden dignity.

“When you are in this mood, Marjorie, it’s a waste of breath to talk to you,” she said stiffly. “And it’s my duty to add that you are letting yourself indulge in such moods more and more. No one knows as well as I do how sweet and kind you are at heart—”

“But there are times when you suspect that I’m developing into a selfish pig,” the girl interrupted. “Again your insight does you credit. I am.”

“Oh, dear child, I hope not!” Miss Pennington dropped her napkin, her shoulders and the corners of her mouth, and looked stricken. Her charge nodded solemnly.

“I am. I can see it myself. I’ve been conscious of it all summer. I didn’t notice it so much at college, because of course all the rest of the girls were just like me. But here at home, with you as a background, I begin to see whither I am drifting. I don’t know whether you’ve ever observed it,” she went on casually, “but I’m really clever.”

“Yes, dear, you are,” the other hastened to admit. “Every one says so. But a little more modesty would be nice. One of the strangely contradictory things about you—” She stopped short.

“Go on,” Marjorie again invited. “Something whispers that this won’t be flattering, but I love to talk about me.”

“What I was about to say—and you’ll forgive my candor, dear—is that you’re not at all vain of your beauty, which is really unusual, and yet you’re very proud of your brains, which . . . which . . .”

“Which you think are not unusual.” Miss Blake hooted softly, then sobered. Marjorie’s little hoot of laughter, originally unlike that of any one else, was beginning to be imitated in her social set. “You’re wrong, Penny. You’re very wrong,” she deigned to explain. “Few young things of my age are capable of the profound thought I’ve been giving to the problems of life for the past six months. There have been times when I could hear my brains whirl. The fear has come to me in the still watches that your innocent slumbers in the next room might be disturbed by them. But not even that reflection has numbed them. I’ve gone right on thinking.”

Miss Pennington began to look really disturbed. There was a new quality in the girl's voice and manner as she uttered the last words, and her companion, who was not without insight, recognized it.

"I've thought of a lot of things, and I've thought to some purpose," Marjorie continued. "While you have been thinking of my blessings, I've been thinking of the things I didn't have. To begin, I'm utterly alone in the world—"

"Marjorie, dearest, you have me!" Poor Penny was hurt again.

"Except for you. The day I was fifteen, when mother engaged you to keep me in the straight and narrow path, was a lucky day for me. You're one of the blessings you forgot to mention, and which I didn't forget!"

But it takes more than a pink-nosed Penny to fill the echoing chambers of an empty heart, and Marjorie, though she accepted the correction, did it with no special uplift of spirit.

"Dearest!" Penny gazed at her adoringly, adapting herself to the emotional key and again wearing the illumined look that so transformed her plain face. The girl went on with increased seriousness.

"Don't think I don't appreciate you. I know that whatever happened you'd stand by me. If I lost my money, you'd follow me into poverty, you'd work with me, slave with me. I know that. Doesn't it give you a better idea of my intelligence to realize that I do know it?"

"I'm glad you know it." Miss Pennington's dim gray eyes held a delicate film of moisture.

"But I have no illusions about the rest of my friends," Marjorie resumed, settling back in the big chair. "A lot of the girls like me, but there isn't one among them who would make the slightest sacrifice for me. As for the boys . . . the men . . . do you think I don't see through them and through the managing mothers who are hurling them at me, and planning and scheming all the time? I've been planned over and schemed over and 'worked' till I'm sick of it," she added with sudden passion. "That's what I've thought about, all the time I was at college and ever since I came home. In fact, it seems to me I haven't thought of much else since Father and Mother were killed six years ago," she somberly interpolated.

"That terrible accident," Penny sighed, and wiped away a facile tear.

"And that, Penny darling," Marjorie deliberately summed up, "is why I'm going to pack my trunks and close this house and go out into the world

to live for a while in strange places and under a new name. I want to learn what sort of person I'd be if I weren't Marjorie Blake. I want to know what people think of me, whether I really am clever, and what I can make of my life. There are other things I want and—" she brought her small fist down on the mahogany table quietly but with a gesture of absolute finality—"I'm going to go after them."

"Marjorie, dear child, is this one of your crazy jokes?" Penny had risen to her feet and was fluttering about her, vaguely, like a deeply disturbed little gray hen.

"No, it isn't. And I'm not out of my mind, though I knew you'd think I was as soon as I told you my plans. Sit down again, if you're interested in them."

Penny sat down.

"It's that college course," she despairingly diagnosed. "I knew from the first what it might do to you. And those girls who came home with you during the vacations showed me what was happening, with their constant talk of the 'inviolable sovereignty of the human being' and all the rest of it. I don't know what the world is coming to, and what young people are thinking of. They imagine they can do *anything!*"

"Of course they do. And they can. That's what I'm telling you. Naturally, I can do 'anything' more easily than most of them, because I'm so . . . so hideously alone." For an instant Marjorie's lovely face twitched. She filled a cup with coffee from the percolator, put cream and sugar in it, and passed it over to her companion.

"Drink that. It may help to sustain you."

With a hand that trembled Penny helped herself to a slice of cold toast. She was now convinced that her self-willed young friend was in earnest, and that what she was about to hear would be cataclysmic. But she also experienced a thrill that was not wholly unpleasant, and her thin shoulders straightened as if under a commanding tap from the finger of life. This was to be one of those Hours one hears about. She watched with affection Marjorie's reassuring smile, winging its way to her across the table.

"Here's the situation," the girl went on. "I want to put it to you without interruption, if you'll let me, and then I'll listen to anything you have to say."

Again Hannah Pennington revealed the innate dignity that had helped to win and keep the girl's affection.

“Dear Marjorie,” she said gently, “the first day I came here, when you were only fifteen, I realized that I’d have no real authority over you; and every day since then has strengthened the conviction. You’re too clever to imagine I’m merely the weak, backboneless thing I’ve seemed. But no one who tried to rule you could have remained with you, and I’ve loved you enough to want to stay and to be willing to hold my place by letting you rule me. Now you’ve evidently made up your mind to change the arrangement. I expected that would happen as soon as you left college, and I’ve been surprised that you waited till autumn. I’m ready for any decision you have made, and you may be sure that, however it may affect me, I shall not ask you to consider my side of it.”

Marjorie, elbows on the table and chin in her hands, looked across at her thoughtfully.

“You certainly are a dear,” she mused aloud. “If you hadn’t been, we couldn’t have held together so long. Don’t think I consider you a mush of concession, either. I’ve known all along that if I started anything you thought was dangerous you’d raise the very devil of a row. As it is, my blameless life has been spread out before you like a white page. Now, by Jove,” she added almost fiercely, “I’m going to write something on that page. I don’t know what it will be. I may cross and interline and mess up the page pretty badly before I get through—”

“If only you don’t blot and disfigure and destroy it,” Penny murmured, gallantly accepting her young friend’s figure of speech and going it one better.

“I may do that, too. The point I’m making—and now that I’ve waked you up a bit you’ll follow it fast enough—” she predicted, “is that I simply can’t face life as I see it stretching before me here in Blakesville. I know exactly what it would be if I lived it out in this nice, big, overgrown town. I’d follow the traditions my blessed father and mother made for me. I’d be on the hospital board and the library board, and I’d be an officer of the Woman’s Club, and I’d entertain a good deal, and be entertained. I’d have an occasional month in New York or down South. Once in a long time, in a spasm of originality, I’d dash off to Europe and do the cathedral towns or the Scotch lakes. Look me straight in the eye, Penny, and tell me the truth. Does that seem much of a life to you?”

“It seems a very safe one,” the little spinster ventured, after a moment’s pause.

“Answer another question. Would you yourself be satisfied to live it if you had my freedom and my money—in short, if you had my opportunity to live a bigger life?”

For an instant the dim gray eyes and the clear brown ones met unwinkingly. Then Miss Pennington shook her head.

“No, dear,” she admitted. “I’m afraid I shouldn’t.”

“Good for you! I knew I could count on your common sense.”

The parlor-maid brought in a note and a package, obviously another gift, and lingered in the hope of seeing it unwrapped. Miss Blake, who was as young as Annie and the parlor-maid, had a fine understanding of their mental processes, and a considerate habit of showing them her new possessions, as well as of giving them old ones. But to-day she was oblivious of the parlor-maid’s longing eyes.

“That will do, Nora, thank you,” she said; “and please see that we’re not interrupted. Didn’t Annie tell you? Anything else that comes can wait till Miss Pennington and I leave the dining-room. After that—” she smiled at Nora—“you may help me to open the new packages.”

The parlor-maid left the room and it was as if she had not been there.

“It comes to this,” Marjorie told Miss Pennington; “I can’t stay here.”

“But, dear—” her companion flushed self-consciously—“you’ve forgotten the most important point of all. You may marry. You’re sure to marry.”

“You bet I’m sure to marry!” the candid Miss Blake announced, with grim determination. “And I haven’t forgotten it for one minute. Do you think I dare to face life alone? Don’t you realize that I’ve simply got to bulwark myself against loneliness? I’m going to marry and I’m going to have six children! I’ve simply got to build up a family. I want to be surrounded in my old age by children and grandchildren,” she added, her mind taking an eagle flight across the future.

Miss Pennington moaned faintly.

“You sit there saying those terrible things,” she breathed, “and while you’re doing it you look exactly like a little chicken just out of the egg.”

Marjorie’s face darkened. For a moment she was furious. Then she uttered the characteristic soft hoot with which she always greeted any remark that especially amused her.

"I'm out of the egg, all right," she agreed.

"What I meant," Penny explained, rather abashed by her own outburst, "is that you look so absurdly young with your bobbed hair. Your hair is wonderful, Marjorie. I may have mentioned it—"

"I know. Never mind about my looks. They're all right," Miss Blake serenely proclaimed. "I want to ask you another question. I've just told you I'm going to marry and have children. Is there a single young man in this town, among those who come here, that you'd be glad to see me marry?"

Miss Pennington sighed again. This was a difficult conversation, and only her Maker knew what it was leading up to, but Penny began to share with Him a dim suspicion. Out in the butler's pantry Annie Riley set down the cream-pitcher and crept nearer to the swing-door.

"There are some very nice young men," Penny feebly hedged.

"Of course there are. Lads I've known and played with all my life. But you haven't happened to observe among them, have you, any one who combines the attributes of Solon the Wise, of Richard the Lionhearted, and of Bayard the pure and irreproachable gentleman, together with the beauty of the morning star?"

The hearer's memory fluttered up against the solid phalanx of the youth of Blakesville and fell back with bruised wings.

"No, dear, I don't."

"Neither do I. Yet that's the kind of man I'm going to marry," Marjorie informed her simply.

As her companion received this surprising statement in silence, the girl went on, more as if thinking aloud, now, than as if speaking to another person.

"Some girls know from the time they're children exactly what they want to do. They want to write, or they want to teach, or they want to be musicians. I want to marry. I've always known it. I've never allowed myself to consider any plan that would interfere with it. But since I've finished college and begun to think seriously about it, I realize that there's a certain kind of man I must have, and that I can't be happy with any other kind."

Penny did not reply. The assertions just made seemed to her rather indelicate. But those that followed were much worse.

“I’m not a feminist,” Marjorie dispassionately explained. “I’m interested in the welfare of this town, and I take a hand in politics because it’s my duty, I suppose; but you don’t hear me talking about women’s rights. Just the same, we’ve got some—and the first of them is the privilege of selecting the kind of husbands we want. I don’t see why we should sit still and let men do the selecting. For of course that’s what we’re doing, in spite of all the nonsense that’s talked about women pursuing their prey. When the right man happens along, and the woman recognizes him, she can do a lot toward getting him. But suppose that, as in my case, he doesn’t happen along. What’s she going to do then? Sit still and take the wrong man, simply because he *does* happen along? She has got to do that, or she has got to gird up her loins and hustle out in the world and look for the right man. And that, dear Penny,” Marjorie complacently ended, “is what I’m going to do. Marriage is to be my career. It’s more important to me than anything else, and I’m not going to have it muddled. So I shall attend to all its details myself.”

Miss Pennington felt a sudden longing for smelling-salts. There being none within reach, she took a deep draught of coffee.

“Another point,” Marjorie elucidated. “As the poet so beautifully puts it, I want to be loved ‘for myself alone.’ I’m not rich, of course, as the world looks at money to-day, but half a million is a temptation to men, so I’m not going to let them know I’ve got it. That’s why I mean to change my home and my circumstances, and live like a simple maiden. And perhaps, though I haven’t definitely decided this point—” she paused and verbally underlined the final words—“perhaps I’ll even work! So now, Penny—” she sat back in her chair and smiled triumphantly at the dazed creature opposite her—“you know the worst!”

Miss Pennington had covered her face with her hands. Incredible as this situation was, she knew that the girl before her was speaking sincerely. In the butler’s pantry Annie Riley, having reached the same conclusion at the same instant, expressed herself to herself by leaning limply against the wall.

“It’s all the influence of that college and those girls,” Penny reiterated, drawing her handkerchief from her sleeve to wipe her eyes and absently dropping it on the table. “It’s the way they talked to you and listened to you; especially,” she added firmly, “the way they listened. It . . . it put ideas into your head.”

Marjorie had a moment of vision.

“They didn’t listen because I was saying anything,” she admitted. “They listened because we were all so young. And their time to talk was coming. But they have nothing to do with the case; really they haven’t. The more they talked about the books they meant to write and the magazines they intended to edit, the more I thought about my six children. But of course I didn’t admit that to them. It would have seemed frightfully reactionary.”

As she spoke Marjorie’s memory took a brisk flight into the past. She had enjoyed her college life, but she had cherished no illusions about it. She had gone through it much as she walked through the dim halls of the old buildings, seeing what was around her but not deeply impressed by it, and unconsciously eager to reach the exit.

“It’s your reading, too,” Penny unheedingly persisted. “I’ve been worrying about your reading ever since you graduated and I’ve seen you absorbed in books when other girls were . . . were . . .”

For the moment an edifying memory of the activities of other girls eluded the speaker, and as she hesitated her young friend filled in the pause:

“Were fox-trotting. I know. I like fox-trotting, too, and I’ve done miles of it. But I’m not going to fox-trot into marriage. I’m going to find a man who will be the right kind of father to my six children.”

“Marjorie! Really! Must you dwell on that any more?” For once Hannah Pennington looked almost stern.

“Isn’t it important?”

“Of course it is. But one doesn’t—”

“This one does. I’m going away for a year. In the meantime I shall send you to Europe to meet that nice chum of yours who’s over there now—Jane Wainley. I’ll keep you there for a year and pay all your traveling expenses and hers, in addition to your salary. She’s in Italy, isn’t she? We’ll write her to-day. You and she can go anywhere you want to, and do anything you like. You, too, can go out into the world in quest of adventure. Come now, Penny,” Marjorie coaxed, “confess that it sounds rather nice.”

But the strain of this climax was too much for Miss Pennington, who had completely broken down at last and was softly weeping into the retrieved handkerchief. Also she had recalled Marjorie’s unfortunate remark about raising the devil in a crisis, and she felt she had something to live up to.

“I didn’t—think—it—would—be—anything—so horrible—as—to—go—off—all—by—yourself,” she brought in gulps. “I don’t know what will

happen to you. I sha'n't have a moment's comfort. Why can't you come to Europe, too, and—and—" she choked over the obnoxious word—"look there!"

Marjorie hooted irrepressibly.

"I believe you have a vision of me going about with a lantern and lifting up the tops of ash-cans!" she gurgled. "No, thank you; no European for me. I want a perfectly good American husband, and while I'm looking for him I may possibly take some jobs. I could be a chauffeur, I suppose, or teach French, or be a governess to some three-year-old infant whose parents are not exacting about his curriculum. But on second thoughts that wouldn't do. Governesses are not given opportunities to meet the right men, and they're always horribly pursued by the fathers of their infant charges."

"Marjorie!"

"Well, they are. Don't you read fiction? It might amuse me to work in some big office where I'd see a lot of men," Marjorie added wickedly, and looked guilty as an irrepressible groan burst from the lips of her companion.

Rising again, she crossed to the other side of the table and dropped an affectionate arm around the bent shoulders of Miss Pennington, who wanly melted under the slight caress.

"Dear Penny," the girl urged, "can't you forget the shock I've given you and fix your mind on what a good time you and Jane Wainley will have? I know you love her next to me, and I know that a visit to Europe with her has been your dream for years. Think of what it will mean to her, too—to be your guest for a whole year! After that you'll come back to me and help me to bring up my family of children as fast as I get them. Did I mention that there are to be six—three boys and three girls—"

"Oh, stop, stop!"

But the mention of the reunion had comforted Miss Pennington. She and Marjorie were not to part forever, then. She sat up and definitely wiped her eyes. The promised year in Europe suddenly lay before her like a blessed isle with a rainbow over it.

"That's right. Three rousing cheers!" Marjorie approved. "I'll write this morning for your cabin and tickets, and I'll go East with you next week to see you off, for I've decided to begin my new adventures in New York. There's something else I must do there, too—something tremendously important. I'll tell you about it another time."

Again the rapidly expanding program was too large for Penny. She collapsed once more, this time rather hysterically, and Marjorie, dampening her forehead with a napkin soaked in a glass of water, had a moment of remorse.

“I’m a selfish pig.” she dispassionately reflected, “or I wouldn’t have sprung this thing on her so suddenly. I could just as well have taken time to it, and given it by instalments. But I know the darling old thing will cry all over me from now till we part, and I want that cut as short as possible. It’s better for her, too, in one way. But I *am* spoiled. I’m afraid there’s no doubt of it. I’ve had my own way too long.”

Miss Pennington revived reluctantly, and the process of revival had successive steps. She had to be convinced that her young friend was really in earnest about this mad plan; then that her young friend was not in an abnormal state due to incipient illness; and finally that there was not some sinister explanation of it all—some explanation, perhaps, involving discontent with Penny herself, or perhaps the loss of Marjorie’s fortune. Was the dear girl simply giving her, Penny, a year of happiness before admitting the terrible truth?

The dear girl, by this time very weary of the interview, reminded her that there was nothing in Marjorie Blake’s character or past life to suggest that she would show any one such hyper-consideration; and Miss Pennington at last accepted the situation with a final choking breath and another abysmal thrill. This was terrible, but it was life. Even Penny, who had been only half alive for twenty years, suddenly felt that she was living now, and heard in the air about her a faint flutter of the wings of Romance.

CHAPTER II

PENNY'S GREAT ADVENTURE

THE illuminated bulk of the Western Limited swept eastward through the darkness, sounding at intervals its blasts of warning to motorists and others addicted to sporting efforts to cross the track before the train came. In the engine cab the engineer mentioned to his fireman that if "they" put him on another run before he'd made up the sleep he'd lost lately, somepin was goin' to drop. In the day-coaches drowsy children ate innumerable bananas and dropped the skins on the floor. In the sleepers bored passengers bitterly assured one another that the present railroad service was a disgrace to the country, and that to offer travelers such a dinner as the one they had just eaten was nothing short of a black crime.

Seated beside a window in a drawing-room section of one of the sleepers, Miss Hannah Pennington gazed out upon a light snow storm and stealthily wiped her eyes, while Miss Marjorie Blake, in the seat opposite her, vainly endeavored to keep her attention on a novel. At last Marjorie laid down the book.

"For Heaven's sake, Penny," she cried with exasperation, "what is the matter with you? You've almost created a freshet since we started, and I'm perfectly sure you're undermining the road-beds. Can't you take in the fact that Jane Wainley will be waiting for you at Naples? Doesn't that help a little?"

Miss Pennington restored her handkerchief to her hand-bag and put on a brave smile; and the smile irritated Marjorie so much more than the tears had done that she was tempted to ask Penny to weep again.

"I know I'm not a very cheerful companion," she choked.

"You're not," Marjorie grimly agreed.

"But the rush in which we did everything, and the way we did it, seems to have got on my nerves," Miss Pennington confessed. "I could have stood the hurrying, I think," she proceeded to explain, "for of course the servants were most kind and helpful, especially Annie and Nora. But the . . . the . . . misapprehension about where we are going and the evasions to our dear friends . . ."

“What dear friends? Whose dear friends? But I begin to understand.” Marjorie looked at her reflectingly. “What’s really worrying you, then, is that I didn’t take the whole town of Blakesville into my confidence? Isn’t that it?”

“No . . . I can’t quite say that.” Miss Pennington turned her faded eyes from the clear brown ones that looked at her so steadily, and gazed out at the snow. “It isn’t what you didn’t tell them that I deplore, but what you did tell them. You misled them, dear, and it hurt me terribly to hear you talking so glibly and apparently so frankly, yet at the same time so . . . so . . .”

“I didn’t make a single statement that wasn’t true.”

“I know you didn’t . . . exactly. But you certainly let them think you were going to Europe with me, and that we’d be traveling so far and so fast that you wouldn’t have time for letter-writing. And when we left you didn’t even let them know what train we were coming on, but made us motor miles across country to take one. You didn’t tell them what boat I’m sailing on. You . . . well, you didn’t tell them a thing.”

“I sha’n’t have time for letter-writing. There’s no deceit about that. And I simply won’t have them tagging after me in New York and looking me up every time they come there, and swinging me back into the atmosphere I’m trying to get away from! You knew perfectly well they’d do it if they knew where I was—not because they care for me but because they’d think they had to. My only chance to make a success of this experiment is to drop out of sight. And one thing is certain in this uncertain world: whatever else I do or don’t do, I’m going to drop.”

Miss Pennington looked at her, and notwithstanding the suffering of the past week her heart softened as it had softened during those difficult days of packing when she had followed the girl around the old house like a fretful ghost. There had been phases of Marjorie’s activities which she had watched with reverence, and there had been phases that appalled her. Marjorie’s thought for and generosity to the servants had been wonderful. Even the unresponsive Annie Riley, while muttering that she had “meant to leave, anyhow,” had been dazed by it.

And this young rebel was such a fascinating rebel, Penny reflected—so ignorant, so cock-sure, so spoiled, yet so understanding and with such generous impulses! She had no illusions about Marjorie. She saw her as she was, and she wondered again to what lengths the girl’s mad impulse would carry her, and what pitfalls lay in wait for her. Very solemnly Hannah Pennington told herself that there would be Pitfalls in plenty for one so

young and lovely. For the girl was lovely, with her bobbed, wavy bronze hair, her dark-brown eyes, her clear brunette skin, her straight little nose and beautiful mouth, her slight but perfect figure, almost boyish in its slenderness and straightness; above all, with her look of breeding and of poise. Penny loved every line of her, and most of all, incongruously, she loved the masterfulness of the child—the masterfulness that had been her own undoing.

Following aloud her line of thought, she murmured, “You were the sweetest thing, at fifteen! It was only after you went to college that you got all the terrible new ideas that are making you act this way. I don’t know what’s going to become of you!” She reached to the depths of her consciousness for a fitting climax and produced it triumphantly: “Girls were so different in my day!”

“They were,” Marjorie agreed. “At least they were on the outside. I don’t think they would have seemed very different on the inside if they had been opened up.”

Penny shuddered.

“You use such indelicate expressions,” she objected.

“In short, I’m getting on your nerves. I’ve seen that ever since I came home in June—and I’m sorry.” Marjorie recalled the recent attacks on her own nerves: the effect of the little mannerisms, of the steady drip, drip, of Penny’s platitudes. “It’s just as well we’re to separate for a year,” she added. “Perhaps our joyous reunion will find me a reformed being, with all my wild oats sown, ready to settle down and jog along at a steady family gait the rest of my life.”

“Oh, I hope so, my dear child! How I shall pray for it!” Miss Pennington clasped her hands.

“That’s right. Prayers never hurt any one,” Marjorie agreed. “You might begin right now.”

She smiled affectionately at the little woman, and reopened the novel, in which she had held the place with a forefinger. As she did so, the engine sounded another of its warning whistles, this time with a new quality in the signal. It was loud, long, frantic, and repeated. There was a mighty grinding of brakes, while the train seemed to buckle under the suddenness with which they were applied. For an instant she met the faded eyes of her companion, fastened on hers at first with the fixed stare of an infant and with as little cerebration, then with a new and fiercely protective light in them. Hannah

Pennington threw out her arms—not in appeal but as if to shield her charge. There was a terrific impact, there were animal noises of pain, a cacophony of sounds, of crashing, tearing, rending, such as might attend some hideously abnormal combat in an abnormal world. Then came blackness and silence.

“I think,” a man’s voice said, “that this one’s comin’ round.” A woman’s voice added gently: “Can you drink this? Will you try?”

Marjorie liked the quality of the woman’s voice. It was a beautiful voice, with something warm and human and dependable about it. On this new, dim, whirling planet to which she had been so incredibly and terribly transported, she vaguely felt the need of something human and dependable.

A liquid stung her throat as she swallowed it.

“Do you think she’s badly hurt?” The woman was speaking again.

“Can’t say, m’self.” There was an instant’s silence. Then the same man’s voice: “The other’s done for, all right, all right.”

“Yes, she’s gone, poor woman!”

An impression, vague but terrible, was struggling for birth in Marjorie’s numbed brain. The voices, of course, were voices on the new planet. They were speaking to something, of something . . . to what . . . of what. . . . There was a different sound . . . an odd crepitation. . . . A picture rose before her with amazing vividness: Penny’s face, Penny’s wide eyes, Penny’s sudden, fiercely protective gesture. . . .

Blackness again and an interval. Years passed, perhaps ages. Then a man’s voice—this time a different one:

“Only concussion and scalp cuts, I think, and shock. No fracture. No broken bones, either, so far as I can tell. But we must get her away from here. Those front cars are on fire—”

The woman’s voice came again: “Will you carry her to the nearest farmhouse? The woman has sent word that she’ll take in as many as we can get over there.”

“I’ll find some one. Can’t leave myself, of course.” The voice was crisp, professional.

“Joe! What are you thinking of? You’ve got to take care of her!” The woman’s voice was sharply imperative.

“I’m thinking that there are a lot of people suffering around us, and so far as I know there’s only one more doctor on the job. I can’t give all my attention to one patient. If it were you, I suppose I’d do it.”

“But . . . Joe, she’s badly hurt.”

“No, she isn’t. For Heaven’s sake, Kate, keep your head. I’ll come to the farm-house later. Here, you chap! I want you.”

Marjorie felt herself raised by a single pair of arms and transferred to another pair. She protested weakly. “No! No!” There was something here she must not leave. She did not know what it was, but her sense of obligation to it was powerful and persistent. Her protest, almost too feeble a sound to be heard, was ignored.

“Gently, there! That’s right.”

She was conscious now of pain, of jolting, of movement, of underlying strength, of the smell of tobacco, of the feeling of rough wool against her face. The woman’s voice spoke—the warm, human, comforting voice it was so good to hear.

“Can I help?”

“Nope. I’ll git along all right. She ain’t heavy; but this field’s full of holes, an’ I can’t see over her very much, with the darkness an’ snow an’ all.”

“I’ll go first and pick out the best way.”

“That’s the right idee.”

It was strange how slowly time passed in this new world. After more years or ages, she was in a room, a crowded room full of human beings and voices. Hands were fumbling at her clothing, removing her over blouse.

“Gee! look at the money-bag she’s got around her neck!” This was a new voice.

“An’ it’s going to stay there, too, Jim Henny, mind that!” A very sharp voice made this announcement, high-pitched, explosive, and feminine. “They ain’t goin’ to be no light-finger work around here to-night!”

“Aw, you make me sick! Who’s talkin’ about light-finger work?”

The warm, human, feminine voice sounded again.

“This lady is my friend,” it was saying, and the comfort of it to Marjorie was the comfort of a mother’s voice to a hurt and frightened child. “She’s

not dangerously hurt, and I think we can get her to the hospital a little later. In the meantime I'll take care of her, so you can give all your time to those who have no friends with them. The doctor has promised to be here soon."

"Well, that's good!" The sharp voice held a note of relief. "I'm glad to take 'em in an' git 'em out of the snow-storm, but of course I dunno what to do for 'em."

"I'll help you as soon as I've made my friend comfortable. No, thank you, we won't put her in the bed. We'll just lay her on top of it beside that other patient and cover them till the doctor comes."

A process resembling thought was going on in Marjorie's brain. She had another flash of that recurrent vision of Penny's face, of Penny's outstretched arms. Her friend—whose friend? This voice was not Penny's.

More centuries and æons. She heard the crisp professional modulations again.

"Sure you're all right?"

"Of course I am. For Heaven's sake, Joe, forget me and look after her!"

"The ambulances will be here soon, and I'll take these people to the hospital. Yes, it's a terrible mess over there, but I think we've got all the live ones out." The voice changed, grew professionally cajoling. "Well, now, tell me, how do you feel?"

Marjorie's eyes were open, and she stared up into a luminous space, in the center of which two faces floated dimly. One was a woman's, the other a man's. Both were reassuring, friendly, and faintly smiling.

"Better," she brought out, thickly.

"That's good." The man drew back, still smiling. "I mustn't let her get a good look at me," he explained in a low tone to the woman. "I'm covered with blood and dirt. We had to dig a lot of those people out—" His voice changed. "By Jove, Kate," he said, "you don't even look as if you'd been in it. You're fresh as paint."

"I haven't a scratch, as far as I know. It's a miracle, too, for a woman in my section was killed horribly—crushed between the seats—and all around me—"

"I know. It doesn't stand talking about." The man's voice was professional again. "Here, drink this."

"I'll do it to satisfy you. Now please, *please* look after her!"

There was a pause while the woman drank the dose. Marjorie was eased, made more comfortable. The professional voice took up the conversation.

“We’ve got to get the injured out of here. The woman of the place seems all right, but I don’t like the look of those two fellows.”

“I’m afraid they’re a bad lot. I made every one but the patients and the woman leave the house a little while ago, but those men came back. I suppose they’re her husband and her son.”

“Probably. They have the air of belonging here.”

“She’s carrying a lot of money, and they know it. They’ve spoken of it.”

“M-m-m.” The doctor was still working over Marjorie. “A lot of the passengers were. We must keep our eyes open.”

“Can you be with her till the ambulances come?”

“Yes, that is, I’ll be here in the house. You’re not interested in the other patients, are you?”

“I’m worried about her. It’s odd, but . . . somehow, I can’t help it.”

“You needn’t be worried. How many times must I tell you that? However, I’ll look after her. There are a number of doctors on the job now. Three are working in the outer room. It seems we’re only seven miles from Tanville, which I’m told is a big and thriving town.”

“Are there good hospitals there?”

“I think so, from what they said.”

He was doing something to Marjorie’s head. Whatever it was, it hurt.

“Nothing to work with here, of course. Naturally there wouldn’t be, and I haven’t even a bottle of aspirin tablets with me. I don’t know what we’d have done if it hadn’t been for my pocket flask and the big supply of clean handkerchiefs I had in my case. God, what an awful mess it is!”

Marjorie resolutely entered the conversation.

“Penny,” she ejaculated. “My . . . my friend!”

The man and woman looked at each other. Again the doctor spoke in cajoling tones, as to a frightened child.

“We’ve taken her to another place. Now don’t try to talk. I want you to keep very quiet.”

“Is—she—all—right?”

“Absolutely.”

“Then—why—isn’t—she—here?”

“Now, young lady, I want you to keep quiet. It is your doctor that’s speaking, remember.”

Marjorie closed her eyes again. Something was all wrong, but she could not think clearly enough to be sure what it was. Detached words came back to her, buzzing around her ears like maddening insects that refuse to be driven away: “The other one’s done for,” . . . “Yes, she’s gone.” . . .

What other one? Gone where? The answer lay in the hinterlands of her consciousness, but she would not let it come nearer. She groaned. The woman’s hand caught and held hers. The woman’s face swam between hers and dark outer space.

“I wish we had something to quiet her.”

“Those doctors out there will have. I’ll go and get something. The ambulances ought to be here, almost any minute.”

The man’s voice was as reassuring as the woman’s. Even his footsteps were comforting, though they were hurrying away. Marjorie closed her eyes again. A man’s voice, heard once before, brought her back to consciousness. It was thick and aggressive:

“Well, I guess they can pay somepin before they go fer all we done fer ’em, can’t they? They got to pay, an’ I’m here to see they do it. They got blood over everything, an’ this ain’t no hospital.”

“Jim Henny, you make me sick.”

It was the sharp voice of the woman, now flattened with humiliation.

“You shut up.”

“Honest, Doc, I wouldn’t of charged ’em nothin’,” the woman protested.

“I’m sure you wouldn’t.” It was the crisp, familiar professional voice again. “But in one way, Mrs. Henny, your husband is right. We have made a mess here, and you ought to have enough to cover it. What do you think would be fair, Henny?”

The man’s voice grew less truculent. “Oh, ’bout . . . ’bout five dollars a head, I guess.”

“All right. We’ve got eight patients here. I’ll pay you forty dollars, on condition that you let your wife keep half of it.”

The man began to bluster.

“That’s the bargain—that or nothing. Better take it, but suit yourself,” the doctor indifferently suggested. The man evidently took it. The doctor’s final words were delivered in a less friendly voice: “And you’re not to take this twenty dollars away from your wife when our backs are turned, either. I’ll be around here for a day or two, and I’ll know it if you do.” To the woman he added, “Better spend it quick.”

The woman laughed. So did another doctor and several of the less severely injured patients. The brief and tragic sojourn in the collapsing farmhouse appeared to be taking on at its finish a gratifying touch of social amity.

There was more lifting, more jolting, a sense of night, of outer spaces, of falling snow . . . Penny’s face and those protecting arms. . . . It was impossible to tell where reality ended and the fantasies of a shocked brain began. But after much movement and confusion there came a great calm. Something had stopped the pain. Marjorie was in the pure air of open fields, sinking into a mass of white daisies—or was it only into a clean white bed? There was a huge lily somewhere near her—or was it only the white-capped head of a nurse? In any case, it was all restful and comforting. She slept.

She woke to the light of another day. Yes, the big white lily had been a nurse’s head. The nurse’s uniform was white, too, and so was the hair under her cap, but she had a surprisingly young face, brilliant dark eyes, and an engaging smile. Suddenly the patient reflected that smiles were very important. They helped one, immensely. She returned the smile, with a tremble in hers, and the nurse’s smile grew larger.

“Feeling better?” she asked buoyantly.

“Yes, thank you.”

“That’s fine. Doctor Tilden will be pleased. So will Miss Kennedy. She’s here now. I’ll tell her you’re awake.”

She disappeared and returned with a companion. Marjorie seemed to have known for a very long time the face that next smiled down at her and the beautiful comforting voice that went with it.

“I’m so glad you’re better. Miss Walsh says you’re doing beautifully.”

Marjorie’s brain was functioning almost normally. She got all the names: Doctor Tilden, Miss Kennedy,—this, of course, was Miss Kennedy,—Miss Walsh. Miss Walsh must be the nurse.

“You’ve been so kind to me. I can never thank you enough,” she murmured.

She thought she had spoken quite loudly, but instead her voice was a mere whisper. She was not allowed to speak again.

Later she made a surprising discovery. She had not been in the hospital for centuries, but merely for a few days—two or three perhaps. Miss Walsh was a little vague about that. Then how was Penny? “All right”? That wouldn’t do this time. She must know where Penny was and everything about her. The helpless look on the nurse’s face—the two were alone together at the time, and Miss Walsh, who was not an imaginative person, had no good alibi ready for Penny—told Marjorie everything. She knew where Penny was, and the knowledge closed down on her like the lid of a coffin. She turned her face to the wall and shut her eyes.

Later that evening, seated beside her bed, Doctor Tilden and Miss Kennedy gave her a few additional details.

Neither on Penny nor on their present patient, they explained, had there been any clue to the identity of the two women, nor any addresses to which telegrams could be sent.

“Even yet you haven’t told us your name,” Doctor Tilden added. So Penny had been temporarily placed in a mortuary chapel in Tanville, to await her friend’s instructions when the latter was better. Miss Kennedy had attended to everything, the doctor said. There had been a simple service and flowers.

“I don’t know how to thank you.” Marjorie held out a hand to each of them. Her mind and memory were quite clear. Penny’s passport and her letters of introduction and her letter of credit were all waiting in New York, at the agency which had first arranged Jane Wainley’s modest tour, and was this week arranging the more ambitious one for the two friends. Everything had been done by telegraph; and to-day Marjorie must cable Jane Wainley that her friend could not come. She groaned.

“All this is very bad for you,” the doctor protested. “But of course we couldn’t keep on lying to you, now that you’re getting normal again. Pull yourself up to it and sit tight. Please try! That’s the only thing to do.”

The advice, like most advice, was easily given and hard to act upon. If only she hadn’t so worried Penny, at the last! The poor darling had cried almost steadily for ten days—the poor, faithful, devoted, adoring darling!

“Of course this sort of thing simply won’t do,” the doctor irritably protested. “You’re getting yourself all worked up. Here, take this.”

Marjorie took it and peace enveloped her like a rising tide.

She was awakened from a long sleep by the professional voice that was now so familiar, but for a moment after coming back to consciousness she lay with closed eyes.

“But I tell you, I’ve got to get back to New York,” the voice was saying.

“You’ll ruin everything if you do.” The second voice was Miss Kennedy’s, and again it held the note of strained patience Marjorie remembered noticing before. The door opened and some one else came into the room. Miss Kennedy’s voice changed at once.

“Doctor Tilden is threatening to leave us.”

“Oh, no, surely not!” The new, protesting voice was that of Miss Walsh.

“Everything here is all right now,” Tilden said, “and Stanhope can look after these people as well as I can.”

Subconsciously, the spoiled young person in the hospital bed resented being so casually classed with “these people.” Then a finer impulse replaced the resentment. She was very grateful to Doctor Tilden, and in these days of weakness and dependence she didn’t quite see how she was to get on without him. But, after all, she was, as he had put it, merely one of “these people,” to whom in the kindness of his heart he had for days devoted himself and his skill. Of course they couldn’t expect to keep him with them indefinitely. Something of her feeling was expressed by Miss Walsh.

“They’ll all miss you. I think she will, especially.” She added a question. “Is there any clue, yet?”

He seemed to understand.

“Not so far as I’ve heard.”

“Odd, isn’t it?” Miss Walsh’s voice was unctuous with interest. “Almost any other girl in the position she must hold would have had cards and letters—something to identify her. She has initials on her wrist-watch and on her hand-bag—‘M. B.’ And the other woman’s initials were on her purse—‘H. P.’ But that doesn’t help us much.”

The doctor spoke indifferently.

“She’ll soon be able to tell you all you need to know. Then the hospital can get in touch with her family.”

“You’ve been so interested in her, Doctor—” Seemingly Miss Walsh was one who took a good deal of snubbing—“I should think you’d hate to go off and leave her till she’s out of the woods.”

“That’s what I’ve been telling him.” This voice was Miss Kennedy’s.

“She’s out of the woods now. She’s never really been in the woods. Besides, Miss Kennedy is going to stay on and look after her.”

“Well, that’s good, anyway.”

Marjorie became conscious that she was eavesdropping. She opened her eyes.

“I couldn’t help hearing—and you’re all too good to me,” she said, more firmly than she had spoken since the accident. “But if you’re really going, Doctor,” she added, a little later, after an interval filled with professional questions and answers, “you must let me settle your account before you leave.”

“Oh, that’s all right. You can give me your address, and I’ll send it to you by mail after you’re well.”

“No, I’d rather pay it now, if you don’t mind; I have a good deal of money with me. And I want to repay the forty dollars you gave Henny. I have an idea that some of the patients can’t afford to pay much, and certainly that expense must not come out of your pocket.”

“How did you know anything about Henny?” The doctor, standing beside the bed, was staring down at her curiously, and with a surprise, almost a disquiet, that seemed out of proportion to the question. Marjorie was not yet very observant, but she rather vaguely took in a general impression of good looks and bigness, all bearing out that first sense of his reliability.

“I heard everything that was said. I didn’t understand much at the time, but some of it cleared up in my mind afterward. I wonder if Miss . . . Miss Kennedy . . . will get my purse for me.”

“It’s in the hospital safe. Everybody’s money and jewelry have been inventoried and put there.”

As if the mention of her name had been an invocation, Miss Kennedy suddenly appeared at the bedside and smiled down at the patient.

Marjorie returned the smile, with interest. She was feeling surprisingly well, surprisingly alive, and her brain was working with deferential alertness. For days Miss Kennedy's face had been oddly bobbing about in the space around her. That, of course, was what made it seem so familiar. But now Marjorie was really seeing it for the first time in detail, and she took in every feature with the keenness of acute interest.

Miss Kennedy was tall, several inches taller than Marjorie, whose height was five feet six inches. Her smooth, clear flesh covered this fine structure generously and with gracious curves, but there was not an ounce too much of it. Her hair was a dark auburn, either naturally wavy or the work of some excellent artist in the permanent-waving line. She wore it straight back from a brow with a widow's peak, and coiled it in a French twist close to her small and well-shaped head. Her eyes were gray and steady, and her smile was charming. During those days of partial consciousness it had been a warmly human smile, friendly, reassuring, intimate. Now—Marjorie took in the discovery with a slight pang—its character was changing.

Indeed, Miss Kennedy's whole manner was changing, subtly but unmistakably, as if perhaps, Marjorie told herself, trying to analyze the difference—as if she had suddenly remembered that she was a stranger, who must not take too much for granted. That, of course, might explain it all. She was still wonderfully kind, but she had taken on an air of detachment, of a dawning amusement at herself and the situation, of tacit apology to herself and others for her presence here. Her smile expressed it perfectly. It was hard to reconcile the smile with the sharp persistence of the woman who had actually pleaded with Doctor Tilden to give all his time to the one patient in whom she herself was interested. She had thus pleaded, and she had called him "Joe." Yet since the patient had come back to full consciousness the manner of Miss Kennedy and Tilden toward each other had been the manner of two persons who were almost strangers. Marjorie frowned. Things were very confusing. Possibly her impressions were not accurate.

The question of age also puzzled the girl. She was inclined to think Miss Kennedy not more than three or four years older than she herself was. Still, of course she might be; one never knew about such things. She liked Miss Kennedy's gown—a reseda-green one-piece affair with a collar and cuffs of gold Balkan embroidery. Around her neck she wore a heavy and unique chain made of large ovals of uncut jade, with small gold globes between them. These details Marjorie caught in an eye-flash, as she answered Miss Kennedy's words.

“Perhaps the head nurse will get it for me, then. I do want the matter attended to, please. I’ll never be out of debt to Doctor Tilden for his kindness, but at least I can pay him for his professional services.”

“Very well. I’ll speak to the nurse.”

Miss Kennedy spoke with her wise little smile, which subtly suggested that patients must be indulged in their fancies, and the door closed behind her as she left the room. Doctor Tilden, who had been looking at Miss Kennedy without appearing to realize that he was doing so, now briskly drew his chair to the patient’s bedside, and sat down with the effect of having the day before him. Marjorie had already realized that this must be his manner with all his patients. He never seemed rushed or hurried. The head nurse breezed in, flushed and apologetic over her absence during part of the doctor’s visit. She had been called to an emergency case. He put her at ease with a word.

“Our patient does you great credit,” he went on suavely. “If she keeps on like this her friends will be coming to take her home in a day or two.”

“I’m not going to trouble my friends.” Marjorie spoke with quiet determination. She had been doing some thinking during the little chat that went on before she opened her eyes. “I’m perfectly all right, and I shall go straight on to New York, as I intended. You see,” she added, “I have no family left, unfortunately, so there’s no one to call on except friends, and I shouldn’t care to trouble them save in an emergency. Penny—Miss Penny—” she hesitated over the words—“was my companion.”

“I see. Well . . . if you go right on to New York, how about her body? Naturally, the arrangements were merely temporary.”

“Of course. They’d have to be.”

Marjorie reflected. She had to make an important decision here and now. She must take Penny back home, re-open the house, have a funeral, go through her preparations all over again, with the inevitable suggestions and friendly interference that would follow the announcement of Penny’s death, or—she must make other “arrangements.” She had no idea what those arrangements could be, but she assumed that some compromise was possible. Looked at in one way, it seemed that her entire plan had collapsed like a house of cards. But had it, really? If Penny had had a family or other close friends, there would have been no upbuilding possible. Marjorie would then have had to take her home. But the little gentlewoman had been as much alone in the world as Marjorie herself was, and her only intimate was

Jane Wainley, now awaiting her arrival in Europe. Jane, of course, must be cabled to at once. There seemed no urgent reason why any one else should be notified. Save in the hearts of Jane and herself, the fact that poor Penny had left this earth would cause no pang of loss or regret. A tragic situation that, if one had time to think of it, and yet no more tragic than Marjorie's own situation. Had she herself gone, who save Penny would have grieved for her? Her girl friends would have shed a few easy tears and then forgotten her. The newspapers of Blakesville would have dwelt on the pathos of so abrupt an end for so young and promising a life. Her fortune, not large enough to cause much interest or discussion, would have gone to the leading charities of her home town.

As it was, probably no one knew that she and Penny had been in the wreck, for no one had known they were to take that train. They had motored to their starting-point, had done a few days' shopping there, had taken the train in their own good time, and, to Penny's horror, had reserved their private drawing-room in the name of Miss Brown. As it happened, they might as safely have used their own names, for both the porter and conductor of their car had been killed, and no decipherable list of passengers survived the fire following the wreck. Marjorie had heard Miss Walsh discussing these grewsome details with another nurse, the third night she was in the hospital. There was something hideous in being as much alone in the world as she and Penny had been. The girl realized more clearly than ever before how fully the condition justified her determination to have a family, to erect bulwarks against a lonely old age by giving children to herself and to the world.

"Might I leave Penny where she is for the time being?" she asked Doctor Tilden.

"Of course—if you prefer to do so. I believe there's an original limit of six months in the reception vaults here, and the possibility of an extension of time if that isn't enough."

Marjorie made her decision. What she was doing might not be right, but she refused to let her mind be diverted into ethical by-paths.

"As I have explained, we were alone. I had just closed my house and left for a year of travel, and we had said good-by to our friends," she told Tilden.

"I see. You were off for Europe."

"I must cable to-day to a friend over there who was to meet the ship at Naples," she murmured, letting the inference stand.

"I'll attend to the matter of the vault," he said, briskly. "I think I can arrange the extension for a year, if you'd like that."

"I would. And thank you so much."

"We made the name H. Penny. That's all right, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"And now, if you'll tell me your name, for the hospital records and my own—"

Miss Kennedy returned with a desk-clerk, who carried a hand-bag and a bill-case with neck-strings. "You'd better send these back to the safe till you go," the clerk advised as he turned them over.

"I don't know about all this," the doctor muttered, pursing his lips uneasily, as Marjorie opened the case. "You're doing too much all at once."

"I've told you she's not fit to be left yet."

Miss Kennedy spoke with her eyes on the doctor's face, and Marjorie, absently glancing up from the money-case, saw the look and dropped her gaze under the revelation. She realized that Miss Kennedy and Tilden must have been seeing much of each other during the past few days and she reminded herself that acquaintance ripens rapidly in such conditions. All this being so, how about that "Joe"? She was interested, a trifle amused, and, incongruously, rather lonely. She had a momentary sense that those two, who had stood by her so magnificently, were now in a combination from which she was shut out.

"Let me finish, please," she said quickly. "It won't take long and I'll have it off my mind. What do I owe you, doctor, plus the forty dollars?"

He mentioned a reasonable amount, and protested against the forty dollars, but she insisted on having her way.

"Spending a little money is one of the few things I can do," she said drearily. "Let me do it."

"All right. That's that. And now the name, please?" His pencil was poised above a page in his note-book.

"Marjorie Brown."

He wrote it down.

"And the address?"

“The New York Exchange Bank will forward letters. You see, I expect to be on the wing as soon as I can travel.”

“Yes, that will be the best thing for you after this shock. Don’t do much very soon. Take things easily for the next few months.”

He replaced the note-book in his pocket and smiled at her. His smooth-shaven face was good-looking in a clean, wholesome, almost boyish way, and his smile was delightful. But the girl, who was studying him for the first time, felt a growing conviction that he was not so strong as she had thought him. There was about him a hint of uncertainty, of weakness.

“Perhaps you’ll come to see me when you get to New York,” he suggested. “I’d like to look you over and be sure you’re all right before you sail for Europe. Here’s my card.”

“I will come, thank you.”

“Then it isn’t good-by. It’s only *aufwiedersehen*.” He held out his hand.

“You’ve been amazingly kind. I shall never forget it.”

He nodded, accepting the tribute absently, as if his thoughts were on her rather than on her words.

“You’re a pretty husky specimen,” he commented, as they shook hands. “Have you gone in for athletics?”

“Yes, at college.”

“I thought so. This little jolt oughtn’t to have any permanent effect on your health. Forget it as soon as you can.”

He pressed her hand in his strong, firm one, swung on his heel, and with a nod to Miss Walsh left the room, followed by the nurse. Marjorie found herself alone with Miss Kennedy, who, she now discovered, had retreated to a window during the final interview. Meeting the patient’s eyes, she came to the side of the bed.

“I ought to leave to-day, too,” she said.

Marjorie started, her eyes widening.

“You, too?” she almost gasped. “But . . . of course . . .” She pulled herself together. For an instant the announcement had made her feel that she was alone in the universe. “You’ve been staying on, just like the doctor, to see us all through,” she continued apologetically. “I never took that in. How abominably selfish we are when we’re ill!”

“Oh, no one really needed me after the first day, but I was glad to stay and do what I could. There’s something about an experience like this—about seeing people go through such suffering—that makes one look at life differently, for a time at least. It’s impossible to turn one’s back on it and go one’s way with a clear conscience,” Miss Kennedy said, with absent eyes on the view beyond the window.

“I wonder if I should have felt like that, if I had been in your place and you in mine?” Marjorie mused, and added honestly: “I’m awfully afraid I shouldn’t. I might have had the impulse to get away from it.”

“You’re younger, and probably your life has been an easy one. Mine . . . hasn’t.” The last word subtly took on some of the quality of the life that had not been easy. The warm voice hardened a trifle.

Marjorie drew a long sigh and her lips quivered. She was beginning to feel the effect of all this talk and thinking.

“Someway, it never occurred to me that you would have to go,” she brought out. “Must you?”

“I ought to.” Miss Kennedy looked down at her soberly. “But I’m on a vacation just now from my regular work,” she added. “I heard you tell the doctor you were going to New York. If you can travel within a few days, and if it would be any help or comfort to you to have me with you, I might wait and we could go on together.”

“That would be wonderful!” Marjorie had an inspiration. “What is your work—may I ask?”

Miss Kennedy looked almost apologetic.

“I suppose one might call it research work,” she said. “I look up information of one kind and another.”

“And you’re free just now?”

“Yes.”

“Then I wonder—” the girl spoke impulsively—“if I could make some arrangement with you for your time. It’s all very sudden and irregular, of course, but I suppose—” the canniness she had inherited from her father came to momentary life—“you have letters and things? It seems abominable even to speak of them after what you’ve done for me and others, but—”

“You’re quite right. Of course you must know who I am. I think I can satisfy you on that point, and I shall be glad to stand by for a few days more,

at least, till you're safely in New York."

"That's splendid." The patient impulsively held out her hand and the other took it with a calmness suggesting that she made such little arrangements every day. "Then our bargain dates from the day of the accident," Marjorie added. "And it goes without saying that I pay all your expenses here. . . ."

The girlish voice lost its clearness. The patient had a quick suspicion that her doctor was right in his theory that she was doing too much. She had gone through a strenuous half-hour for a convalescent. She had paid her physician, engaged a new companion, and lost her identity. She felt rather faint.

"I feel queer," she said dreamily. "I suppose I've been talking too much."

"You certainly have. Close your eyes now, and try to go to sleep."

The firm tones steadied her as they had done from the first. The clasp of the cool, strong hand was quieting, too. The look in the gray eyes was perhaps most steadying of all, in its suggestion of unshaken poise. Marjorie closed her eyes, and her new companion stood very still, looking down at her for a moment with a new element in her slight, musing smile. It was still understanding and tolerant, but there was in it a suggestion of conscious power. Miss Kennedy nodded slightly, as if in answer to some question in her own mind. Then, arousing herself from her reverie, she quietly left the room.

CHAPTER III

ALONG COMES HORACE

THE letters of Miss Katherine Kennedy—she had explained that her first name was Katherine with a K—were distinctly reassuring. There were several of them, written by well-known authors and educators whose passion for knowledge in special lines Miss Kennedy had obviously helped to gratify.

“Most authors are lazy; or they put an exaggerated value on their time, and I save them the trouble of going to libraries and looking up things themselves,” she lightly mentioned in passing.

Her new employer accepted the explanation, but she was not unsophisticated, though of course she was much less experienced than she fancied herself. The reflection came to her that Miss Kennedy dressed much better and was generally more affluent in effect than one could expect a person of her occupation to be. Marjorie knew that large prices were not paid for this particular variety of research work. Also, it was somewhat surprising that the owner had the letters with her, so ready to her hand in an emergency she could not have foreseen. However, Miss Blake, who had her own code of loyalty, sternly closed her mind against the intrusion of such unwelcome thoughts. She was under heavy obligations to Katherine Kennedy. Moreover, there was in the girl’s make-up an unconscious feudal assumption that anything belonging to herself acquired from that bare fact a special value—almost a place beyond criticism. Katherine Kennedy was now her employee, and therefore Miss Kennedy must be quite all right. It is a pleasant code, upheld by many unconscious optimists; but it occasionally leads to sad awakenings. Marjorie mentally admitted, too, that if chances were taken in this leap in the dark, Miss Kennedy was obviously accepting her share of them. She was not asking for references or confidences, and only her amused little smile suggested that she might reasonably have expected these.

Marjorie, having repudiated “nourishment” and settled down to three meals a day to build up her strength for the remainder of the journey to New York, spent many of the long hours of her convalescence in thought, and found little to be said in favor of this form of diversion. Her meditations were persistently depressing, and before her mind’s eye was a succession of

dark images. For the time at least all the glamour had been taken from her great adventure. She promptly found the explanation of this, or, rather, the two explanations,—nervous shock and the tragic death of Penny,—but the analysis did not greatly help her. She was haunted by two visions of Penny: the one, Penny in her last moments of life, self-forgetful and shielding; the other, Penny in the reception vault, stiff and cold, but conscious and wondering why she was there. In connection with these visions, Marjorie made a discovery.

What she most missed in Penny's going was not Penny herself, but the love for her, Marjorie, which with Penny had passed out of the world. She had not realized how much she valued that love, but it had been as definite a thing, and in its way as warming, as the heating plant of Marjorie's house. Unconsciously, she had basked in it, and now she seemed to be living icily in a frozen world. Yes, it was surprising how she missed that love. Odd, too, that she herself had won and given so little love.

As it happened, her friends at college had been the "boy-rushing set," and she had been neither intrigued nor allured by the other set, whose members wrote one another "crush notes" and sent one another roses, or put feminine members of the faculty on pedestals and knelt before them. In that boy-rushing period Marjorie had briefly fancied herself in love with half a dozen lads, half a dozen times, and the experiences had been enlightening. She was glad to have had them. They had cast a mellow glow on life, had given her a few thrills, had taught her a little, and had troubled her not at all. A dignity she inherited from her mother, and had worn like a banner almost since her infancy, kept her from the diversions of "necking" and "petting parties." Her attitude toward that sort of thing, when she saw others going in for it, had something of Katherine Kennedy's amused and tolerant point of view toward life in general. In short, for six years, save for the brief and spasmodic episodes mentioned, Marjorie had lived without much love and without those substitutes for love which had contented many of her associates. Now, in the desolation of her mood, she told herself she never would love. There must be something wrong with her.

She had shocked Penny by talking glibly about a future husband and future children, and she had meant all she said. But she knew it had not been love or the romance of love for which she was reaching out. It was for The Family—that institution whose invisible walls, closing around little groups of individuals, create an illusion of unity and companionship on the quicksands of life. It was The Family she wanted, The Family she still

wanted, The Family she must have. More than ever before she was afraid to face the future and old age alone.

Another reflection kept pushing its way to the front of her unwilling mind. Was this tragedy at the beginning of her experiment to turn her back? In her present mood it seemed a blocking of the way, but she must not let that mood prevail. If it was her duty to turn back, to take Penny home, and if she followed this imagined duty, she would never again get away to the same freedom. More firmly than ever she was convinced of that. Yes, block or no block, she'd better go on. But could she? Despite her earlier resolution, she now wavered, alternately urged and restrained. Difficulties continued to come up over her horizon like the advance clouds of a storm.

In one way, of course, poor Penny's death would leave her freer than before. But already she had made several blunders, and the worst of these was her change of name. The next lay in her recent admission to Doctor Tilden and Miss Kennedy that she had some money. How, now, was she to explain her desire for work?—if she desired it. That desire might conceivably be strong. Existence under her new and widening horizon might call for anodynes, and surely work would be the best of these. The atmosphere of the hospital helped this mood. All these eager workers around her, many of them laboring day and night, were bearers of the torch of life. It would be inspiring to be like them. But how could she explain to the quizzical-lipped Miss Kennedy why she desired a job, and how could she make Doctor Tilden understand?

Her reflection suddenly centered on the new companion. There was no question that Miss Kennedy was a delightful and a surprisingly efficient person. She had already purchased a limited wardrobe for Marjorie—only the essentials, of course, as everything not needed for the journey could wait till they reached New York. But in what she had selected she had shown excellent taste and a fine sense of the fitness of things. Marjorie, who was highly exacting, could not have done better herself. Now, in a corner of the hospital room, Miss Kennedy was on her knees, packing Marjorie's new trunk, while Miss Walsh scuttered about, willingly but rather vaguely collecting garments from closet-hooks and hangers.

During the morning Miss Kennedy had read aloud to the patient, in the lovely voice whose modulations were a delight to the ear. Marjorie had enjoyed that reading. She also appreciated the tact Miss Kennedy showed in her relations with her new employer and with the hospital people. She was not acting like an employee; possibly she did not consider herself one. Neither was she assuming the rôle of friend. She was merely a casual

acquaintance, amazingly helpful, equal to any situation, and, when it came to human relations, suddenly as remote as a polar bear on an isolated cake of ice.

Marjorie wondered if she loved any one. Theoretically, of course, she must; and the warmth of that beautiful voice certainly suggested that she could. But the detached manner offered different testimony. Marjorie sighed. If she and Miss Kennedy held together for ten years, instead of the ten days that would doubtless be their limit, and if she, Marjorie, passed out of life at the end of that time, Katherine Kennedy would draw down her eyelids with cool, steady fingers, and turn from her death-bed to face the world with her tolerant, understanding smile. And yet—Miss Kennedy had been sympathetic and warmly human during those first days after the accident. These reflections, like most of Marjorie's recent reflections, were not agreeable. To banish them she spoke hastily, addressing her companions from the big chair beside one of the room's two windows, where she had been tucked by Miss Walsh.

“What time does our train leave, to-morrow evening?”

“At eight o'clock.” As she spoke Miss Kennedy closed the lid of the trunk on her completed packing, rose from her knees, and came alertly to the patient's side.

“It's a good hour, too,” she added. “It gets us off comfortably, and allows us plenty of time for supper and a prolonged and emotional farewell scene with Miss Walsh. Then you can go to bed as soon as we get on the train.”

“I can't fancy your farewell to anybody being either emotional or prolonged,” Miss Walsh contributed with unexpected insight, and Marjorie looked at her with respect. Obviously Miss Walsh read her new companion as she herself did.

“I suppose I ought to telegraph for rooms,” Marjorie murmured.

Miss Kennedy indulged in a rare moment of hesitation.

“I have a little flat I've sublet, lately,” she then said. “It's very simple, of course; just the third floor of an old brown-stone house that has been made over into apartments for professional people. The kitchen isn't much larger than an ordinary ice-box, but there's a good-sized living-room and an extra bedroom. I can put you up till you make your plans, if you like the idea.”

For a moment Marjorie did not reply. She was not certain she liked the idea. Miss Kennedy went on with more assurance.

“Several well-known persons live there.” She mentioned the names of a distinguished magazine editor and his wife, and of a noted woman artist. “And the windows of the living-room look out on the park,” she convincingly ended.

“Central Park?”

“No, Gramercy.”

“Oh, I’ve always liked Gramercy Park—that is, the few times I’ve seen it.”

“It’s very quiet.”

Henry Blake had been noted for quick decisions, and his daughter was not unlike him.

“I’ll come,” she decided. “Thank you very much. It’s awfully good of you to ask me, and I’ll try not to be a nuisance.”

“There’s no danger of that.” Miss Kennedy took the decision with her usual calmness, but she was clearly pleased. “We can get our own breakfasts or they can be sent up from the general dining-room,” she explained. “We can take the rest of our meals in the house or go out for them, as we choose. There’s a big fireplace, too.”

“It sounds charming.”

“It isn’t; it’s rather shabby. But it’s clean and comfortable, and you’ll be all right for a few days.”

Marjorie decided not to outstay her welcome, and her reluctant mind admitted another thought. Apartments on Gramercy Park are not inexpensive. Even a shabby one would rent for a price that might well stagger a girl who earned her living by looking up information for authors and educators. But possibly Miss Kennedy had an income aside from what she earned, as Marjorie herself would have if she went to work. This reflection cheered the girl. She did not like to have her thoughts making these furtive little sorties into the private affairs of her new companion.

“Shall you be nervous about the journey?” Miss Kennedy was still beside her chair, looking down at her.

“No . . . I think not.” Marjorie had not thought of this. “Shall you?”

“No. But I’m going to the station now for our accommodations, and in the circumstances it might be better—mightn’t it?—to take a section instead of a state-room. Looking at our fellow-passengers will help to divert our

minds. And it would be natural, you know, if our thoughts occasionally turned to wrecks.”

“I think so, too.” Marjorie was reflecting that this girl thought of everything. Of course one’s subconscious mind would be full of apprehension during that journey, and every whistle or sudden stop would quicken one’s heart-beats. “But that means the upper berth for one of us.”

“For me; and I shall not mind it in the least; I’ll rather like it.” Miss Kennedy disposed of that little matter as efficiently as she did everything else. “I’ll trot off now and make the reservations. Are there any other errands I can do?”

“Not that I can think of. You never leave anything undone.”

Marjorie smiled at her gratefully. It was comforting to have any one around on whom she could rely so absolutely, after poor Penny’s well-meaning but vague gestures.

“You’ve sat up long enough.” Miss Walsh hurried her into bed. “If you take my advice, Miss Brown, you’ll stay in bed all day to-morrow, to rest before that journey. I don’t approve of the section plan, either,” she went on, almost brusquely. “If you had your own state-room you could lie down half the time—or all the time, for that matter, if you wanted to.”

“I shouldn’t want to,” Marjorie assured her with conviction. “I’d go crazy lying on my back for hours, gazing up at wabbling hammocks and swaying curtains.”

“M-m, perhaps so. But you’re not as strong as you think you are.”

Miss Walsh left the room on this warning note, with the avowed purpose of getting the patient’s luncheon, and Marjorie turned to the new books Miss Kennedy had selected for the journey. The companion’s literary taste appeared to be as sound as her taste in other matters. Marjorie picked up the volumes in turn and glanced appreciatively at their titles. A Wodehouse story, light and gay, good reading for a convalescent. Galsworthy’s latest novel, rubbing sides with one of Arnold Bennett’s. Evidently her companion had a bias toward the English writers. But the Americans were not neglected. Here was an Edith Wharton, and a new collection of Edith Thomas’s poems, and Frances Hodgson Burnett’s “Robin,” which Marjorie had read but was willing to read again. A nice assortment, but for the moment she was unable to fix her attention on any of the books. What an extraordinary position she was in. “Miss Brown!” She grimaced

distastefully. Yes, she had begun her new life with one or two serious blunders.

Matters looked a little brighter the next evening. For one reason, the day had been brilliant and bracing. Her self-respect found food in the reflection that she was not nervous on the train, as she had feared she might be. She was glad she was out in one of the sections of a sleeping-car, instead of confined in a state-room; and she surveyed her fellow-passengers with deliberate interest, while the porter, under Katherine Kennedy's direction, found unobtrusive shelter for the hand-luggage. Marjorie, herself an experienced traveler, recognized at a glance most of the familiar types around her: the traveling-man making up his expense-account, the young mother with the two children who would certainly ask questions all day tomorrow, two solid citizens already discussing politics, and a few citizens not so solid—among them an overdressed and pallid youth with a furtive air and a twisted mouth. He seemed as obviously of the underworld as if he were made up for the part, and Marjorie classified him without effort. But he was merely a Western college boy with dramatic instincts, called East by the sudden death of a chum.

To one passenger, who sat in the section directly opposite her, she gave closer attention, largely because she discovered that he was interested in her and her companion, in a boyish and inoffensive way. He had given them several quick, keen glances under cover of the newspaper he held, and once she had met his direct gaze. It was a pleasant look, gay and debonair, from a pair of the most vividly blue eyes she had ever seen, and it moved back to the newspaper with no effect of haste or apology. This young man seemed about her own age. He had a clean-shaven, dark face, very black hair and eyebrows, a firm-lipped and smiling mouth, and a singularly determined jaw. He was extremely well-dressed, and the shapely hands that held his newspaper were admirably cared for.

Katherine Kennedy had been standing with her back to the two, efficiently supervising the porter's final disposition of hats and coats. Now she turned to take her seat, but before she could do so the youth across the aisle rose and came to her with an outstretched hand.

"And yet," he cordially remarked, "there are those who say this is a disappointing world!"

That his appearance was a surprise to Miss Kennedy was clear, and there was an instant in which Marjorie, watching the two as their hands met, was

convinced that it was not a pleasant one. In the next Miss Kennedy's eyebrows arose and her warm voice took on a cajoling tolerance.

"I'm beginning to expect you to appear almost any time, Horace."

"Exactly. Just like the demon in a pantomime."

"But I thought you were to be in Chicago two weeks."

"Now, what New Yorker would stay in Chicago two weeks if he didn't have to?" the young man wanted to know. "I hustled my work through, finished in a week, and behold my reward! I'm not only on my way home but I find you on the train."

His appreciative glance took in Miss Kennedy's companion, as if asking her sympathy in this delightful surprise, and Katherine, taking her cue after an almost imperceptible hesitation, presented Mr. Kemp to Miss Brown, with a slight hardening of her voice. Mr. Kemp seemed unconscious of this effect. Traveling-cap in hand, and his dark face alight with pleasure over the encounter, he continued to discourse, addressing his conversation to both ladies.

"Dad expedited matters by telegraphing for me," he confessed. "I get so frightfully on his nerves at home that he sends me on remote errands, and then he gets so stirred up over what he thinks I'm doing when I'm not under his eye that he wires for me to come back; so the exile never lasts very long."

"Hasn't it ever occurred to you that it would be pleasant to get off your father's nerves?" Miss Kennedy languidly suggested.

The young man beamed at her.

"Oh, if we're going into *that*," he said, "I'll have to sit down. May I?"

As Miss Kennedy silently referred the inquiry to Marjorie, he addressed his next words to the younger of his companions.

"I shall be extremely interesting," he promised. "When I get on the subject of my father there's hardly a dull moment in my discourse. Everybody says so. Even Dad admits that I've told him things about himself he didn't know, and I'm always willing to confess that he can show me depths in my own nature that I've never even dreamed of."

Marjorie smiled.

"It sounds fascinating. Do sit down."

The young man cast a triumphant glance at Miss Kennedy.

“An understanding soul,” he murmured. “I knew it at a glance.”

But when he had accepted the invitation, and comfortably settled himself opposite them, he seemed disposed to postpone the family revelations. He at once referred to last week’s wreck, and when, in response to a direct question, they admitted that they had been in it, he showed the liveliest interest, sympathy, and curiosity.

“I passed over the road a few hours after the wreck,” he said, “on my way to Chicago. I think mine was the first train that went through. If I had known you were among the victims, Kate, I’d have got off and ministered to you. I can minister awfully well,” he complacently mentioned to Marjorie.

She laughed. The picture of Mr. Kemp ministering to anything except a sick puppy was hard to call up. The young man looked hurt.

“You don’t believe it? That’s because you don’t know me well enough. Just wait. One by one my virtues will burst upon you like the unfolding petals of a lovely flower, and the next time you’re in a wreck you’ll wave Kate Kennedy aside and feebly call for Horace. I’ll come, too,” he added, with an impish smile.

Marjorie returned the smile. The youth in her was responding to the call of the youth in this irrepressible lad, and she was glad they had met him.

“Tell Miss Brown about your father,” Kate invited. “You promised her that, and I think you ought to make good.”

The young man sighed.

“I’m in such a beatific mood that I can’t see Dad in the proper perspective just now,” he confessed. “Something tells me this is going to be a wonderful journey. I have an impression that I’m about to fall in love again. It’s vague as yet. It doesn’t amount to much more than the preliminary tuning up. But the very next time you smile,” he impressively told Marjorie, “I’m going to hear the opening strains of the Love Motive.”

Kate Kennedy looked weary.

“The last time I heard you say that,” she said dreamily, “was to little Margie Vandewater.”

Young Kemp nodded.

“Margie is about seven,” he told Marjorie. “I tried it on her.”

“Margie is nothing of the sort. She’s seventeen, and you all but turned the poor child’s head. Of course if she had been a few months older she’d have seen through you.” Kate spoke to Marjorie. “His technique is always the same,” she explained, glancing at her wrist-watch. “It’s now half-past eight o’clock. By nine he will mention that he deeply feels the need of a sweet girl’s uplifting influence. By half-past nine he will tell you the story of his life and point out his perilous state. At ten this evening, if I let you stay up, which I shall not do,” she added firmly, “he will declare that there was never a girl like you since the world began, and at ten-fifteen he will ask you to marry him. Don’t do it.”

Kemp sighed.

“She cramps my style awfully,” he murmured.

“You should be capable of more variety,” Marjorie suggested. “Tell me about your father.”

“Oh, there isn’t much to say about Dad to-night. He’s a stiff-necked, stingy, irritable, intolerant, narrow-minded, bone-headed old curmudgeon, who thinks that because I’m his son he can jerk the leash every minute. He’s got his collar on me, and he drags me after him wherever he goes, so of course I bite his heels as often as I can.”

“Horace is devoted to his father,” Miss Kennedy interpolated.

“Of course I am. But that doesn’t prevent me from seeing that as a parent he dates back to the stone age. He’s as unenlightened as a Hottentot and as stubborn as a mule and as fanatical as an old-fashioned hell-fire Presbyterian. I’ll bring him up to the present century at least before I get through with him, but I know he’ll dig in his heels and set back his ears and kick every minute of the way.”

“You might not get that impression, but they’re really very congenial,” Kate mentioned as an aside.

“Congenial nothing!” young Horace rudely contradicted. “You think we’re congenial because I take him out to the country club every Saturday and wipe up the links with him. I’ve got to. Great Scott! if he could beat me at golf, he and I couldn’t live in the same world.”

“Who plays billiards with him every night?”

“I do,” yelled Horace, speaking so resentfully that several interested persons turned around in their seats to look at him, “and for exactly the same reason. He rather fancied himself at billiards, so I had to take the conceit out

of him. Besides, I'm trying to build up his moral character by telling him between shots what I think of him. That reaches him in two ways. It makes him so mad he can't see straight, so he can't play, and it chastens his spirit."

"Who was at his bedside twenty-four hours a day when he had pneumonia?" Kate asked ironically.

"Well, could I let him meet his God the kind of a man he is?" demanded the dutiful son and heir of Horace Kemp, senior. "What sort of a show would he have, with his record, if he died? And who would take any interest in him in eternity, with me busy playing harps? I pointed all that out to him ___"

"Horace, you didn't!"

"You bet your life I did! He saw the point, too, and got well, the old hide-hound, thick-skinned piker!"

"How old is your father?" Marjorie asked the question with visions of an octogenarian feebly repulsing the assaults of this undutiful offspring.

"Fifty-two. Old enough to have learned something, as I tell him seven times a week."

Marjorie looked at him suddenly, solemn-eyed.

"Really, I don't see how you can talk this way about your father," she murmured.

"You will when you hear Dad talk about me," young Kemp predicted. He turned to Miss Kennedy. "Could he or could he not beat me hands down, even if he was gagged?"

"I think he could," Miss Kennedy conceded. Kemp junior descended into sudden gloom.

"I'm looking up new words all the time," he confessed. "I spend hours over dictionaries, but it's no good. He doesn't know the meaning of the worst ones, and, anyway, I'm not in his class. You see," he ended with a heavy sigh, "he had an immense vocabulary to begin with, that he has tried out on his business associates, and now he's made up a lot of words and phrases of his own. He's unique," he ended with a sigh. "Last week, on the golf-links, just before he kicked me to Chicago, he told me I was a worm-livered, waddle-legged, duck-toed, camel-backed protoplasm that fancied itself alive because it could move enough to hit a hunk of rubber over a few feet of turf. That was after I'd beaten him. Of course this started me off, and the next thing I knew half the players on the links had formed a ring around

us and were cheering us on, with bets on the side. So we stopped and said the rest when we got home. And then I went to Chicago.” He stopped to chuckle. “I guess I found a few vulnerable spots in the old dinosaur!”

“All this would sound horrible,” Kate Kennedy placidly commented, “if one didn’t know how much they really care for each other.”

The sensibilities of her eccentric friend were outraged by the tribute.

“What d’ye mean, care for each other?” he snapped. “I’m making a lifework of developing one decent impulse in him before he dies; and I’ll tell the world it’s a sporting proposition, with every odd against me.”

The frank conversation about his parent seemed to have left a weight on young Kemp’s buoyant spirit. He rose.

“Well, I’ll toddle back and have a smoke. Kate has blocked all my moves, or you and I would be awfully well acquainted by this time,” he told Marjorie. “However, she’s a dull companion sometimes, and if you feel the need of sprightly and uplifting conversation, as I rather fancy you will by morning, you’d better let me join you at breakfast.”

CHAPTER IV

KEMP MAKES AN OFFER

“HORACE KEMP is thoroughly spoiled,” Kate explained when the young man had vanished through the car’s rear door. “But there’s a good deal to be said for him,” she went on thoughtfully. “His father *is* an old curmudgeon, and I fancy Horace discovered early in the game that the only way to get on with him was to give him his own medicine. That, of course, alternately enchants and infuriates his parent, and the pair live a cat-and-dog existence in their big, lonely old house up in Westchester. Horace has rooms in New York, too, but his father doesn’t let him use them much. I suppose the old fellow is lonely. Horace is the only child, you see, and his mother died when he was ten. He had a sister, Susie, two years older than himself, who was my chum at school, and I used to spend my vacations with her. That’s how I met them. She died when she was sixteen.”

“They’re probably perfectly happy,” Marjorie suggested, her thoughts on the relations of father and son.

“Oh, no, they’re not! Horace is really extremely clever, and, though he hasn’t been out of college two years, he has made himself invaluable in his father’s business. That’s why he dares to take such liberties with Mr. Kemp, who is really a very cold and sardonic proposition. When Horace brings off a coup, as he does now and then, his father is so proud of him he almost bursts, and so jealous of him he simply can’t be fair to the boy. I suppose it’s easy enough to understand,” she elucidated. “The older man wants to continue to be indispensable to the business, and he won’t be very much longer if Horace develops as fast as he’s doing.”

“You seem to know all about them.”

“Oh, yes, I’ve kept in touch with them since I left college,” Kate said indifferently. Marjorie lost sight of the Kemps in her interest in this new discovery.

“Then you’re a college woman, too?” she asked.

“Yes.”

The word was almost curt, and was certainly an invitation to change the subject; but Marjorie, usually very much alive to these social subtleties, was

almost too intent on the new topic to heed it. Even so, it held her for an instant.

“I’m Smith,” she said at last.

“I know.” The other’s tone was absent.

“Do you? How do you know?”

Miss Kennedy looked almost startled, then pulled herself back to the moment after what had evidently been a mental excursion.

“Why . . . didn’t you tell me?”

“I don’t think so. I don’t remember that I did.”

Kate Kennedy picked up a book. She did not yawn, but there was a sudden setting of her firm jaws that suggested she would have liked to.

“Did you find anything among those books to interest you?” she asked carelessly, and opened her own volume without waiting for an answer.

Marjorie gazed out at the flying landscape, feeling young and snubbed. Then she smiled, recalling her new acquaintance. She was glad he was on the train. He should be rather amusing. Her mood sobered, and her thoughts swung back to the tragedy of the first journey. She resolutely detached them and fastened them on something more pleasant. Thus far she had met two men, if one could consider Horace a man, and though she had avowedly come out into the world in search of the right man, neither, up to now, had recalled to her that quest. Tilden, of course, was very much a man, though possibly a weak one, but he had seen her not as an individual but merely as a patient; and to her, thus far at least, he had been merely an efficient and sympathetic physician. Moreover, she had reason to believe that he was deeply interested in Miss Kennedy. As to young Kemp, of course no one could take him seriously, since he was so unable to take himself that way. Yet she felt for him an abysmal understanding.

He was almost as much alone in the world as she was, for she did not quite accept Kate’s theory of utter devotion between two such incessant wranglers as he and his father appeared to be. Possibly it was her own loneliness that made her fancy she discovered, under his surface lightness, an element of depression. Certainly there wasn’t much youthful illusion about Horace, and no one but an infant like the Vandewater child would take his love-making seriously. Nevertheless she liked the young man. Most certainly they would ask him to join them at breakfast.

Horace, however, anticipated this hospitable intention by an invitation of his own. At eight o'clock the next morning he appeared beside them, confident and beaming.

"Mr. Horace Kemp presents his compliments," he said formally, "and cordially invites Miss Kennedy and Miss Brown to breakfast with him in the dining-car. At the same time he reluctantly warns his guests that they will get a particularly vile meal, cooked with a can-opener. But we need nourishment, so let's eat and see what happens."

Kate rose without alacrity.

"Do you mind having this infant with us?" she asked Marjorie.

"I'm not going to be with you," the infant corrected her. "You're going to be with me. You wouldn't think, would you," he added thoughtfully, "that dear Aunt Kate rocked me to sleep in my innocent childhood?"

Miss Kennedy, who was moving along the aisle toward the dining-car, apparently untroubled by the rocking motion of the train, stopped and turned upon him an outraged face. No woman, however well poised, can endure this sort of thing.

"There's exactly two years between us," she said. "And I never rocked you to sleep in my life."

"Well, then, why didn't you?" Young Horace winked at Marjorie. "If you didn't, why didn't you?" he repeated in an injured tone. "That's what I want to know." But there was a limit to the rise he could get out of Miss Kennedy, who had now regained her poise and was continuing her journey to the dining-car.

"He was a singularly unpleasant young cub of ten," she remarked, as the three took their places at a table, "when I began to go to Mr. Kemp's with Susie, more than twelve years ago. He used to put garter-snakes and angleworms around on the chairs, and then pretend to be hurt because we didn't like his 'little friends.' We were helpless, so we let him bully us and frighten us—"

"Oh, come now, call it a draw." Kemp's dark young face was red. "Never have a duel with her," he warned Marjorie. "She'll get the better of you. She always knocked me out then, and she does it still."

Miss Kennedy gave him a quick glance. So did Marjorie. The latter had an impression, fleeting but strong, that this was some sort of warning. Of course that idea was absurd. Nevertheless, she was increasingly sure that

these two did not really like each other as much as they pretended to. However, there was reassurance in Horace's care-free look and in the deference with which he seated them at the table. With Marjorie his manner was gay and companionable. Toward Kate he now adopted an air of deep respect, as due from youth to age, and particularly irritating in this instance, as Marjorie saw from Miss Kennedy's heightened color.

"What are you going to do in New York?" he suddenly demanded. "Have a good time? If you are, I'd love to help you!"

"Thanks. I'm going to look around a bit. Then perhaps I'll find a job and give some one the inestimable value of my services."

"Really? You mean it?" He stared at her.

"Yes, really. Why not? Is it so surprising?"

"In you it is. You look like one of those lilies of the field we read about. However, I'll take up your case later."

He gave his attention to the menu, and turned a grieved eye on the waiter.

"Is this all you've got? No real food?"

"Dat's all real food, suh," the man earnestly testified. "Dat's all very good food."

"It is, eh? It would jolly well serve you right if you had to eat it, but I suppose they let you off." The pessimist gave his order and the man departed.

"Now about that job," Horace went on more cheerfully. "What can you do? Or, rather," he added politely, "what do you think you can do?"

"Nothing."

He beamed at her.

"Fine. You're going to be another jewel in the world's crown. But what would you like to do if you could do anything?"

Marjorie reflected. "Of course what I'd *prefer*," she testified, following his lead, "would be a high-salaried executive post of some kind, where I could show initiative and originality in directing a large staff who would do all the work while I did the thinking."

He nodded.

“A less original aspiration than I had hoped for,” he commented. “How would you like to be Dad’s home secretary instead?”

Kate Kennedy frowned.

“Horace, please try not to be any sillier than you have to be,” she urged, rather tartly.

“Oh, but I’m not silly. I’m talking business.” He fixed serious blue eyes on Marjorie’s doubting face.

“My father, like most captains of industry,” he went on, “has no system whatever and never has time for all his letters at the office. So he’s always hauling his overworked secretary out to the house for extra jobs. She is mighty sick of it, and I don’t wonder. She has been with him twenty years and is not so young as she was. So last week, just before I left, she read the riot act and he promised to find some one else to do his home work. Of course he won’t do it, but she may have attended to the matter herself. If she hasn’t, I will, and you can have the job.”

“All this is simply idiotic!”

The voice was Miss Kennedy’s, but its golden notes were gone. It was so hard that Marjorie looked at her in surprise. As if the glance had pulled her together, Kate went on in a different tone.

“If you want work, Miss Brown,” she said with a smile, “I’ll promise to find some for you—something interesting and worth while.”

“What I’m offering is interesting and worth while—that is, if it’s still open. But it will be,” Horace added buoyantly. “If it isn’t I’ll simply fire the new incumbent and create a vacancy.” He grinned ingratiatingly.

Marjorie shook her head.

“I couldn’t be a secretary. I don’t know shorthand or typewriting.”

“Father doesn’t dictate fast enough for a stenographer. He hasn’t the brains to think that fast,” Horace lightly protested. “And you can get all the secrets out of a typewriter in two days.”

“Of course you’re not taking this seriously.” Kate was speaking to Marjorie.

“Of course not.” But Marjorie was interested.

“You’ll be making the mistake of your life if you don’t take it seriously. And think how we can uplift Father together! Doesn’t that inspire you?”

“I don’t think Bachelor’s Hall would appeal to Miss Brown,” Kate contributed.

Horace shook his head at her.

“Aunty, aunty!” His vivid blue eyes had narrowed. “You know we have the most virtuous and impressive housekeeper in Westchester County, Mrs. Caroline Ward, widow of a general, who speaks exclusively in contralto. And if the house isn’t respectable for a fair young maiden, why were you visiting us for a month last August?”

Again Marjorie had a sense that these two were fencing, and fencing, moreover, without foils. But now Miss Kennedy suddenly threw down her weapon.

“It’s absurd to take you seriously, Horace,” she laughed, “and I think Miss Brown has already discovered that.”

The young man nodded.

“So long as she takes me, I don’t care how she does it. We’ll let aunty change the subject now, since she’s determined to do it,” he told Marjorie, “but we’ll return to it anon. Consider your future assured, for any time you get tired writing Father’s letters you can marry me.”

Miss Kennedy glanced at her watch.

“This is something of a record,” she said. “Counting last night, he hasn’t yet been in your society a full hour.”

The waiter set before them a dish to which he optimistically referred as kidneys and bacon, and young Kemp immediately and passionately called his attention to his mistake. Then, as if conscious that he had not been doing his full duty as a host, the young man began to describe his recent Chicago experiences. He had put over a deal that would be fine for the business but that would make Father simply furious, and he described it with a combination of boyish enthusiasm and cool business acumen that impressed Marjorie and made Kate Kennedy look thoughtful.

“There’s going to be a joyous reunion in your house to-night,” Kate ironically suggested.

“You bet there is. And especially when Father learns that we’re going to have a little fairy there.”

Marjorie frowned. Young Kemp was entirely too casual in his manner, and he took too much for granted.

“I shall be with Miss Kennedy a few days,” she said, “and while I’m there I’ll consider the offers that pour in on me. Of course I know there will be competition, so I mustn’t tie myself up too soon.”

She caught the quick look the young man threw at her companion and the glint in the eyes that met it, and she dropped her own eyes with a sense that she was seeing too much. The weapons of these odd fencers hadn’t really been thrown down at all. They had simply been at rest for a moment.

CHAPTER V

MISS BROWN WONDERS

THAT night, in New York's Grand Central station, Horace Kemp junior gave Marjorie another glimpse of unsuspected qualities. With sudden seriousness, and quite unmindful of Kate Kennedy's conspicuous lack of appreciation of his efforts, he engaged a porter, gave him the hand-luggage of the little party, accompanied the ladies to a taxicab, and then, to the open surprise of Miss Kennedy, resolutely climbed into the cab after them. It was all done efficiently, but with an air, for young Kemp was the type of man who moved as if he were at the head of a procession.

"Of course I've got to see you safely to your door," he now remarked, as he tipped the porter and returned to the cabman. "Where's your present figure, Kate? You're on the wing so often that I'm never quite sure."

Miss Kennedy mentioned a Gramercy Park address, and he repeated it to the cabman as if that functionary were hard of hearing. During the drive down Fourth Avenue he was so thoughtful as to be almost absent-minded, but he returned to a consciousness of his companions' existence when the taxicab stopped before a house fronting the park, and hastened to make himself helpful in the matter of the luggage. Miss Kennedy bade him a good night that was almost too emphatic, but, having returned this with equal emphasis, the escort still lingered.

"Mayn't I come up and see the new quarters?" he asked, pathetically.

"Dear boy, you certainly may not! We're tired."

"All right. But listen, Miss Brown. This is important. I'm in earnest about that job, and I want my father to meet you. Will you lunch with Dad and me at the Princeton Club at one to-morrow? Aunty too, of course," he added deferentially, turning to Kate. Marjorie was conscious that Kate was looking at her, but she refused to meet the steady gray eyes.

"Thanks, I'll be glad to," she said cordially, "if Miss Kennedy has no other plans."

"She hasn't," Horace assured her. "One of the many fine things about Kate is that she always changes her plans when better ones come up,"—and again Marjorie seemed to see the flash of steel.

“Of course I’ll come,” Kate indifferently agreed. “It will be very nice for Miss Brown to meet your Father, though I don’t think she’ll care to be his secretary.”

“You’ll get some real food, too,” Horace assured Miss Brown. “Kate will probably give you a biscuit to-night and an egg for breakfast. I know something about her light housekeeping. But bear up; you shall have a wild duck with currant jelly, at the club.”

Marjorie followed her hostess into a rather dim hall, lighted by a single electric bulb, and to an elevator run by a buttoned boy who was half asleep. Leaving the elevator at the third floor, they traversed another dim hall, and reached a door which Miss Kennedy unlocked with a latch-key. The door opened upon a dark space that evidently had been unaired for some time. Kate switched on a light in a small inner hall, and preceded Marjorie into a room whose two windows she promptly threw open.

“Mrs. Rogers, the housekeeper, was supposed to air these rooms while I was gone,” she explained, “but that detail has escaped her memory.”

She switched on more lights, two this time, and Marjorie found herself in the living-room previously described as shabby and facing the park. On the whole, she approved of it. It was a large room, taking up fully half the space of the building’s third floor. (Later she discovered that the remaining space held a microscopic kitchen and two small bedrooms with an up-to-date bath-room between them. Each of the bedrooms had a closet, and there was another closet in the private hall.) On the theory that the living-room was the one which best expressed its occupant, Marjorie took in its details with growing interest. It held a combined effect of comfort and good taste, both gained from a masculine rather than a feminine point of view. There was a noticeable absence of clutter. The large rug was a fine Oriental, and the few pictures on the wall were excellent. The big davenport, heavy wing chairs, and large library table showed signs of long use but were of admirable design. A brick fireplace held waiting logs on its fender. Bookshelves filled two sides of the room, there were reading-lamps beside the table and the davenport, and smaller tables—one at the davenport’s head—supported cigarette-boxes, matches and ash-trays. Apparently Miss Kennedy smoked. Indeed, she now promptly demonstrated that she did, tossing off her hat and coat and going at once to one of the boxes, which she opened with an expression that bade hope wait.

“I wonder if Johnny has left me any,” she murmured. “Unfortunately, he approves of my brand. Yes, there are actually half a dozen! Drop your things

anywhere and sit down for a moment," she invited. "I won't urge you to stay up long, for of course you ought to be in bed. But we'll have some sandwiches and ginger-ale. That train dinner was worse than nothing."

As she spoke she rang and ordered the refreshments. "You smoke, don't you?"

"Not often, and not just now, if you don't mind."

"I'll light the fire, anyway. It will give you a better impression of the room."

"The room is delightful. I like it immensely."

"It isn't mine," Kate again confessed as she pushed a wing chair forward for her guest, and knelt to light the fire expertly. "I've only had it since the first of September. It belongs to a woman editor who has gone abroad and sublet it to me for six months. As Horace remarked, I'm on the wing much of the time, but most of my friends have quarters and there's usually some place I can drop into." She lit a cigarette as she spoke, pulled a second chair to the fire beside Marjorie's, and drew a long inhalation of smoke.

"This *is* good!" she confessed. "Naturally I didn't want to startle our new friends by smoking at the hospital, but I must say I missed my cigarettes. Won't you change your mind and have one?"

"Not to-night, thanks. I'm going to bed directly."

Marjorie was charmed by Miss Kennedy in this mood. She was always interesting, but to-night she was the mellow and human self of their first days, as if warmed by the fact of her hospitality. She seemed, too, more relaxed and casual as she leaned back in the big chair, hands clasped above her head, her cigarette held loosely between her lips. The room's atmosphere was definitely relaxing and comforting, for a big fire was now roaring up the chimney. It seemed rather foolish to start it so late, but probably Miss Kennedy was a night-owl, who would sit and smoke for an hour or more after her guest had gone to bed. The sandwiches and ginger-ale came and they ate and drank in a restful and congenial silence.

Suddenly the hostess spoke.

"I want to give you a pointer about my young friend Horace."

"Yes?" Marjorie waited expectantly. Her liking for the care-free heir of Horace Kemp had increased with every hour they spent together.

“You will remember that when he began to talk about his father as he did—as he always does—I explained that the two were really devoted and that Horace’s talk didn’t mean anything?”

“Yes.”

“I didn’t want you to do the boy an injustice, for I’ve known him since he was ten and I’m fond of him, though of course he gets on my nerves at times. He’s mischievous, and so cock-sure that it’s annoying, especially as he’s usually right. I’ve told you before, he’s amazingly clever, much more so than he seems to be.”

“Yes, I realized that.”

Marjorie wondered what all this was leading up to, and learned in the other’s next sentence:

“But he has the instability that goes with such cleverness, and he’s not the sort one can tie up to. You felt that, didn’t you?”

“I don’t think I went as far as that, in my impressions of him. I thought him amusing and interesting, and by turns very young and rather surprisingly old.”

Kate nodded.

“He’s all those things, but he’s erratic, too. So I hope you’re not considering that mad project of his to get you out to their country place as secretary to his father. Now that I’ve mentioned their good qualities, I can touch on the rest.”

Marjorie reflected that Miss Kennedy had already touched on a few of the rest, but she said nothing.

“They’re an impossible pair to live with,” her companion added with emphasis, “and you’d be simply wretched if you went to them.”

“I’m not thinking of it seriously. And I haven’t the least idea of burying myself in the country. In fact, I haven’t any serious intention of going to work.”

Marjorie had suddenly remembered that there was really no reason why she should consider the proposition, since association with young Kemp and his father certainly would not take her along the road of what she now recalled as her present purpose. She liked the boy, but her imagination was incapable of a flight that pictured him as her future husband.

“Doctor Tilden advised me to take things very easily for a time, anyway, after the nervous shock of the wreck and Penny’s death, and of course there’s no real reason—” She checked herself and added more lightly, “I dare say my job for the next few months will consist of vaguely looking for a job.”

Kate’s expressive face took on a brighter shade.

“I’m glad you’re going at it deliberately,” she commented.

“But I want to meet people,” Marjorie went on; “all kinds of people. And I suppose it’s permissible to eat the luncheon even if I have no intention of taking the work?”

“Of course it is.”

Kate lit a fresh cigarette. There was no question that she was relieved. She smiled at her guest, and her eyes took on a sudden warmth.

“I’m not in a position to advise you about anything,” she continued, “unless you ask me for advice; and naturally,—after what you told us in the hospital,—it was hard for me to understand why you even considered working.”

“I considered a lot of things,” Marjorie murmured, “but I realized it wouldn’t be easy to find any work. I don’t know a thing.” She grimaced as she spoke, wondering what some of her classmates would have thought of this admission.

“That wouldn’t handicap you much. Most of your competitors would be in the same condition.” Kate Kennedy seemed as pessimistic about the labor situation as young Kemp.

Marjorie rose.

“Good night, then. I’ll trot off to bed if you’ll be good enough to show me my room.”

Kate led her into a tiny room with a single bed, a chair, a dressing-table, a bureau, and faded chintz curtains, flashed on the light, deftly turned down the bedclothes, threw open the door of the communicating bath-room, and turned back to her with a gay little nod. She certainly was a superbly efficient creature. Not a movement had been lost.

“Lock the opposite door when you use the bath-room,” she now suggested, “or I may plunge in on you. And I’ll lock yours when I’m using

it. You'll have your breakfast in bed at eight, if that will suit you. Good night and pleasant dreams."

Marjorie crossed the room to her as she now stood at the outer door, with one hand on the knob. Impulsively, she caught the disengaged hand.

"You're most awfully good to me," she said, "and I don't know how to thank you. It would have been rather horrible to come on alone and go to some big hotel—"

She stopped. The hand she held had grasped hers warmly, then dropped it almost with the effect of a recoil. The look on the other's face was odd, too—a suddenly shut-in expression as if the soul's blinds had been drawn. The next instant she told herself she had imagined all this.

"I'm glad to have you here." Her hostess, towering three inches above her, looked down at her from this superior height with her quizzical smile, and again the visitor felt very young and inexperienced.

"She probably thinks I'm a sentimental idiot," Marjorie reflected, "the kind that expects to be tucked into bed with a kiss. Well, she'll get over that notion when she knows me better."

She flushed with annoyance at the thought, and at the memory of her impulsive gesture, and the annoyance was followed by a feeling of self-surprise. It really hadn't been like her to be even so slightly emotional, but there was something about Miss Kennedy that won not only her liking but a basic, instinctive trust that rose up to meet and down any passing doubts or questions. No doubt it was explained by those first days of utter dependence, when this stranger's face and voice had been the sole realities around her.

She made her preparations for the night thoughtfully, mind and memory busy. She knew that from a worldly point of view she was taking a chance in picking up this stranger so casually, and in coming to her home. What she should have done, perhaps, after those first days of great kindness on Miss Kennedy's part, was to separate from her appreciatively and then make it a point to see that, in one way or another, the debt of her obligation was wiped out. There were always ways of doing such things. Nevertheless she was glad she had not followed this course. Beneath her incessant speculations about the new companion, despite her occasional uneasiness, rested the solid stratum of confidence Marjorie could neither ignore nor explain.

The claim of her hostess that Gramercy Park was very quiet was borne out by the atmosphere. Even after she was in bed, under the serene gaze of a cluster of stars looking in at her through the parted chintz curtains, Marjorie

heard no sound but the occasional low hoot of an auto horn, or the soft whirl of the elevator's cables. Sleep stole toward her, enveloped her in relaxation as in a wadded garment, touched her eyelids.

How long she slept she did not know. It might have been half an hour, an hour or several hours. Through the window still shone the dim light of the stars, and the transom over the door leading into the living-room revealed the same oblong of light it had framed when she turned off her electric bulbs and went to sleep. This meant that the lights were still on in the living-room, and, probably, that Kate Kennedy was still there. For a moment the guest blinked drowsily into the semi-darkness, wondering what had awakened her. Then she stiffened into surprised attention. She was hearing voices, very quiet voices, carrying on a sustained and low-toned conversation. She frowned reflectingly. Possibly it was the housekeeper, drawn by the living-room light and making a late call on Miss Kennedy to explain why she had not put the rooms in readiness for the travelers. But no, the new voice was not a woman's voice but a man's, deep-toned and authoritative, and rising at moments as if under special earnestness or feeling. The other voice, of course, was Miss Kennedy's; Marjorie could never have mistaken that voice.

She listened intently, confused, and a trifle uneasy, but she could not catch a word. On an impulse she switched on the reading-light, and finding her wrist-watch on the tiny table beside her pillow, looked at it incredulously. Twenty minutes past one! She had been in bed before midnight, so she must have slept more than an hour.

Surprise filled her, an incredulous bewilderment. Of course there must be, would be, some perfectly good explanation of this presence of a man in the home of a young woman at one o'clock in the morning. If there had been anything sinister about the interview, the pair would undoubtedly have taken more pains to avoid being heard. Marjorie told herself this, but she was glad to remember that she had locked both the doors leading into her room—the bath-room door and the one opening on the living-room. No one could get in without breaking down those doors. . . .

She pulled back the bolting steeds of her imagination. Now, she sternly told herself, she was being silly. Who would want to get in? No one, surely. She was simply recalling a lot of stuff she had read and talked about at college. The speakers were really being careful not to disturb her. The voices were very low—so low, indeed, that if she had not been an extremely light sleeper with an unusually acute sense of hearing, she would not have caught them at all.

Suddenly they ceased, and she sat up in bed. For a moment it seemed more unpleasant to have them stop than to have them go on. Then there were footsteps, followed by the sound of an opening door—the door, obviously, opening on the outer hall. For a moment the quiet voices spoke to each other on the threshold of this door. Next she heard footsteps going along the hall, firm, decisive footsteps, making no effort to be stealthy, and the closing of the door again, the click of a lock, and the retreat of lighter footsteps, Miss Kennedy's, no doubt, back to the living-room. A few moments later there were carefully controlled sounds in the bath-room, more footsteps, the sound of running water, and after that darkness and silence again.

Marjorie sighed. She did not like this sort of thing. No doubt it was all right. No doubt it would be explained . . . but . . . she did not like it! Its worst feature, regarded in retrospect, was still to come. It held her thoughts, kept them swinging round in futile circles, forbade sleep. She could not risk another such experience. She would find new quarters to-morrow, in some quiet hotel, and immediately move into them. Incidentally, of course, she would pay Miss Kennedy the largest salary she could persuade her to accept for her services, and she would make her a handsome present in addition, something of a nature she could not refuse, as a lasting souvenir of the tragic experience they had undergone together.

But this decision, instead of calming her and leading to resumed slumber, brought all sorts of disconcerting reflections in its trail. For one thing, she did not wish to cut herself off from her new friend. The thought of facing the world alone was almost appalling. Moreover, there was in the situation an element of novelty and adventure that greatly intrigued this girl of conservative past. She had wanted new experiences, unusual ones, and thus far she was certainly having them. On the other hand, of course, she had no idea of running unnecessary risks or of putting herself into situations which might hold unpleasant elements. Miss Brown's life, like that of Miss Marjorie Blake, must always be able to bear close inspection. She must not carry into her venture either evil or the appearance of evil; so of course she must be sensible and get out of here to-morrow. Kate Kennedy was all right,—her conviction of that remained unwavering,—but by her own confession she was a Bohemian, a wanderer on the face of the earth, and evidently highly unconventional.

Dawn appeared remotely, then touched the window-panes with tentative finger-tips. Close behind it the November sun flung out slender shafts of

light. The objects in the little room, already familiar, loomed out of the gloom as if to reassure the new-comer by their homely simplicity.

On the reading-table was a copy of St. Teresa's "Chemin de Perfection," especially bound, hand-tooled, and showing much use. Marjorie smiled at it dreamily. She had been introduced to Saint Teresa by William James, and "The Way of Perfection" was one of her favorite books. It was rather wonderful to find it here. Instinctively her hand reached out for it. She would read a little and thus quiet her troubled spirit. But as if the mere sight of the familiar volume had brought sufficient reassurance, the hand dropped back. She pulled the bedclothing closer around her, and, bunching her pillow under her cheek, closed her eyes and again drifted off into slumber.

CHAPTER VI

KATE'S BROTHER BOB

SHE awoke with a high heart and with the impression that some inspired Mennonite was vocally saluting the dawn. The singer, however, was merely Kate Kennedy, easing her labor of taking the breakfast from the buttoned boy by throwing in a few bars of *Frederick's* aria from "Mignon." Marjorie listened with dreamy satisfaction, nestling deeper into her pillow and deliberately prolonging the comfort of the moment. A little later, in response to an imperative tap, she sleepily crossed the room, and, throwing back the bolt, opened the bedroom door. Miss Kennedy, clear-eyed, charmingly dressed in a fresh lavender house-gown, her general effect that of one who has been playing ping-pong with the morning stars, stood on the threshold, balancing a tray.

"Good morning. I thought *Frederick* would drag you from your slumbers," she observed. "He's sure to wake any one, when assisted by me."

"I didn't know you sang."

"I don't. You'll realize that when you're awake." Kate carried the tray into the room and stood expectantly at the bedside. "Ready for breakfast?"

"Not till I've had a cold plunge."

"Make it snappy, then," her hostess cheerfully advised. "In exactly two minutes the bloom will be off this meal. And there's no bloom on it to spare," she added with a care-free gurgle. The charm of Miss Kennedy, when under her own fig-tree, Marjorie reflected, was equaled only by the charm of Miss Kennedy when ministering to the half-conscious victim of a wreck.

When the guest was again among her pillows, with the tray balanced on her knees, her hostess sat down on the bed and braced her back against its foot-board, evidently in readiness for an informal chat.

"Did we wake you last night with our talk?" she asked as a beginning.

Up till that instant Marjorie had been conscious of an under pull of disquiet not in harmony with her general sense of well-being. Now, recalling

its source, her spirits sky-rocketed in an uprush of relief. The episode was to be explained, then, as of course she had known it would be.

“I heard it,” she admitted, “but I went to sleep again.”

“It was awfully inconsiderate of Bob,” Kate apologized. “I told him so, but men are like that. He kept forgetting any one else was in the apartment, and raising his voice every time he got interested or impressive. Bob is interested oftener than he’s impressive, but he was both last night.”

Marjorie wondered who “Bob” was. It seemed clear that she had only to wait to find out.

“He was feeling abused about the wreck, among other things,” Kate went on, “and wouldn’t believe till he really saw me that I escaped without even minor injuries. I think he expected to see me in bandages. Is the coffee all right?” she broke off to ask.

“It’s the best I’ve ever drunk.”

“I made it,” Kate said, explaining this superiority. “Where was I? Oh, yes, I was telling you about my brother Bob. Of course I had telegraphed him after the wreck that I was all right,” she interrupted herself to say. “But I wouldn’t let him come out to Tanville, as he wanted to do, and I didn’t telegraph for him to meet us, so he was sure I was heroically concealing some sufferings from him. When he saw for himself that I was quite all right, he went through the inevitable brotherly reaction and was annoyed because he had been worried. And he took that out on me instead of rejoicing over our reunion.”

She poured forth this information with her usual air of detachment from her subject, and Marjorie took it in with the first breakfast she had enjoyed for a week.

“My brother isn’t married, either,” Kate continued more slowly, clasping her hands behind her head, in what was clearly her pet attitude, “and we’re awfully dependent on each other. But he has a lot of grievances against me just now. Possibly you’ll notice that when you see us together. One is that I won’t settle down in some apartment and ‘make a home’ for him, as he touchingly puts it, and let him support me. He has the feudal notion that no woman of his clan should do anything but wait on him. As it is, he’s always presenting me with checks which he can’t afford. How is the breakfast?” she suddenly demanded.

“The best I’ve ever eaten.” Marjorie buttered another muffin, which, like life and the world that morning, was perfect. Then she realized a lack. “I

wish I had a brother,” she wistfully added.

“They are nice things to have around when they’re reasonable and don’t interfere with one too much,” the other admitted. “I simply adore Bob. There’s nothing brilliant about him, and he doesn’t put his goods in his shop window for the world to admire. But he has a fine mind, and when I’m not furious with him I know he’s the salt of the earth. I wish I had more of his qualities.”

“Do you look alike?”

“Yes. Same features, same hair, same coloring. Even our voices are alike.”

“That’s fortunate for your brother. Is he a college man?”

“Yes.”

Again a door shut softly in Marjorie’s face. She was not to know what college Mr. Robert Kennedy had graced with his presence, but she finished her breakfast undisturbed by the fact. Kate detached herself from the bed and rose, but lingered.

“Miss Walsh and Doctor Tilden both warned me that you must be especially careful for a while,” she reminded her guest. “You’re in for nervous ups and downs. So I’m going to bring you some books and keep you in bed till noon.”

“I feel perfectly able to get up now and take a five-mile walk. I’d like to!”

“I’m glad to hear it; but we’ll play safe, just the same. Suppose you lie still till half-past eleven, anyway. That’s only three hours. Then you’ll have plenty of time to dress comfortably before lunch, and we’ll walk up-town to the Princeton Club.”

“I’d love it. I love being here, too.” Marjorie was beginning to wonder why she was experiencing this new, warming, and vitalizing sense of content. She felt more interested, more cheerful, more alive than she had felt for months. It was almost as if she had forgotten the recent shock and tragedy, or as if they had happened to her very long ago.

“That’s good. But I suppose we can’t keep you long. Doctor Tilden says you thought of going to Europe.” There was warmth in the reply and warmth in Kate’s gray eyes, which rested steadily on her guest’s face. Marjorie put her tray to one side, before her companion could help her, settled back

among her pillows, and yielded to her first impulse to be confidential with her companion.

“I’m not going to Europe,” she confessed. “Penny was going, but I had no intention of going with her. I intend to stay right here in New York. I’ve been simply crazy to get away from the conventional, smug, comfortable life I was living,” she continued. “Perhaps I’ll be glad to get back to it some day, but just now, with everything so new and different, the air seems full of wings.”

Kate nodded, but did not speak. She gave the impression of one waiting for a revelation yet to come, and of not being willing to risk checking it by comments of her own. Incidentally she returned to her seat on the foot of the bed.

“I’m not an heiress, you know.” Marjorie decided that it was the right time to bring this in. “Lots of rich people would consider me poor. But I have a good income, enough to soften me and deaden my ambitions if I did nothing for the next year or two but stay home and spend it. I don’t want my new friends here to know anything about that, and I intend to live very simply. For the rest, I’m setting out with two purposes in my mind. They’re both queer—unusual, I mean. One of them I talked over with Penny. The other I’ve never talked over with anyone. Probably I never shall. But it’s the more important of the two, and I want to do something about it right away.”

Kate waited for a moment, till it became clear that Miss Brown had said all she meant to say. Then she smiled her musing smile.

“It’s all rather unusual,” she summed up, “and I suppose it raised the hair of your conservative friends. But I’m not conservative, and I think you’re wise to try anything you want to do. And now I think we understand each other.” She rose again: “What you want first of all is to meet new people and study new phases of life?”

Marjorie nodded. “That’s it. Modest of me, isn’t it?”

“Modest enough. We’ll see what we can do to start you.”

“I don’t want you to have me on your mind.”

“You’re there, and I like to have you there.” Kate hurried on. “Perhaps Bob can help. He’s owner and manager of a small factory that manufactures one of his own inventions, the Kennedy clip. The invention seems a trifle, but it’s making some money for him at last, after years of the discouragements every inventor has. The point I’m coming to is that he knows all kinds of people, and that he and I together can show you a good

many different phases of New York life. Not the society phase, of course. We have no social position whatever," she ended with undiminished cheerfulness.

"I'm not interested in the society phase. And it's awfully good of you to be interested in me. I think I'm very fortunate." Marjorie remembered to ask a question that had come to her during the night. "What is the Kemps' business?"

"They publish school-books. It's a rich, conservative firm that was joggling around in a comfortable circle till Horace got into it. You heard him tell about that big order he got in Chicago—the one he took away from his competitors?"

"Yes."

"Well, he got the order, but his firm hasn't got the books. He told me about it while you were taking your nap. He simply discovered that such a text-book was the need of the moment and that his competitors had it, and he bluffed the order through. Now he's got to find the right author and have the book written and rushed off the presses in time to fill the order. That's the sort of thing that drives his father frantic."

"I should think it might." But Marjorie found herself rather admiring young Kemp.

"By the way—" Kate paused again in her journey to the door—"you won't mind Bob's being with us at luncheon, will you? I telephoned Horace and asked if I might bring him, because I want you to meet him and this seemed a good chance. Horace groaned and said I could," she chuckled. "Horace's father likes Bob, but Bob and Horace are about as congenial as a grizzly bear and a new-born pup would be."

Marjorie felt that this was rather hard on young Horace, but she expressed a cordial wish to meet Mr. Kennedy and that gentleman's sister at last departed from the room. The guest was sorry to see her go. She liked Kate Kennedy even better in this sublet apartment than she had liked her before. She quite surprisingly liked her. Nevertheless, there was a certain relief in the cessation of Miss Kennedy's immediate activities in her behalf. Marjorie appreciated these activities, but they made her feel helpless and dependent, which was not the spirit she chose to carry into her new life.

The walk up Fifth Avenue proved a somewhat chastening experience. Despite the buoyancy of her spirits, the new-comer to New York was not so strong physically as she had thought herself. Toward the end of the walk she

actually had to suggest that they go more slowly, for her companion had set their pace at a good three miles an hour. Another sobering reflection had to do with the matter of clothes. The gown Kate had purchased for her was a well-made one-piece affair of brown, with tan collar, cuffs, and vest, and she had bought her a long coat and a small hat to match it. All the garments were the best the hospital town had to offer, and each had a certain snap—notably the hat with its dull-red quill, a note Kate had emphasized by providing a dull-red necklace to wear with it. Brown kid gloves, brown silk stockings, and brown suede pumps completed the effect, which was entirely appropriate and very much like the general effect of dozens of girls who passed her. Marjorie's clothes had always been distinctive—as distinctive as Miss Kennedy's, who now swung along at her side in a strikingly artistic morning costume topped by a fetching hat.

“I must have some new clothes,” was Marjorie's tribute to her hostess's appearance. “A lot of them,” she absently added.

“Of course. We'll do some shopping after lunch. But why a lot, if you're going to live simply?”

Marjorie saw the point.

“Oh, I don't expect to be a rival of Sheba,” she conceded. “On the other hand, I don't want to be confused with a violet.”

“You won't be. But I should think you'd find two new gowns and hats enough, added to what you've got.”

Marjorie did not wholly like this. Miss Kennedy was assuming rather too much.

“I must have a fur coat, too,” she announced, and wondered why she was taking the trouble to mention the decision. It was five years since she had really consulted any one about her clothes.

“Must you?” Her companion smiled her quizzical smile and Marjorie felt her face grow hot. She resented the increasing sensation of youth and immature judgment the other girl aroused in her, but no doubt it was good for her soul. And of course Kate was quite right about the matter of her wardrobe.

Two masculine figures were hovering near the door of the club's reception-room when the guests arrived, and Horace Kemp junior, looking very eager and happy, at once hastened forward to greet his guests. Back of him loomed a tall man Marjorie assumed to be the elder Kemp, till she saw that the big stranger's strong face was that of a man well under thirty, though

its seriousness added years to his apparent age. Horace presented Kennedy before the latter's sister could do so, and Kennedy, turning a masculine copy of Kate's features to her new friend and employer, gave Marjorie a deep look from a pair of clear gray eyes more serene in expression than Kate's, and added a firm hand-clasp. His smooth auburn hair, like Kate's, ended in a peak in the middle of his forehead, and his smile also was like Kate's, but sweeter. He nodded to his sister, but did not try to interrupt the patter that was pouring from the lips of their host.

"Dad's somewhere in the offing," Horace said, "probably in the dining-room doing his best to mess up my order. Unfortunately, he's a member of this club, too, you see, because he took the precaution to enter it twenty-five years before I was on the earth to blackball him. We'd better go right in. The dining-room is filling up, and I can see by Miss Brown's pallor and exhaustion that she hasn't been fed since I left her last night."

Still talking, he led them to the dining-room, and stopped at a table arranged for five, where a solitary gentleman sat in august aloofness. At their appearance he rose, greeted Kate and her brother with a curt "good morning," and unsmilingly awaited his introduction to Marjorie. The girl reflected that with two such silent guests to carry as Kemp senior and Kennedy this promised to be a rather taxing luncheon.

"Here's Dad, Miss Brown," Horace briskly proclaimed. "He's acting even worse than usual, so don't pay any attention to him. Sit down, everybody. Like the walrus—or was it the oyster?—Dad's got a grief. He'll tell you about it in five or ten minutes. He'll say I dragged him away from an important business conference. What I really did was to make a lot of money for him by getting him out of a hole he was in and couldn't have crawled out of alone. Any one but Dad would have learned by this time not to take part in conferences of any importance without consulting me—but we needn't go into that. I'm just telling you this so you won't let him spoil the lunch more than necessary. Of course his presence makes any social occasion seem like final obsequies in one of the vaults at the Manhattan Funeral Church."

"Don't waste your time listening to that slaverling young parietic," Kemp senior gloomily advised Marjorie as he dug his spoon into a honey-dew melon. "He's got delusions of ability," he went on wearily. "A few years in some institution for congenital idiots might straighten him out, if I could find time to take him there. He tells me you want a job," he added abruptly, fixing on her a pair of tragic blue eyes that must once have been like his son's.

“He’s mistaken. I don’t, really.” Marjorie was rather startled by the rapidity with which the issue had come up. “At least not for a long time,” she added. “I want to look around first, and see something of New York.”

Kemp senior checked his luncheon to glare at her.

“See New York, eh? So you’re like the rest of ’em. I suppose you’ll want bright lights and fox-trots all night, even when you do take a job. Then, after four hours of sleep, you’ll want your employer to pay you for yawning all the next day in his office and forgetting what he expects you to do.”

Marjorie flushed. She had never been spoken to like this.

“No, I can’t say I’d planned it like that,” she said coolly; “and you forget that I’ve just told you I’m not looking for work.”

He ignored the end of the sentence.

“Haven’t planned it like that, eh? How have you planned it?”

Miss Blake of Blakesville seized her opening. She was sorry to do it before an audience, but there seemed no way of avoiding this, as her fellow-guests were giving their entire attention to the dialogue.

“Oh, I’m a bit vague as to details,” she serenely admitted, “but if I ever do go to work I have a general notion of making myself indispensable to some strong, stern Captain of Industry, by keeping track of his engagements and admiring him, reminding him of his wife’s birthday, and selecting his mother’s Christmas presents, and telling him not to forget his rubbers when he goes home at night. The brightest girl in my class is a private secretary to one of your big financiers here, and she tells me that’s all there is to the job.”

Kemp senior frowned and turned the light of his countenance away from her and toward his melon.

“I’d like to know where you picked up such fool notions,” he growled as he viciously dug his spoon into the fruit.

“Aren’t they correct? Lucy really seemed to be opening her heart to me!”

Marjorie began her luncheon with a certain complacency, convinced that any delicate shoots of interest Mr. Kemp senior might have felt in her were now permanently blighted.

“She’s just pulling your leg, Dad,” Kemp junior kindly explained to his parent. “Any one can see in a glance that you’ve no more sense of humor

than an obelisk, but you really ought to laugh sometimes when I wave my napkin across the table as a secret signal that a joke is on.”

Kemp senior appeared to be conscious only of some disturbance of the atmosphere. However, his melon was not ripe, and while he waited for something fit to eat he'd look further into the matter of this young person's qualifications.

“Well, young lady, now that you've had your little joke and we've laughed ourselves sick over it,” he grimly remarked, “suppose you tell me what your idea of work really is—if you've got one.”

“Oh, I've got one,” the young lady cheerfully admitted, “but putting it into words will take some of the dew off it. What I'm really hoping for, of course, as you recognized at once, is to find a position in the remote future with some one who will be cheerfully imposed upon by me while I'm learning my job.”

“In other words, pay you while he's educating you.” Kemp snapped. “Exactly what I've said.”

“That's the usual system in the business world, isn't it?” the new-comer pointed out. “My father always said his people weren't worth much, if anything, during the first six months they worked. Of course, almost any time after six months, I'd expect to take over the business. And in the meantime I'd have to earn a living wage.” She was rather pleased with that last touch. “Living wage” sounded distinctly professional. Even Kemp seemed impressed by it.

“What do you consider a living wage?” he wanted to know.

It was a queer luncheon, and while, in a way, its queerness bore out the purpose that had brought her here, the novice decided that the misunderstanding between them must be definitely set right.

“Oh, enough for a room and board, I suppose. But as I haven't any idea of taking a situation immediately, and as probably I'll never take one,” she went on, addressing the table in general, “I mustn't go on discussing my personal affairs.”

She turned to Kennedy, who sat at her left, and her manner drew him into a tête-a-tête from which the others were shut out.

“I hope you've convinced yourself that your sister is quite all right after the accident,” she began.

For an instant he looked confused and stared at her with the gray eyes that were so like, yet so unlike Kate's. Their expression was so different, indeed, that for an instant his gaze and Marjorie's remained locked. Then Marjorie turned away and Kennedy, suddenly self-conscious, vaguely fingered his water glass.

"Oh, yes, yes, of course," he then said hastily, as one who had hooked up a memory.

"Those who are reported killed ought to stay killed," young Horace warmly contributed. "It's much less unsettling for their families. Not that I'm reproaching you, Kate, I'm merely bringing up a point of etiquette for your future guidance."

"I'll give you a job," Kemp senior remarked, ignoring this interlude.

"Thank you, Mr. Kemp. That's very good of you, and very brave, too. But, as I've said, I'm not looking for a job."

"You don't have to. If you don't like the country, I'll give you something here in my New York offices."

His son started spectacularly.

"Now, what sinister motive," he asked the table, "has Dad got this time? Let's put our heads together and find out. Miss Brown, I'll put my head next to yours. On the one hand—"

"No, thank you, Mr. Kemp."

It was not young Horace's day at all. No one seemed to know he was at the luncheon except the waiter who eventually brought him the check to be signed.

"I'm not fond of this modest pose, and I can't promise to keep it up very long," Marjorie added, somewhat restively. "But while I'm following it I'll tell you frankly that I'd be of no earthly use to you or to any one else. I think I'll take a course in a business college."

This inspiration had just come to her, and she mentioned it triumphantly.

"You'll learn more in my offices in a month than you would in any business college in a year," Kemp senior observed, emphasizing his utterance with a fork which held a bit of duck.

"Especially if I give you a lot of personal attention," his son contributed. "And I will," he added earnestly. "I promise to."

“I don’t know a typewriter from a letter-file, nor a stenographer from an office boy,” Marjorie protested. “I couldn’t tell the ink-wells from the adding machines. Please don’t let’s talk about it any more. It’s all too absurd.”

“I thought you told me this young woman wanted a job, you mush-brained, hee-hawing young donkey,” Kemp senior suddenly yelped. “I thought you dragged me away from my office to give her one.”

His son shook his head at him.

“I dragged you away from your office to keep you out of the poorhouse, and to give the business a few hours to recuperate,” he explained. “Incidentally, I gave you a chance to do a stroke of good business under my observation and direction. But of course you aren’t up to it. Let me show you how it’s done. This young lady did want a job. She does yet. She’s only coy.” He addressed Marjorie: “Would you use a lip-stick and chew gum while you were taking his dictation?” he asked sternly.

“No, but—”

“Would you stop him in the middle of a sentence he fondly thought was important and ask him how to spell conference?”

“No . . . I . . . think not.”

“Would you wear two chains and a lorgnette, and rattle as you wrote?”

“No, but Mr. Kemp—”

“Would you buy him a box of futurist ties at Christmas, and feel hurt because he didn’t wear them?”

“I would not. But if you—”

“Hush, child; one more question, and it’s terribly important. Would you smile and look knowing every time a lady’s voice called him on the telephone?”

“Certainly not. Won’t you let me—”

“Then you’re the secretary he has been searching for all his life. God has sent you to him. The matter is settled. Report to-morrow at nine at twenty Broad Street. Be happy, my children. Now let us eat duck and try to remove the memory of those chops we had on the train last night.”

“Horace,” Kate Kennedy said gently, “if you’ve quite finished, and are ready to let a guest make a remark—”

“Oh, Aunty!”

“I’d like to say that you really mustn’t worry Miss Brown about a position any more. She doesn’t want to talk about it, and she’s not yet up to it. She has had a big shock and a severe injury. Can’t we do as she has asked us to do—change the subject and enjoy our luncheon?”

Her brother spoke suddenly.

“I think Miss Brown has been offered a big opportunity by Mr. Kemp,” he said. “He has made the offer understanding that she is inexperienced,” Kennedy went on, “and he’s quite right in saying that a month in his offices will teach her more than she’d learn in a year at a business college. I don’t think she ought to turn the offer down without realizing what she’s doing.”

Young Horace burst forth again.

“Kennedy,” he said, “I’ve always believed that if I followed you around long enough I’d hear you say something worth while. This moment has rewarded me for years of faith. I salute you. Now muzzle your sister and I’ll muzzle Dad, and we’ll begin to enjoy ourselves. I think well of you, Robert,” he added impressively. “I do indeed.”

“I suppose you’ll be seeing the new plays,” Bob suggested to Marjorie. “Which are you going to see first?”

“I like a good play occasionally,” Kemp senior unexpectedly contributed, when Marjorie had confessed that she didn’t know what was “on.”

“You wouldn’t believe it, but Dad’s almost human at the theater,” Horace confided to his guests. “The audience isn’t annoyed by him at all, unless some one steps on his feet between the acts. Then, of course, there’s a scandal right off and I have to lead him out.”

“I like most of Shakspeare’s plays,” his father went on, having rejected the salad with an expression of cynical suspicion. “And that fellow Hampden is pretty good in ‘Cyrano.’ ”

Apparently they had all forgotten her, and, with burning cheeks and warm gratitude to Kate, Marjorie retired from the lime-light. She had loathed being discussed and analyzed and patronized, yet of course all these people were very kind to concern themselves with a verdant young pilgrim whose sole recommendations were that she was a girl and a stranger.

She was interested in Kennedy and made a closer inspection of him. Yes, he was surprisingly like his sister, and his voice, a rich barytone, was a

masculine reproduction of Kate's lovely contralto. He was also wholly unlike the picture she had unconsciously formed while Kate had talked of him. She had called up then a nervous, rather irascible person, whereas Robert Kennedy's definite notes were strength and reserve. These qualities, in truth, showed in every line of his clean-shaven face. He had none of the ease and un-self-consciousness of young Kemp. He looked like one who had borne responsibilities all his life, beginning in his boyhood, and who, like an athlete in a balancing act, was braced for steadily increasing burdens. He suggested, too, that he could bear these. His figure, though so big and powerful, held no hint of heaviness or clumsiness. He was dressed in brown, which suited his coloring, and it was plain that he had a good tailor. Marjorie's eyes returned to him often, and once or twice their glances flowed together as he looked at her. There was something unusually likable about Kate Kennedy's brother.

The appearance of Kemp senior also was unexpectedly agreeable to the eye. He was in the early afternoon of life, and he obviously kept himself in good physical condition. His hair was gray and made a becoming frame to his fresh, clear complexion. His figure was as slender as his son's, and he held himself as erectly. His flaws, from Marjorie's point of view, were his manners, his tragic blue eyes, and a habitually dour expression, which at times became grimly sardonic. Apparently he and his son had signed a truce on this occasion, for there was between them no more of the rough give-and-take for which they were noted.

Last of all, Marjorie's eyes turned to Kate's face, touched it lightly, ready to swerve, and then clung with quickened interest. Kate's usual, tolerant smile was gone, and her present expression was brooding, almost somber. It was impossible to avoid the inference that something had annoyed her. No one else at the table, however, seemed to observe anything unusual, and Marjorie hastily turned from the revelation, telling herself that she was magnifying a slight impression. Exaggerating trifles appeared to be a habit she was falling into of late; and she added a mental resolution to be on her guard against it.

CHAPTER VII

MARJORIE HAS A VISION

As the little party was separating after luncheon, Kemp senior again turned his tragic blue eyes on Marjorie, whom he had ignored during the latter part of the meal.

“My offer stands open till the first of the year, young woman,” he curtly observed, “while you look around and waste your time. Take it or leave it, but let me know before the end of the holidays which you’re going to do.”

“Thank you. I will.”

Marjorie spoke almost absently, her thoughts on the Kennedys. She was forming the impression that the brother and sister did not always pull together. However, Kate’s face had brightened, and both appeared to be in an amicable mood as Kemp senior made his brusque farewells and hurried away, dragging his reluctant son with him.

“Would you care to walk down-town?”

The suggestion was Kennedy’s, and his sister promptly vetoed it.

“Miss Brown has walked far enough this morning, for a convalescent,” she pointed out. “Besides, we’re going to do some shopping.”

Bob motioned to the driver of a taxicab at the curb.

“All right. I’ll drop you wherever you want to go,” he announced, and entered the cab after them.

Kate gave him the address rather drily. She had recovered her equanimity, but apparently she had not yet wholly restored her brother to her good graces. He grinned widely, and Marjorie’s eyes, at that instant on him as he sat opposite her, were held by the surprising change wrought by the grin. It made him look ten years younger, almost boyish. It held an element of mischievousness and whimsicality she had not expected to find in his mental make-up. Most surprising discovery of all, it lent beauty to his face. Until now it had not occurred to her that he was good-looking. She had been chiefly impressed by the resemblance of his face to Kate’s keen, clever one, and by his evident poise and strength.

“Tired?” he asked her, the grin disappearing as suddenly as it had come. She had yet to learn how rarely it came.

“Not at all.”

“Don’t shop too long. I’ve never heard shopping recommended as a rest cure. And, by the way, would you both care to dine with me and go to the theater to-night?”

Marjorie left the answer to Kate. She might as well do so, for she had already learned that Miss Kennedy was brisk in the uptake of such matters.

“No, thanks, unless Miss Brown cares to. Doctor Tilden’s coming.”

Marjorie looked at the speaker in surprise, and Kate answered her unasked question.

“He telephoned this morning to ask how you had stood the journey,—you know, we had told him what day you planned to start,—so I invited him to dine with us and see for himself.”

“I shall be glad to meet him again.” But Marjorie’s surprise increased, and the next words of Kennedy, following close upon his sister’s, did not lessen the emotion.

“All right,” he said again. “We’ll add him to the party. Shall I call for you at seven? I’ll telephone Tilden to meet us at the Biltmore, unless you’d rather go somewhere else.”

Kate shook her head at him, as one whose patience was a little tried.

“Dear boy,” she said very gently, “I’ve reminded you again and again that though I wasn’t hurt in the accident, Miss Brown was. She can’t keep late hours yet.”

That was that, and Kennedy evidently knew when he was beaten. He said no more until the taxicab stopped at the entrance of the shop Kate had selected and he alighted to help the ladies out. Then, raising his hat, he reëntered the cab, gave an order to the driver, and drove off without a backward glance.

Marjorie followed Kate into the store, and, in a state of mental confusion that was not pleasant, took her place in a crowded elevator. Normally she was neither supersensitive nor superimaginative, and she lacked the exaggerated sense of ego that makes an individual feel herself of unique importance to those around her. But she had received as definite a sense of a duel between Kate Kennedy and her brother as she had got from the

encounter between Kate and young Horace Kemp. Some sort of silent contest seemed going on over her; she was almost convinced of that, absurd as it seemed when she put it to herself. The situation both amazed and intrigued her. The issue, she believed, concerned the offer of a situation in the Kemp offices. Young Horace and Kennedy, allies for once, however uncongenial in the past, wished her to take this position. Kate was determined that she should do nothing of the sort.

All that seemed clear enough. But why? The suggestion that Kate resented interference from others, in matters affecting her relations with her protégée, might have explained the case if a small-natured woman had been concerned. But Kate was not small-natured. No petty jealousy would make her show annoyance. She was not that sort of person. Neither did the next obvious suggestion wholly solve the problem—the suggestion that Miss Kennedy's self-interest was involved. Presumably her brief engagement with the new-comer would end if Marjorie accepted a situation. But that, while of course it might explain the elder girl's attitude, hardly accounted for the resentment of half an hour ago. And yet, on the other hand, perhaps it did. Possibly Miss Kennedy had dreamed dreams of a larger association, of a permanent position—easy, agreeable, and much to her taste—which might develop as a result of their chance encounter.

“Shall we look at the ready-made gowns first?” Kate was leading the way out of the elevator at the fifth floor. “You're a perfect thirty-four, you know, and they have some lovely things you may be able to put on at once and wear, while you're having others made.”

Marjorie acquiesced rather absently. The matter of clothes no longer seemed to her vitally important. Her mind was concerned with another phase of her problem. Granting that Horace and Kennedy were differing with Kate about that position, granting that some odd undercurrent of feeling was around her, why were the two young men opposed to Kate? Was it merely through a good-humored masculine desire to see an attractive girl get started in the right way—Marjorie knew perfectly well that she was attractive and that all three men at the luncheon had found her so—or was it, could it be, an effort to remove her from Kate's influence? And if it was, why, in Heaven's name, would Miss Kennedy's brother lend himself to such an effort? He wouldn't, of course. The idea was absurd, showing to what lengths imagination will carry one. And yet . . . the suspicion dogged her mind. Marjorie considered it while she inspected and tried on gowns, while she selected a gown, while she looked at hats. But at this stage of her shopping Miss Kennedy detached her mind from it with a pregnant question:

“Do you really think you ought to wear an expensive fur coat if you plan to pose as a working-girl?”

The pilgrim to the new world saw the point.

“I suppose not,” she admitted; “but I’ve always had one.”

“I fancy you’ve always had a lot of things you won’t have now,” Kate smilingly reminded her. “And, you see, there’s a chance of criticism and misinterpretation, especially if one is a stranger with no recognized background—”

“Of course. I know. I suppose I can make this coat do. But how shall I manage when I go out in the evenings? I thought if I got a fur coat I could use it as an evening coat as well.”

Kate looked amused.

“You’ll come up against a lot of problems of that sort. If I were you I’d plan a certain course of action and stick to it.”

“I’d hate to go about looking commonplace,” Marjorie confessed, more disturbed than she realized by this unthought-of phase of the experiment.

“You couldn’t do that, no matter what you wore.” It was the first compliment the other had paid her, and Kate offered it with evident sincerity. It helped Marjorie to bring out her next question.

“What do you advise, then?”

“Stick to an elegant simplicity. Have two or three pretty and individual gowns, and wear them all the time. Have one evening gown, with slippers, gloves, and silk stockings to match. Of course if your heart is set on a fur coat, you can get an inexpensive one. I suppose I’m really the only woman in New York who hasn’t one. All the stenographers and manicures and clerks seem to wear them. So, on second thought, I don’t see why a fur coat should wreck your reputation, if it isn’t too affluent-looking.”

Marjorie barely caught the last words. She knew now what her gift to Miss Kennedy was to be.

“What sort of fur coat would you choose if you were buying one?” she asked with quickened interest.

“I’m not,” Kate tersely announced. “But I’ve always liked the squirrel coats.”

“A long, stunning squirrel coat is a nice thing to have.”

Kate raised her eyebrows.

“They’re rather expensive,” she reminded her impetuous young friend, “and they don’t wear very well. You’d do better to get a good Hudson seal. That’s only dyed muskrat, you know. And of course, as you say, if you have a fur coat you won’t need an evening wrap.”

“You think my reputation would be safe if I wore dyed muskrat, but would crumble under a real seal?” Marjorie commented. “That’s intriguing.” She considered the idea thoughtfully. “According to that theory,” she went on, “one ought to be able to detect virtue or its opposite at a glance, in the New York working parade. I suppose a cloth coat with a ratty collar means virtue undefiled. A heavy fur collar and cuffs might indicate that a girl has been about a little. A cheap fur coat would suggest that she was skidding, and at the first glimpse of an expensive fur coat one would lead her to a Big Sister. It’s awfully simple, but it might complicate traffic. And if one weren’t quite sure, could one stop the girl and feel the fur?”

“You’ll see some fur flying if you don’t stop making fun of me!” Kate warned; but she found Marjorie’s new mood interesting. It was becoming clear that the accident had temporarily soft-pedaled the girl, and that to-day life’s foot was pressing less heavily upon her. “Jeer all you like,” Kate added lightly; “but there’s something worth thinking about in what I’ve said.”

“I know, and I’ll think of it,” Marjorie promised. “Now let’s go and look at virginal fur coats.”

Looking at fur coats was interesting. Trying them on was interesting, too, especially trying them on Miss Kennedy. Finding the ideal coat for her, and discovering that she liked it, was most interesting of all. But when the coat had been found, and Miss Kennedy looked so well in it that the saleswoman who attended them was swooning with admiration, the whole plan went to pieces. Pleasantly and appreciatively, but with unmistakable decision, Kate declined the gift. Marjorie argued, even pleaded. She also unconsciously reverted to the personality of Miss Blake of Blakesville, who was not accustomed to having her wishes crossed.

“I shall be frightfully hurt if you don’t take it,” she said coldly. “I’ve been trying to think of the right gift for you ever since I really came back to consciousness, and now that I’ve found it I think you ought to be generous enough to take it from me.”

“It’s more than kind of you. But I couldn’t; I really couldn’t.”

At the look in the girl’s eyes Kate relented.

“If I took that,” she gently explained, “I’d feel that you were paying me for the little I did for you. Can’t you let me give at least one remote imitation of a good Samaritan? You don’t know how rarely I’ve been able to help others. It would be almost a crime if you checked this sporadic impulse.”

She was smiling now, but her eyes were serious. Marjorie gave up the losing battle.

“Have it your way,” she said rather drearily, her spirits drooping: and with the words she registered a firm resolution to accept no more favors from Kate Kennedy. She also resolved to leave the Gramercy Park apartment the next day, ignoring the reminder of an active memory that this was at least the third time in twenty-four hours she had made the same resolution.

The stricken clerk, deprived of a good sale all but completed, did not cry out in pain, but her manner suggested that she’d like to. She revived from the blow only enough to take a languid interest in the dyed muskrat coat next under consideration, and a perceptible constraint hung over the three women during the remainder of their association. It was a pity, for in the first trying on of the squirrel coat there had been an entente of a perfection rarely found in life.

“Tell me the truth,” Marjorie dispiritedly revolved before a long mirror. “In this coat do I look like a Young Person with a Past?”

“No. Only like one with a present and a future. But if I had taken the coat you urged on me, I’d have been forced to pin all my references to it. Isn’t that all you care to do to-day?” Kate added: “If it is, let’s go home and have a big fire and some tea and muffins.”

Marjorie liked the suggestion. She also liked the friendly look in Kate’s gray eyes, and the impulsive touch of Kate’s hand on her arm as they started toward the lift. Plainly, Kate wished to make up to her for the little disappointment about the squirrel coat. But even as they volplaned to the ground floor, in the elevator, she and her companion grew serious, and Miss Kennedy’s next words explained the change.

“I’m glad I put off the doctor till eight,” she said, almost brusquely. “It will give us time to rest before advice begins to flow again. I suppose you’ve noticed that every man who looks at you shows an earnest desire to shape your future, as soon as he learns that you haven’t yet decided what you’re going to do with it.”

“Yes; it’s awfully good of them.”

“But rather trying.” Kate smiled her musing smile. “If there’s anything I loathe, it’s advice.”

“I don’t believe you get much of it.”

“I get it, but I don’t often take it.”

An hour later, over hot buttered muffins and tea, Kate revealed that she, too, was generous in the matter of at least tentative suggestions for her new friend’s future.

“What I’m rather hoping you’ll decide to do,” she began, as they sat facing the fire, toes on the fender and the tea-table cozily between them, “is to stay here with me for a time. Of course that won’t keep you from doing anything else you choose to do,” she hurried on before Marjorie could speak. “But it will give you a hearthstone and a certain amount of companionship—not too much, I hasten to add—when you come home, exhausted by buffeting the winds of adventure.”

“It’s awfully good of you. I really meant to go to-morrow, and I suppose I ought to.” Marjorie thought she was speaking truthfully. An hour ago she had resolved to leave the next day. Now everything seemed different. “Suppose we don’t decide for a few days,” she said at last. “I’ll stay that long, and give you a chance to know me better, and myself a chance to think things out and look about a little.”

“All right.” Kate dropped the subject so abruptly that Marjorie almost heard it fall, and the guest realized that her hostess was disappointed. For some moments the two sat silent, watching the flames leap up the chimney. Again Marjorie was conscious of the deep inner content she could not explain—the content she had felt in this room last night and this morning. With the friendly impulse to tell her companion something of it, and of what this hospitality meant to her in her present loneliness, she turned with a smile, her lips parted for speech. They closed again on the unuttered sentences.

Miss Kennedy had seemingly forgotten her. Crouched forward, elbows on knees, chin in her cupped hands, a cigarette between her lips and somber eyes on the fire, she stared unseeingly at the coals, her lips twisted over her cigarette in a grimace that was an almost grotesque imitation of her usual tolerant smile. It was a distorted grin at life, at herself, perhaps at both, and the sensation it gave the observer was almost as definite as a draft in the room. Under its influence Marjorie drew back into the recesses of the big wing chair, silent and instinctively repelled. For a little longer the tableau

held. Then, with a shrug, Kate sat up, straightened her shoulders as if casting a burden from them,—or was it that she adjusted them to one?—and smiled cordially at her guest.

“I believe I was half asleep,” she said, “and having a waking nightmare. Anyway, we’re both tired, and you look as depressed as I feel. Do you ever take a nap before dinner?”

Marjorie rose as if the words had touched a spring in her.

“I never have, but perhaps I can. Anyway, I’m going to lie down and try. And when I get up I’ll have the excitement of putting on my new evening gown. That ought to exhilarate me.”

She returned the other’s smile, but once across the threshold of her bedroom she felt an unexpected sensation of relief in being alone. She had not liked that expression on the face of her hostess. It was a revelation almost as unpleasant as that of some unsuspected physical deformity would have been. Adding to it the memory of the lowering look the same face had worn for a few moments during the luncheon, she had certainly gained a somewhat startling grasp of potentialities in her new associate. In another they might have meant no more than a difficult and warring temperament, and a lack of social poise. In Kate Kennedy only some cause out of the common should explain the phenomena. And why, notwithstanding them, and notwithstanding her present disturbance over them, did Marjorie still experience that undercurrent of trust in the woman? It was all very confusing. The guest threw herself on her bed and, feeling that her soul had special need of its trumpet-call, took up “The Way of Perfection.”

But though her eyes remained on the printed page, her thoughts did not. She could not feel that she was alone. Memory filled and almost crowded the little room with figures. Most of them were the familiar forms of the day just ended—the irrepressible young Kemp; his dour-looking but really sound-natured father; Robert Kennedy, so unlike the man she had pictured him and with the unexpectedly boyish grin on his lips; Kate Kennedy with that distorted twist on hers. Doctor Tilden was there, too, cool and professional; and off in a dim corner was the shadow of Penny, a Penny with wide, terrified eyes and outstretched, shielding arms—the Penny of that last moment in life.

Marjorie tossed restlessly. What havoc a nervous shock could make in one! Was she never to get rid of that vision of Penny? And now her nerves were not content to show her the apparition and let it go at that. They were even suggesting that Penny was there with a purpose—that from the dim

vast spaces to which her soul had fled, Penny had returned in urgent unrest to warn her beloved charge of some peril. What nonsense!

But of course it wasn't nonsense, after all; it was merely nerves, and Marjorie must keep those nerves as steady as she could, and sit tight till time and Doctor Tilden pulled her past this little corner. She would go to Doctor Tilden's office to-morrow morning, and have him prescribe a good tonic. That was all she needed, but she grimly admitted that she needed it rather badly. In the meantime she would divert her mind by getting up and putting on the new evening frock. It was almost time to dress, and she could dawdle as much as she liked. If she had reached the serious stage of nervous shock in which a new frock—even as plain a new frock as this one—failed to interest her, she might as well face that fact and add it to the impressive list she must mention to Doctor Tilden.

She smiled and jumped up; and as if the briskness of the mere physical action had dispelled them, the memory figures, which had seemed almost sinister a few moments before, drifted out of her thoughts like departing and apologetic guests who have overstayed their welcome.

Penny, of course, was the last to go. Penny hovered about till the old-blue evening gown with its relieving bits of silver embroidery was spread out on the bed. Apparently Penny did not care for the new gown, for in a few moments more Marjorie found herself humming softly as she fastened the hooks—which, of course, she could not have done if the illusion of a warning Penny had persisted.

The new gown was simple, inexpensive, and extremely becoming. Marjorie was glad of that, for she reflected that she'd have to wear the thing till it was in rags. Following her determination to dawdle, she gave herself a prolonged inspection in the long mirror set in the bedroom door.

As Penny had remarked in their pregnant interview, Marjorie's beauty had never especially impressed its possessor. Her usual attitude toward it was one of almost boyish indifference. She admitted to herself on occasion that she was glad her features were "all right." To-night she was conscious of a momentary return of this calm emotion. There was nothing here to handicap her in her new life. She was sorry for people with bulging eyes or bad teeth and complexions, or with other features unpleasant to look at. This was as far as Marjorie's complacency ever carried her when she considered her own appearance.

Concerning her brains she was less modest. At times she was vainer of them than their quality justified, perhaps because at college they had

received so much more approval than they deserved. At present they were making no impression whatever on her new circle, and while she resented this indifference the new-comer admitted that it gave her something to think about.

CHAPTER VIII

LITTLE BETTY OSGOOD

AT quarter of eight she sedately returned to the living-room, where she found her hostess smoking before the fire, in a black-velvet evening gown rather conventional in effect. As the guest entered she was conscious of the quick scrutiny of eyes that missed no detail of what they were resting on.

“It’s a great success,” was Kate’s verdict. “It’s charming. Doctor Tilden will be impressed. You know he hasn’t seen you before in anything but bandages.” She brought out the next words in the same light tone. “But even so, I suppose you realize that he is immensely taken with you.”

Marjorie looked at her in surprise.

“I don’t realize anything of the sort,” she said almost curtly, and added in a different tone: “I don’t make a point of thanking my Maker because I’m not this or that, but I *am* grateful to Him for not having made me the sort of idiot who thinks every man she meets is in love with her. I know Doctor Tilden approved of me as a patient,” she added, settling into the now familiar wing chair and feeling the comfort of the room untangling her nerves; “I had all the reactions his diagnosis called for, and that endears any patient to a physician. But I’m not the type men look at once and then go off their heads over; I’m one of those acquired tastes you read about. It takes a long time to love me, and my address-book is full of the names of friends and acquaintances who have never got around to it.”

Even in the earlier talk of the day she had not spoken to Miss Kennedy with such intimacy, and she did it now with a friendly wish to soften the effects of her first brusqueness. Kate watched her carefully, interested in the increasing change in her. She had realized that one struggling up from the after-effects of a bad nervous shock would either reveal herself too completely or would hardly reveal herself at all. She was beginning to understand the girl before her.

“Such modesty may not last long, and it’s not for me to say anything to discourage it,” she commented. “But, just the same, whether you admit it or not, Doctor Tilden is taken with you.”

“You surprise me.” Marjorie raised her new slippers to the fender and regarded them approvingly. “I suppose your brother and the Kemps haven’t escaped the devastating effects of my personality.”

Kate laughed, but looked rather snubbed, and the look gave Marjorie a moment. She liked Kate, but she was human, and she was tired of being the one who was put in her place.

“Oh, Bob doesn’t count. He almost never falls in love,” Kate indifferently told her. “As for the Kemps, Horace is in love with you, of course, but that doesn’t count, either. Being in love is Horace’s usual state, and he falls out of it as fast as he falls in. He’ll lie on your door-mat for a few days or a few weeks, and if you’re not careful, you’ll trip over him as you go in and out. Then some day you’ll introduce him to a girl friend, and the next morning he won’t be on your door-mat. If you’re interested enough to look for him you’ll find him on hers.”

“You draw a charming picture of him!” Marjorie spoke with distaste. She disliked that type of young man, but she did not think Kemp junior was as black as he was being painted. It had been clear enough from the start that he had no advocate in Kate, despite the latter’s evident desire to be fair to him. Kate’s next remark fitted neatly into the pattern of her thoughts.

“You’ll see a lot of Horace if you accept Mr. Kemp’s offer.”

A persistent telephone bell called the speaker away before her guest could reply, and Kate returned to the fireplace with the announcement that Doctor Tilden was on his way upstairs in the elevator.

“He’s the punctual type. I shall enjoy watching his face light up when he sees you in that gown,” she confidently predicted.

The opportunity was not long delayed, for the door-bell rang almost immediately and Tilden, entering with the air of a young man sure of himself and pleased with his companions, first shook hands warmly with his hostess and his late patient, and then stood off to favor Marjorie with a quick professional scrutiny in which it was immediately clear that the blue evening gown had no place.

“Good!” he said, at last; “but it could be better. You’re not yet back where you were, are you? But there’s an improvement. It shows what care Miss Kennedy is taking of you.”

Marjorie shot a mischievous glance at her hostess. She was amused and not at all surprised by Tilden’s purely professional attitude. It was exactly what it should have been and what she had known it would be, though it

clearly failed to please the exacting Miss Kennedy. Marjorie, who had an almost pagan love of physical perfection, was rather more impressed by Tilden's appearance than he appeared to be by hers. His evening clothes were very becoming, and he wore them with the assurance of established habit. Either he had so few patients that he did not fear interruption to evenings of pleasure, or so many that he could afford to ignore them. Marjorie saw Kate's eyes on him, and he spoke suddenly, as if he had been reminded of something.

"That's a pretty dress you have on," he said with cheerful matter-of-factness, and Marjorie laughed. If this was gallantry, she could stand a lot of it. The three sedately went down to dinner.

At the table, the critical Miss Blake inwardly admitted that Tilden was an agreeable guest. A slight constraint he wore at the beginning of the meal was soon cast off, and he talked much and without effort. It became clear that his tastes were wider than his professional interests, but that his point of view was somewhat circumscribed. He liked music and pictures, and had definite opinions about the new plays. The most definite of these opinions was that many of the plays were "rotten." He warmly advised the two girls to keep away from several he took the pains to mention. He further unconsciously revealed a lack of sympathy with the modern-woman question.

"In another minute," Marjorie reflected, "he'll be telling us woman's place is in the home."

The thought both amused and disappointed her. She was rather reactionary herself, but she liked men to be broad-minded. She was observing Tilden closely. It was hard to realize that he was meeting them socially for the first time. He had, as the evening wore on, and especially from the time they were back in the upstairs living-room, an increasing effect of ease and accustomedness. That, of course, she told herself, was because he was a doctor. Doctors understood women better than most men did; felt more at home with them. And Doctor Tilden and Kate must have made long strides toward intimacy in the days immediately following the wreck, while she herself was struggling back to full consciousness. All this assumed that she was mistaken in her original impression that they were not strangers to each other, and that she had not really heard those first names beating against her ear-drums.

Tilden did not mention that woman's place was in the home. Neither did he seem conscious that man's place was sometimes there. He remained till

almost midnight and left reluctantly.

The next day Marjorie was tired, and Kate, evidently self-reproachful and anxious, kept her in bed and read aloud to her. It was not Miss Blake's dependence in the hospital which had made her consider Kate Kennedy a wonderful nurse. Kate seemed born for a sick-room. She was calm, swift, noiseless of movement, understanding, and amazingly skilful. She cared for Marjorie as if she enjoyed doing it, and after a few faint protests the girl lent herself to the comfort of such care.

The following day she allowed Marjorie to sit up before the fire at tea-time, and accepted a call from Tilden with such casualness that it was plain she had sent for him. She left him alone with her guest, and the visit, which had begun smoothly with professional questions and answers, ended in both patient and physician temporarily losing each other in a reverie before the burning logs. Tilden came out of his with a self-conscious start.

"By Jove, Miss Brown," he exclaimed, "you will forgive me, won't you? I've got an awful lot on my mind these days, and it's so blessedly quiet here that I . . . I'm afraid I was absent-minded."

"I must have been absent-minded, too," Marjorie admitted.

He rose and gave her his hand and a sudden deep look.

"Well, that's a good start, anyway," he said, and went away, leaving his enigmatic remark quivering in the air.

To her abysmal disgust, Marjorie continued languid and depressed for a fortnight. Seemingly all her new supply of vitality had been exhausted by her first day in New York, and she was appalled by her sense of uselessness. Kate was the only light along her darkening horizon.

"We let you do too much too soon," she diagnosed. "Now we'll put you through a rest-cure, and for a few days at least you mustn't see any one but the doctor."

Marjorie nodded, too indifferent to protest, and the days resolved themselves into mornings in bed and afternoons on the big divan in the living-room, with Tilden dropping in at eleven and five, and Miss Kennedy acting as super-nurse.

"I like it," she said briefly, when the patient suggested that if she must have so much waiting on a maid or a trained nurse should be brought in to do it; and it was clear that Miss Kennedy spoke truthfully.

Tilden, too, showed the patient his most delightful side—the side revealed in those first days in the hospital. Marjorie dispassionately admitted to herself that two such charming companions took all the weariness from semi-invalidism, and she added an abysmal hope that they would not revert to indifference as soon as she got better. One day Tilden brought her some flowers,—brought to his office, he explained, by a grateful patient,—and the next afternoon he handed her a novel which he frankly admitted was the only work of fiction he had read for a year. Marjorie did not care for the novel. Tilden's taste in literature, she decided, was not up to Kate's. Horace Kemp junior and Bob Kennedy telephoned friendly inquiries every day, and Horace junior filled the apartment with roses and chrysanthemums. Marjorie was in danger of being spoiled.

At the end of a week Kennedy was permitted to drop in at tea-time. He arrived with a holiday expression and a large box of bonbons, and Marjorie found herself liking him increasingly. He said little, but gazed at them serenely over his tea-cup while the two girls talked, and there was about him a heartening suggestion of strength and vitality.

Marjorie got better, and watched Miss Kennedy recede. She could almost see her fading out like certain gradually dimming effects in motion pictures. Tilden's manner remained unchanged, but his visits became fewer and less leisurely. Marjorie and Kate trotted around Gramercy Park five times a day. This was supposed to be equal to a mile walk, and Marjorie confided to Tilden her discovery that it was as exhausting as a tour of Central Park. Her strength was soon gone. By the end of the second week Kennedy and Horace junior had constituted themselves her staffs, one on each side of her, as she took the daily constitutional; and the pilgrim was telling herself that her journey East had been worth while. All these delightful people, knowing nothing whatever about her, nevertheless liked her for herself alone. The discovery was exhilarating. In a fortnight she abruptly pronounced herself well.

“Yes, you're all right now,” Tilden admitted, with a keen professional eye on her. “But there must be no more backsliding, remember.”

The day before she had caught him watching her with a new expression in his eyes, and she had fallen asleep while trying to analyze the look. Today his gaze was wholly professional and his manner that of a maiden aunt.

“What you need is recreation,” he robustly added. “How about a little dinner up-town, for a change?”

“I'd like that,” Marjorie confessed.

“I’ve promised Bob he can give the first dinner,” Kate contributed—rather regretfully, the patient thought. “I’ll telephone him, and if he’s free we’ll have it to-night. You’ll be with us, of course,”—this last to Tilden.

“Of course. I mean,” he spoke more formally, “I’ll be glad to.”

Kate went to the telephone, while Tilden, at a window, abstractedly stared down at Gramercy Park. From her pet chair by the fire Marjorie watched him. Suddenly he swung toward her.

“Do you know what you ought to do?” he asked abruptly.

“I know a few dozen things. What particular thing do you think I ought to do?”

He crossed the room and gazed down at her with his professional look, its effect slightly modified by the fact that his hands were casually in his pockets.

“You ought to marry,” he broke out. “You ought to do it soon, too. It’s idiotic for a girl like you to be traipsing about alone.”

“I’m not traipsing about,” Marjorie reminded him; “and I’m not alone.”

“Don’t quibble. You realize what you were made for, don’t you?”

“Not quite so clearly as you seem to,” his hearer languidly admitted.

“All right, then I’ll tell you.” Tilden cocked a somewhat apprehensive eye toward Kate, who, however, was out of hearing and busy at the telephone at the far end of the living-room. He went on quickly and in a lowered voice. “Why don’t you take young Kemp? He’s a nice chap and crazy about you.”

“Really, Doctor, is this sort of thing in your line?” Marjorie asked coldly.

“Of course it is. As a physician and as a scientist, I don’t like to see good material going to waste.”

“Oh, well, if your interest is merely professional—” Marjorie began, and was interrupted by Kate’s return.

“Bob’s delighted,” she reported. “He’ll call for us here. You,” she explained to Tilden, “are to meet us at the Ritz at half-past seven.”

Tilden raised his eyebrows.

“The Ritz is going some, for Bob!” he ejaculated.

“Don’t be familiar with him too soon,” Kate warned lightly, but Marjorie saw her color rise. “He feels that this is a big occasion. With surprising sprightliness he assured me that he meant to do it up ‘brown,’ ” Kate ended. And they all laughed dutifully.

At the table in the main dining-room of the up-town hotel, Kennedy put Marjorie at his right and Kate at his left, and, with a nod, called Tilden’s attention to the remaining seat. Then he devoted himself to the dinner order with the absorption a normal host gives to this rite. For the moment he and the waiter were alone together in the universe. Marjorie met Tilden’s steady eyes.

“Feel all right?” he asked.

“Yes, thank you. And it’s rather jolly to be out again!” She looked with interest around the big noisy room. It was the height of the dinner hour at the height of New York’s gayest season, and the crowd surrounding her was cosmopolitan and brilliant.

“It was nice of Mr. Kennedy to bring us here,” she added, sighing contentedly. “As it happens, I’ve never been at this hotel before.”

Kennedy, his thoughts now on the salad, heard his name and gave her a friendly glance. A few moments later, the matter of the meal at last off his burdened mind, he assumed the rôle of the attentive host.

As he leaned toward her, about to speak, Marjorie’s attention was caught and held by the familiar look of a small red bobbed head and profile near her. The girl to whom these belonged now turned her face away, but Marjorie was sure she could not be mistaken in Betty Osgood’s vivid hair. She stared intently, and Kennedy, observing her interest and following the direction of her eyes, looked too, at first casually, then with equal attention.

There was something wrong with the pretty young girl they were watching. She was nervous, ill at ease and, Marjorie was sure even in the first swift scrutiny, badly frightened. Her sole companion, a young man in evening dress, revealed nothing which explained her panic. He was an ordinary-looking youth, very much like dozens of youths in the room, and differing from them only in the degree and quality of his attention to his guest. Regardless of the food placed before the pair, he leaned forward talking to the girl in a low tone, his eyes never moving from her face. Marjorie heard Kennedy speaking.

“Do you know that chap?”

She turned to him. He had asked the question without looking at her, his frowning regard still on the other man's face.

"No, but I know the girl with him."

"Is she a nice girl?" Kennedy's gaze transferred itself to Betty. Marjorie's eyebrows rose.

"Why . . . I suppose so. I haven't seen much of her for three years, and I never knew her intimately. She was in my class at college, when I was a freshman. She left at the end of that year, and I've only met her once since."

"When was that?"

"About a year ago, in Chicago, at the home of one of my friends. We were both there as bridesmaids at a wedding."

Marjorie answered the questions fully now. They were leading up to something, and she had begun to suspect what it was.

"Where does she live?"

"In Philadelphia, with her father and, I think, a brother. Her mother is dead."

"H-m-m. You haven't heard that she's left home lately and is on the loose? Anything of that kind?"

"I'm sure she's not." Marjorie spoke decidedly. "She's a little idiot, and she was in a foolish set at college. I've heard that she's in with a fast set in Philadelphia, but I'm sure she isn't . . . she hasn't . . . I mean I'm sure she's really all right. Why do you ask?"

"Because she happens to be with one of the worst scoundrels in New York, and I'm wondering if she knows it."

"You mean . . ."

"He's as bad as they make them," Kennedy said dispassionately. "He's so bad that I'm amazed to see him in this hotel. I believe he'd be kicked out of it in five minutes if it weren't for the girl. Of course the manager doesn't want to make a scene. But I'll wager his eye is on that table pretty closely."

Marjorie felt rather sick. She had heard and read of this sort of thing, but she had not supposed it was so common that one ran up against it during one's first month in New York. And little Betty Osgood! The girl was as old as herself, but Marjorie always thought of her as still the irresponsible infant

she had shown herself to be in her freshman year. She rose with sudden decision.

“What are you going to do?” Tilden’s voice showed that he had overheard the conversation. He, too, rose hesitatingly, doubt and disapproval in every line of his handsome face.

“I think she’s frightened. I’m going to find out if she wants my help.”

“But . . . Miss Brown . . . you may let yourself in for something horribly unpleasant,” Tilden nervously warned her. “The girl is old enough to know what she’s about, isn’t she?”

“Old enough, yes. But I don’t think she does. As I’ve said, she’s a little idiot, and just now I’m sure she’s frightened. If I’m mistaken I’ll get out of the situation as gracefully as I can. Excuse me—just a moment.”

Marjorie tossed the apology back to him and Kate as she moved toward the other table, conscious that Kennedy was close behind her. In a final eye-flash she saw Tilden and Kate, the latter still seated, the former slowly subsiding into his chair as if in response to his companion’s suggestion. The next instant she was smiling down into the eyes of her former classmate.

“Hello, Betty,” she said cheerfully.

The girl started, stared incredulously, then turned up to her an ecstatic, illumined face.

“Marjorie!” she gasped, and frantically caught the other’s hands. “Oh, Marjorie!”

The look alone would have been sufficient revelation that something was very wrong. The gesture, the little choked cry, told a fairly complete story. Marjorie laid a steady hand on the girl’s shoulder.

“I didn’t know you were in New York,” she went on, easily. “What friends are you visiting? We must get together.”

“I . . . I’m not visiting. I’m here at this hotel.”

“But not alone, surely?”

Until now Marjorie had ignored Betty’s companion, who, at her appearance, had risen to his feet and stood quietly waiting to be presented, his glance moving in turn from Betty’s face to the new-comer’s.

“I . . . no . . . I . . . oh, Marjorie, I’ve done a dreadful thing! I’ve run away . . . and . . . I wish I hadn’t! I’ve told him so, and he won’t take me

home or let me leave!”

“Be careful, Betty: don’t speak so loudly! Some one may hear you.”

Marjorie gave the warning in a low tone, her manner casual, a slight, conventional smile on her lips; but her heart sank. Was there to be a scene, as Tilden predicted? Already several persons were turning to look at them, and a stout woman at the next table, upholstered in brown velvet, was beginning to look alarmingly maternal. Betty, however, at last appeared to realize the possibilities of the situation. She made a pitiful effort to pull herself together.

“Let me present Mr. Monroe,” she stammered, and added, with a gulp tragic because it was so childish—Betty Osgood was twenty-two but looked seventeen— “We were going to be married, but now I don’t want to.”

“You were going to be married?” Marjorie acknowledged with a cool nod at the young man’s bow. “When?” she asked Betty.

“To-night.”

“Nonsense.”

The girl in the blue-and-silver gown, whose beauty and a certain tenseness about the little group were attracting the attention of other diners, laughed lightly.

“You can’t be married this way, you know,” she went on in the same low tone, audible only to the three listeners. “And you’re too young to be trotting around New York unchaperoned. So I’m going to take you home with me now to Gramercy Park, and to-morrow we’ll talk it over.”

“Oh, Marjorie!—if you will!”

The man called Monroe spoke for the first time, in a voice as low as Marjorie’s, but with a manner subtly suggesting that he had had enough of this.

“Pardon me, madam, but you don’t seem to understand. Miss Osgood is to be my wife, as she has just told you. We’re to be married to-night.”

Marjorie sent a bright smile past the side of his face, and Kennedy came a little closer to the table.

“Does your father know anything about this? or your brother?” she asked Betty.

“Oh course not. We’ve eloped. They’d be simply crazy!” Betty was reviving. She still held tightly to Marjorie’s hand, but she spoke with more assurance.

“When did you leave home?”

“This afternoon. We’ve just got here,—in time for dinner—so Ed thought we’d better dine first and be married afterward.”

“That was very wise of him,” Marjorie agreed. “And I’m sure that now he’ll see the wisdom of waiting even longer.”

“That’s impossible, madam—whoever you are. Our plans are made.”

However chagrined and furious the young man might be, and doubtless was, Marjorie admitted that he was meeting a trying situation very well, though it was increasingly clear that the thin veneer of his manner was ready to crack under the strain upon it. However, he managed a smile as he spoke, and the little interview now seemed so clearly the result of a chance encounter of old acquaintances that even the upholstered plump woman had ceased to watch it closely. But into this atmosphere of graceful suavity, Mr. Robert Kennedy suddenly introduced a discordant note.

“Get out,” he told Monroe, in a low but urgent tone.

“What the devil—” The latter wheeled on him.

“Be careful. Don’t make it necessary for me to have you publicly kicked out. You know you would be if I said the word. Say good night to the ladies and go quietly. We’ll take them back to my table, and then I’ll escort you to the entrance and make sure you don’t linger there.”

“But . . . the rooms . . .” the other stammered, his eyes wandering.

“Knowing what I do about you, I’m sure the rooms are in the young lady’s name. She’ll pay for them, as she would have to do in any case. Come along.”

Still apparently amicably chatting, the four returned to Kennedy’s table, and went through the form of a perfunctory presentation, as Marjorie and Betty sat down. The next moment Kennedy and Monroe strolled off together, and disappeared through the exit into the outer hall.

“Miss Osgood is an old friend of mine,” Marjorie told Kate and Tilden. “I haven’t seen her for a year, so I’m going to take her back to the apartment with me, if you don’t object”—this last to Kate, in airy disregard of the lack of an extra bed and bedroom in the Gramercy Park flat. But Betty, now

vastly relieved and already convinced that the situation had not been as serious as she had thought it, had other plans.

“I’m going right straight home,” she firmly announced. “I’ve got just time to pay my hotel bill and take the nine-o’clock train. A taxi will get me out to the house soon after eleven, and if Father happens to be up and around I’ll tell him I’ve been to the theater.”

“That’s the best plan, of course.” Marjorie had remembered the single beds. “But how about your evening gown? You won’t have time to change.”

“I’ll keep my coat on; or perhaps I can get a state-room.”

“All right; I’ll take you to the train. Have you plenty of money?”

“Of course I have.” Betty’s childish voice was almost haughty. Money, at least, was something an Osgood was never without. Marjorie was amazed by the rapidity with which her young contemporary was casting off even the memory of what, from its nature, must have been a taxing experience. Hers was the mental attitude of the reckless motorist who, missing by the narrowest margin collision with a railroad train, steps on the gas and speeds onward with a care-free backward wave of a hand to the engineer.

Betty had social charms, and now she called on them. Even Kate—confused, suspecting the truth, yet of course unaware of the conversation at the other table—almost began to think her suspicions were unjust to this sophisticated young person. Probably she was merely out for a lark. When Kennedy returned, Betty greeted him with a smile of such radiance that he blinked under it. Marjorie rose hurriedly. It would not be easy to make that train.

“I’m horribly sorry to break up the party,” she apologized, “but I know you will all forgive me. Of course I must see my friend off. Mr. Kennedy understands—and you and Doctor Tilden won’t mind?” she asked Kate.

“They’re going to stay right here and finish their dinner, I hope,” Kennedy added, and Tilden, expressing a high appreciation of the course already served, obviously took it for granted that they would do so.

Kate showed no disappointment. She seemed interested in Betty as a new type, and bade her good-by with a friendly nod. Betty, who was not always such an idiot as she had been to-night, revealed a flash of insight as they walked to the exit of the dining-room, followed by Bob.

“Miss Kennedy looked as if I had done her a favor,” she commented, and added sagely, “I guess she likes that handsome doctor pretty well.”

At the hotel desk Mr. Kennedy attended to those sordid details of finance with which the mind of Miss Osgood was ill fitted to cope, and later he waited in the hotel lobby while Marjorie and Betty, in the latter's room, packed in record time the two suit-cases that contained the sole wardrobe the flapper had been able to bring with her. At the station, too, Kennedy was unostentatiously useful in the matter of securing a ticket and a state-room. His return to the ladies was accepted by Betty as a joyous reunion of old friends.

"I wish I had you around all the time," was her tribute. "You're the sort of man no girl should be without. This whole business has put a crimp in my maiden fancy, of course," she added flippantly, "but I dare say I'll get over it in a day or two."

"In Heaven's name, Betty, *why* did you do it?" Marjorie asked the question with sick distaste, when the three were in the safe shelter of a reserved state-room on the nine-o'clock train. Betty looked at her rather doubtfully, as if not quite sure, after all, that this old friend of hers would understand.

"Why, I didn't happen to have any other pressing engagements to-day," she explained at last, "and, besides . . . well, it was the only thing I hadn't tried!"

She made this artless revelation while the three were waiting for the sound of the warning whistle, and now that whistle checked any reply Marjorie might have been able to make.

Kennedy rose abruptly.

"I'll get you out on the platform," he told Marjorie, "and then take a final run through the train to be sure that scoundrel isn't on it. It's possible, of course, that he might expect to find her here, and follow."

Betty's color faded at this, and Kennedy was glad to see the phenomenon. It held out a hope that the flapper was not so hardened as she seemed. In her farewell to Marjorie, also, she showed a certain emotion, ephemeral but apparently sincere.

"Aren't I glad I met you!" she said. "Gosh, if I hadn't . . ."

"If you hadn't, I hope you'd have had sense enough to go home by yourself about this time," Marjorie retorted. But Betty shook her red head.

"He wouldn't have let me," she explained simply. "Ed's a mad dog when he's not having his own way. He doesn't care what he does. That's what

interested me. He was so different from any one I'd met before."

A few moments later Bob tapped at the state-room door, and, opening it without permission, thrust his head around the side.

"The train is free from all objectionable insects," he reported, and Betty giggled.

She had opened her vanity-case and was applying her lip-stick at the time of the interruption. An instant later, when Marjorie and Bob waved good-by to her from the platform as her train passed them, she was engaged in the congenial occupation of powdering her little nose. She interrupted this long enough to return their signal and to throw in the smile of an impish street urchin as she was swept back to home and safety.

"You've been wonderfully kind. I've spoiled your dinner and your whole evening, and you've taken it like an angel."

Marjorie brought out the words as she and Kennedy walked back through the Pennsylvania station. She could not hope to express her sense of the quietness and fine efficiency with which he had performed every service, but mentally she contrasted his record with that of Tilden, who had placidly eaten his dinner and chatted with Kate while Betty's little drama was in performance.

She was unjust to Tilden, and she knew it. Apparently there was nothing he could have done, and any effort on his part might have been officious. Nevertheless, making a finished thing of it while she was in the critical mood, Miss Blake told herself that even if he had tried, he would merely have messed things up. He was efficient in wrecks and sick-rooms, but she had a dark suspicion that in the routine affairs of daily life the handsome young physician would need looking after. He was the kind who would forget his rubbers and would expect to be told what drawers his shirts were in. Her beloved father had been that kind, and she had never felt that the fact lessened her mother's happiness. Still, such an episode as that of to-night was a test of men. If she happened to be considering him as a possible husband, as of course she wasn't—it was amazing how the girl's thoughts skidded away from even the slightest approach to the quest she had avowedly come out into the world to make—if she had been considering possible husbands, she would certainly have given Kennedy a white mark to-night and Tilden a black one.

Marjorie let it go at that.

CHAPTER IX

THE SUN GOD

IN an early afternoon of the following week, in the physician's private office, Marjorie revised her opinion of Doctor Tilden. Such revision, she was learning, was one of the inconveniences attending life in a new environment. One could not label a person and be done with it. Her acquaintances were constantly disqualifying the tags she so carefully attached to them.

There was Tilden, for example, so friendly and understanding about those absurd nerves of hers. He hadn't been of any use in the Betty Osgood episode. He probably wouldn't be of any use to-day if he saw her about to wreck her life by a mad escapade. But as a sympathetic physician and a congenial companion with whom to discuss the after-effects of nervous shock it would be hard to find his equal.

There was young Horace as another example: wholly selfish and self-absorbed, he nevertheless continued to telephone and call several times a week with the obvious determination of keeping in close touch with her. Also, he had been useful in taking her about, showing her New York and various phases of its life as soon as she was able to feel an interest in them, and making her realize that he was very much at her service. His comments on persons and institutions were usually amusing and she soon learned that under his nonsense lay unexpected strata of insight and observation.

Tilden and Kate joined several of these expeditions, and Marjorie was increasingly interested in Miss Kennedy's efforts to draw the physician out and show him at his best. He did not always give her the support such earnest championship needed. On the contrary, he often seemed moody and abstracted. Marjorie decided that he was disturbed by professional and financial cares. Miss Kennedy's tactful efforts to put him through his paces were equaled only by the quiet determination with which she endeavored to soft-pedal Horace. But that astute young man was rarely there when she tried to put her foot on him. He saw it coming, and moved.

Part of Horace's solicitude for herself, Marjorie knew, was due to his susceptible nature, and part of it to his distaste for self-communion. With five minutes on his hands Horace would telephone to almost any one rather

than think. She could not believe he was really in love with her, yet she suspected that his persiflage only partly concealed a serious determination to spread a protecting wing over this stranger he had met. Some day, she told herself, she would know why he thought she needed it.

And there was Kennedy, out of town for several days and, when he returned, resting on his oars and neither calling or telephoning, when any one else would have known that she'd like to talk things over. However, she'd have nothing much to do with any of them, since obviously it would take the three to make up one really satisfactory person. She put their qualifications before her in a brisk review.

Horace, clearly, was too frivolous for serious consideration, notwithstanding his foundation of business acumen. Besides, she'd never be able to trust him with other women. With that temperament of his, he'd always be catching fire. What she feared in Tilden was his weakness. Moreover, he was certainly showing no deep interest in her, though he now drifted in and out of the flat with the accustomedness of an old family friend. As for Kennedy—Marjorie's eyes grew increasingly thoughtful. Kennedy was wholly out of the picture. She liked and admired him and amazingly trusted him, but nothing about him stirred her pulses. Tilden, she confessed to herself, did stir them, a little. So did young Horace. But the slight emotion passed as swiftly as a bird on the wing.

These reflections she indulged in during a brief interval in the young doctor's waiting-room, which, she was interested to observe, showed no signs of congestion. Only one patient was waiting in it when Marjorie and Kate arrived, and she was an exquisite, soul-shimmering young creature with the flags of disease flying in both thin cheeks. She went into the private office almost immediately after they came, and remained there twenty minutes, while the new-comers, left alone in the hushed atmosphere of the outer room, looked about them silently and with the depression of spirits that seems inevitable in such an environment. Marjorie, indeed, was sorry she had insisted on this visit, instead of having Tilden come to her as he had been doing. Her object was twofold. She wished to see his offices, and she also desired to make it clear to Kate that she was no longer to be regarded as a semi-invalid, to be amused and coddled. To be amused and coddled was agreeable, but it did not fit in with her plans. There were things she meant to do, and she deeply regretted the weeks of time she had already lost.

Tilden's rooms were in the East Sixties, in a building given over to physicians. They were rear rooms, small, and furnished with a severity which bore out the notion that the young doctor was not yet overwhelmed

by his practice. Kate, as if grasping Marjorie's unexpressed impression, answered it when the other patient left the room.

"He's only two years old, professionally," she explained. "That is, he finished his hospital training two years ago and opened his office. He's doing very well, but he has heavy expenses. He supports his mother and two little brothers, and is educating the boys."

Marjorie wondered how she knew all this, and again, as if her thought had communicated itself to the other, Kate answered it.

"He talked to me a great deal while we were all at the hospital," she ended. "You see, we had hours on our hands there."

After her own satisfactory interview with Tilden, Marjorie returned to the waiting Kate, somewhat uncertain as to what she would do with the rest of the afternoon. She had planned to visit the New York bank to which her home bank had commended her, and to interview there a certain Richard Grant, who, she had been led to believe, would enter into her affairs with passionate zest. Those affairs needed interest from some one. It was high time she took up practical financial matters, and arranged to have money paid regularly to Marjorie Brown. Even dyed muskrat coats, however reassuring they may be to suspicious eyes, represent an amount of cash that cannot be withdrawn from the average purse without leaving a perceptible void. Moreover, she had made a generous arrangement with Kate by which she took over the apartment, assumed its running expenses, and continued her engagement of Miss Kennedy as companion, all for the coming three months. She had made several discoveries during the fortnight of rest-cure, the most important being that Miss Kennedy had no money to spare. It had been clear that her journey West had used up most of her surplus funds. It was also clear that she herself followed the advice she had given Marjorie in the matter of wardrobe. Her clothes were unusual and distinctive, but she had very few of them and wore constantly those that she had.

So Marjorie needed cash and needed it immediately. She began to realize that if she had been forced to wait for it until she earned it, her position would be excessively inconvenient. The reflection made her rather thoughtful and increased her respect for wage-earners. But now it developed that she was not to be projected into the life of Mr. Grant that day. Her wait and the long subsequent interview with Doctor Tilden had carried her so close to the time limit of banking hours that it would have been inconsiderate to present herself. She would let the bank interview go till morning, and this afternoon she would follow the urge that filled her and

make a little expedition into the slums. But there was her waiting companion. She would have preferred to make that expedition alone. On the other hand, she didn't know her way about the lower East Side; and of course, she reflected, she need not make explanations as to her errand. Kate Kennedy would ask no questions.

"Do you know where Oliver Street is?" she asked as they left the doctor's office and walked toward Park Avenue.

"Yes. It's off the Bowery, near Chatham Square."

Of course she would know. Kate knew everything. But Kate immediately admitted that there was nothing surprising in this knowledge.

"Oliver Street is unique," she said. "It's in the heart of the slums, but several important politicians live down there, in a little colony that's very well known."

"I'd like to visit a tenement house in Oliver Street," Marjorie confessed, and mentioned a number. "Is that easy to get to?"

This time Miss Kennedy took time to reflect, turning to look up and down the street for approaching cabs.

"It's two or three blocks from the colony I spoke of," she said at last, "down close to the river, judging from the address. But a taxi will waft you there in ten or fifteen minutes. Shall I stop one?"

"Yes, please. And will you come with me? All my ideas of New York tenements are based on stories and moving pictures. I suppose I really need a guide."

"The taxicab will take you to the door, but of course I'll go if you want me. What number did you say?"

The driver to whom Kate had signaled stopped his cab, and the two girls climbed into it after Marjorie had given him the address. Her thoughts were busy, and Kate, with her usual tact, observed this abstraction and was silent too. With an effect of decision the younger girl turned to her companion.

"What I want," she explained, "is to find out something about a family who lived in that tenement long ago, and I've just realized that I don't know how to go about it. I don't suppose there's one chance in a million that the family is there still?"

"How long ago was it?"

"About twenty-five years."

“Oh, then I suppose there isn’t. Tenement people shift about a good deal. Your best plan would be to talk, first of all, to the janitor of the building. If he can’t help you himself, he can tell you who the oldest tenants are, and they may remember something. And if that fails,” Kate added, “there are the agents to fall back on. Their old records ought to show when the family you’re interested in left, if it did leave.”

“That’s the best way, of course,” Marjorie agreed, much relieved.

“I should say that if the people left a quarter of a century ago, they’d be about as easy to find now as a needle in a haystack,” Kate pointed out. “Your best chance is to find some one who knew them, if you can.”

“There seems to be a lot of ‘ifs,’” Marjorie discontentedly mentioned. “But of course I knew there would be.”

There was another silence, which lasted till the cab approached the tenement door. Marjorie looked about her with an interest which was reflected in her charming face. Notwithstanding the nearness of the powers Kate had mentioned, the grimy, crowded street was littered with papers, fruit skins, and other refuse, though numerous garbage-cans on the curb stood hospitably ready to take in waste material. The fine weather had brought the children out on the road and sidewalks, while the sick and the old, alike in unkemptness, crouched in halls and on door-steps. The taxicab seemed a novelty, for some of the children shriekingly pursued it during the last stage of its journey. A lean cat slithered across the street within half an inch of its front wheels, and, as the cab swerved in toward the curb, one intrepid infant got close enough to be knocked over by the fender. Other children, having regarded this disaster with pleasure, stood around the vehicle wide-eyed and wondering, ragged and wretched, unconsciously tugging hard at the visitors’ heart-strings with their small, dirty hands. The infant who had been bowled over joined them pridefully, having been yanked to his feet by the chauffeur, whose comments on the episode showed a fine command of words. There were push-cart men along the gutter, and almost every tenement appeared to have a fruit-stand or a vegetable-stand in front of it.

“Would it do to give the children some dimes and nickels?” Marjorie whispered.

Kate shook her head. She had no theories about indiscriminate giving, but she foresaw the results of it in this instance.

“Wait till you’re driving away,” she advised. “If you do it now you’ll find every child in the neighborhood here when you come out, and some of

them might get hurt in the scramble.”

It was not hard to find the janitor, though he clearly felt himself ill used when he realized that he was expected to gratify the curiosity of two young ladies he darkly suspected of being welfare workers. “An’ God knows the neighborhood has enough of ’em already,” he piously reflected, “without importin’ more from up-town.” A dollar presented by the younger lady produced a rosier view of life. He put the bank-note in his pocket and his manner softened.

No, there wasn’t no McManus family in the house, nor there hadn’t been in his time, an’ he’d been there twelve years. In that twelve years, about which he pressed many undesired details upon them, he’d seen a lot of fam’lies come an’ go—mostly go, for goin’ an’ not stayin’ seemed to be what they was used to. He was sure they wasn’t no one left in the building that had been there longer than himself, except the Widow Casey, who lived on the top floor in a state of affluence due to having two sons who were policemen, and who paid her rent an’ gas an’ heat an’ meat an’ grocery bills. Paid ’em reg’lar, too, an’ come to see their mother every Sunday, though both was married an’ lived in other districts. It had been a fine day for the Widow Casey when she brought those two boys into the world, an’ well did she know it—her that was always fed an’ warm whatever happened to her neighbors. Not to say she wasn’t friendly with ’em, at that, an’ good-hearted, with the teapot on the back of the stove ready for any that dropped in . . .

The janitor, whose name proved to be Murphy, was detached with difficulty from the chronicle of the Widow Casey’s simple life and led to the discussion of less interesting details. How long had she lived there? Less than twenty years, he was sure. And they wouldn’t think it, but Smith himself—*the* Smith, Al Smith—had once climbed them steps to see the Widow Casey when she was sick, an’ her with a trained nurse an’ the doctor comin’ twice a day.

By this time the hospitality of the janitor was so excessive that they escaped from it with difficulty. He accompanied them up to the Widow Casey’s rooms, and, competing with a canary-bird inside, in full song, succeeded by repeated knocking in bringing the widow to the door.

From a social point of view, the privilege of meeting the Widow Casey was well worth the climbing of four flights of stairs. Marjorie felt an instant liking for the pink-cheeked, wholesome little woman, whose spotless kitchen and canary and red geraniums made such an attractive background

for her engaging personality. But as a source of information about the vanished McManus family, the widow was disappointing. Having lived in the building only seventeen years, she did not even know that a McManus family had once dwelt there. She showed a drug clerk's passionate desire to supply a substitute, and the visitors did not escape till she had run over the lives of all the McManuses she had ever known, none of whom was named Margaret or Lizzie.

Marjorie descended the four flights lingeringly and with an absurd sense of depression. She had expected this result, had known it to be almost inevitable, but the established habit of getting what she wanted when she wanted it had not helped to develop philosophy. Kate looked curiously at her downcast face.

"There are still the agents," she reminded the girl.

Marjorie brightened. She built no high hopes on the agents, but they suggested something more to do. She wrote down the address the janitor gave her, and paused again in the dim hall to extract from her own purse and from that of Kate all their available small change. This largess, scattered backward from a cab window as she drove away, created an effect she was rather sorry to leave. The enthusiastic and vociferous children followed her for blocks, and Kate watched her with amusement.

"You're an odd combination," she said, as they emerged into the different atmosphere of the up-town streets. "One wouldn't think you had anything in common with those tragic youngsters."

"I love children. I always have." Marjorie spoke absently, then added with a sudden twinkle: "I'm going to have six! Haven't I told you that?"

Kate laughed out.

"Really?"

"Yes, really. And I'd better be about it, too, before long," Marjorie firmly added. "You needn't tell me that. I know I've no time to lose."

"You *are* odd." Kate studied her with a strange expression.

"You don't know half how odd I am," Marjorie admitted, and they both laughed again, with a new sense of intimacy.

At the agency also their visit failed to awaken enthusiasm. Few of the clerks in up-town offices are fond of delving into past records in search of old-time tenants of tenement property, and the aloofness of the young man who conveyed this to Marjorie suggested that tips were out of the question

in his case. The most he would promise to do was to “look into the matter within the next few days.”

“Possibly the young man may be willing to earn something extra outside of his office time,” Kate suggested. “If he could stay after office hours some evening and look over the old records . . .”

The young man’s brow cleared. That, of course, might be possible, though . . . He waited, and Marjorie took out her purse and handed him a bank note.

“I’ll give you another like it, if you find anything helpful,” she promised; and again she was called upon to admire the vast difference between a business interview put on a proper business basis, and the intrusion of inquisitive strangers.

It was now almost five o’clock, and the weary pilgrim into a new world decided to consider it a working-day.

“I’m ready for some tea and a quiet hour and a book,” was the way she put it.

“I’ll see that you have them all,” Kate heartily assured her.

But the program was not carried out. From the hall settle as they entered the house on Gramercy Park, an elegant and rather dazzling young man rose and regarded them with an expression of great relief.

“Miss Blake?” he asked, turning a vivid glance from one to the other, and letting his eyes come to rest on Marjorie. She bit her lip. This was especially maddening because she had no idea who the young man was. He went on eagerly. “I’ve come to thank you for being so awfully good to my sister. Betty told me all about it when she got home, and I came over as soon as I could get away,” he added, and held out an impulsive hand which Marjorie took unwillingly. Then, irrepressibly, she smiled. Life was like that.

“You’re the much-talked-of brother I never met,” she said, and presented young Osgood to her friend with the reflection that here was a somewhat exacting test of Miss Kennedy’s *savoir faire*. “But how did you ever find me?” she could not help adding.

“Betty remembered that your friend’s name was Miss Kennedy, and that you had mentioned the name of your apartment house on this square,” the young man eagerly explained, his brilliant eyes still on her face, “so that was easy. But when I got here,” he continued in an injured tone, “the infant in charge told me no Miss Blake lived in the building. So I had to mention

Miss Kennedy's name at five-minute intervals to keep a foothold in the hall till she came home."

"I'm here with Miss Kennedy," Marjorie murmured, "and we're just going to have some tea. Will you come in?"

The young man would, and did. He was about the age of Kemp junior, and had something of that care-free youth's manner and social charm, combined with a degree of beauty that was almost startling. Marjorie took him in with the attention she would have given to the Lanzlo portrait he suggested, while his conversation drifted past her inattentive ears. He was an autumnal-hued youth, on whose head the poinsettia hue of the Osgood hair had softened into the reddish-gold of an October oak-leaf. His handsome face still wore some of his summer tan, and his brown eyes, very large and clear, had shifting amber lights in them. He evidently knew what clothes his coloring called for, as he was dressed in brown, with touches of red in his tie. A sentence from her own patter to Penny flashed through Marjorie's mind. She had outlined her future lord as one who must have the wisdom of Solon, the courage of Richard, the pure heart of Bayard, and the beauty of the morning star. She knew nothing of young Osgood's courage or of his heart or brains, but it seemed reasonably clear that the suitor with the beauty of the morning star had appeared.

David Osgood, however, clearly had no knowledge that he was a suitor. His resemblance to the morning star must also have escaped his attention, for his manner was pleasantly free from vanity or self-consciousness.

When Kate had supplied tea and cakes and left the two alone, which she did with immediate tact, he turned to Marjorie with genuine emotion in his young face.

"Words don't seem to help much when one really has something to say," he began as soon as the door had closed behind Miss Kennedy, "but I do want to tell you that I'll never forget what you've done. I came on to say this. It has taken me all day to find you, and now that I'm here I seem to be making a mess of it. But you understand, don't you?"

"Of course I do. I'm sorry you went to so much trouble. And, before I forget it," his hostess added, "I'll admit that you've given me away rather badly and that I hope you won't do it again."

"Given you away?" He looked at her in consternation.

"Yes. For reasons of my own, I'm here as Marjorie Brown. I want to escape being overrun by my dear friends from home. Even Miss Kennedy,

who is my new companion, doesn't know my real name, and I don't doubt she has gone out now to count her spoons."

He looked at her helplessly.

"Great Scott! I *am* sorry! What can I say . . . or do?"

"There's nothing you can say, except to call me Miss Brown with great firmness if Miss Kennedy comes back, and try to look as if you were subject to attacks of aphasia."

"I can do that, all right," he murmured. "I wasn't sure about the name, but I thought Betty called you Blake, or Black when she wasn't using your first name. I suppose that's what started me on the color line, Miss Brown."

He added the last two sentences in tones so suddenly clear that Marjorie knew Kate was in the room, and the latter now came to the fireplace with the pitcher of hot water she had forgotten. Marjorie made her remain, and the young man showed his social experience by ignoring his earlier slip, and bringing the name of Miss Brown into the conversation only once more, this time without emphasis or explanation.

"Another reason I came," he explained, taking Kate into the heart of the matter with a friendly simplicity both women admired, "is that Betty asked me to tell you Monroe is an unusually ugly customer. She said his specialty is 'getting even' with those he has a grievance against. He has a reputation for that sort of thing and brags of it. Betty never took his talk seriously until that eventful night, when he showed her a side of himself she hadn't seen before." He stopped for a moment, as if the thought of that side of Mr. Monroe was rather too much for him. "Betty heard last night that he has been threatening to 'get' Mr. Kennedy," he ended, "and we both felt that Mr. Kennedy must be warned at once."

"He doesn't even know who my brother is, does he?" Kate seemed unawed by the Monroe menace.

"Oh, but he does! Betty said the names were mentioned as part of the introduction bluff you were all putting up for the benefit of those around you. And she thinks, though she's not sure, that he heard you speak of taking her to Gramercy Park. If he got that much he can trace you easily enough; that's all I had to go on, you know. Betty thinks now that Monroe wouldn't stop at anything. However, I have some plans of my own about him." He offered his cup to be refilled. "May I? Thanks. So I don't think you need to worry," he ended with a brisk return to the more serious topic. "I've had Monroe under pretty close observation ever since—"

He stopped, self-consciously. Kate produced the cigarette box, and the young man's expression of well-being deepened to a degree that was almost fatuous. Under its urge Marjorie poured out a third cup of tea for him.

"Look here," he said suddenly, "I'm going to be around New York till to-morrow, and it's a dreary place, if one's alone in it. I've been wondering if you'd both dine with me somewhere to-night and dance afterward? Or go to a play?"

Miss Kennedy referred the invitation to Marjorie with an eye-flash, and the latter answered it with an assurance born since the new arrangement went into effect. She was hostess now.

"I don't feel quite up to going out again to-night," she admitted. "Too tired, and comfortably lazy. But if you'd like to dine with us here . . ."

She left the invitation in the air, and Kate caught its trailing end before the young man could do so.

"We might ask Horace, too," she suggested. "I have reason to believe he intends to come anyway," she added with an unconscious sigh. "Johnny says he has telephoned three times."

Marjorie agreed that this would be pleasant. "They can vie with each other to amuse us," she put it.

"And it will be exciting to hear Mr. Osgood trying to get in a word occasionally," Kate wickedly suggested.

Osgood's brilliant face suggested a hunter's moon with a slight cloud passing over it. These two women were treating him as if he were a boy, he reflected, whereas he was twenty-six and rather blasé about most of their sex. Not blasé about Miss Blake, however—or, rather, Miss Brown. Why the dickens was she changing her name, anyway? That seemed a silly thing to do, but of course it was a mere trifle compared to what girls were doing nowadays. He wished the other fellow hadn't been dragged in. He rose, the small cloud still dimming the luster he had brought into the room.

"Awfully good of you," he managed to say gratefully. "I'll go to the hotel then, and dress. When shall I be back?"

Marjorie's heart yearned over him. Under his little disappointment the young Apollo had become a spoiled and sulky boy. Odd how quickly men gave themselves away when one was observing them intelligently! She felt as maternal as if she had taken a toy from a child and was watching its startled eyes and quivering lips.

“At eight. So glad you can come,” she said, and threw in a smile that banished the cloud and made him stumble over a footstool as he found his way out.

“A nice young man but with no brains to spare,” Kate diagnosed when he had gone. “And he’s entirely too handsome to be at large. He looks like a Sun God, and he ought to be kept in an art gallery.”

“I got that impression, too,” Marjorie agreed. “But *how* I love good-looking men and women!” she added, sighing. “It’s one of my strongest weaknesses.”

“I hope you’re not going to fall in love with him.” For a tactful person, Marjorie reflected, Kate sometimes let herself go rather far. “He’s not in your class mentally.”

“I haven’t any brains,” Marjorie observed out of a sudden black depression.

“Nonsense!”

“I haven’t; and I’m just discovering it. I have a vocabulary that may mislead you. But when it comes to the mental equipment I thought I had, it simply isn’t there.”

“I won’t listen to such talk. You’re tired. Close your eyes and take a nap.”

Kate laid a hand on her shoulder in a touch that was almost a caress, and left the room, and Marjorie smiled after her appreciatively. There was no doubt about it, she was becoming very dependent upon Miss Kennedy. She relaxed in the wing chair, reviewing the impulses that had brought her out into the world. Ostensibly a desire for work was one of them, but on this her thoughts now rested as lightly as a bird on a branch. She had not even taken the trouble to look squarely at the elder Kemp’s offer, to which she must give him an answer by the first of the year. The short procession of the men she had recently met filed past her, but not one of them stopped for review, though the red-brown head of David Osgood swung abruptly before her like a particularly gorgeous chrysanthemum.

Her thoughts were centered on the Oliver Street tenement. Again its grimy door and dim halls opened and she climbed its uneasy steps. On the third floor of that tenement she had fallen behind the others and with a catch of the breath had stood still an instant, staring hard at a closed door guarding the rear tenement. She knew what rooms lay on the other side of that door. She had a desire to open the door and look into those rooms—a desire so

imperious that under the force of it she had set her teeth. Then she had stumbled a little, in apparent explanation of her delay, and had gone on just as Kate, looking back at her, had stopped too. Kate's expression had been rather peculiar. It was clear that she mentally questioned and wondered a bit; and why wouldn't she? Marjorie decided to speak more freely of her errand, the next day, to admit to Kate that she had a strong desire to find a woman named Lizzie McManus, and to ask her some questions.

And yet, if she found her, to what would it lead? Another memory came to the girl with a poignancy that made her catch her breath, just as the breath of the dying woman she was recalling caught on the last words she ever uttered. Again Marjorie heard those words:

“But . . . be . . . careful . . . my darling. Move . . . slowly . . . and . . . secretly. You . . . may uncover . . . a . . . swarm of parasites . . .”

Marjorie sighed, cast a final and regretful look at the fire, and went to her room to put on her one evening gown.

CHAPTER X

QUINN'S BACKWARD LOOK

YOUNG HORACE and young Osgood rather took to each other. That was clear from the moment the oysters were served. There were between them, however, moments of constraint, due to the fact that they had taken to Miss Brown even more than to each other, and it was at one of these moments that the card of Mr. Benjamin Pfeifer was brought to Marjorie. She looked at it vaguely at first and then more closely, and was rewarded by the discovery that under the boldly typed name of Mr. Pfeifer a very small printed line dimly announced that he represented Claghorn & Miller.

Light flashed upon Marjorie. Claghorn & Miller were the agents of the Oliver Street tenement, and it followed as a natural inference that Mr. Pfeifer was the remote young man in their office whose respect she had won that afternoon by her timely retainer of five dollars.

The party of four had left the first-floor dining-room and returned to the upstairs apartment, where coffee and cigarettes had been served. The hour was quarter of ten, and the unchanging vivacity of Horace Kemp was plainly getting on the nerves of his fellow-guest. Marjorie drew Kate's attention to the card, brought from the lower regions by the buttoned boy, otherwise known as Johnny, whose most conspicuous feature was an impressive row of brass buttons down his front.

"It's Mr. Pfeifer," she explained to Kate; "from that real estate agency, you know. He has evidently been working at the office, and he must have something to report or he wouldn't be here. You won't mind if I see him for a moment?"

"We'll arrange for a private audience," Kate agreed, and firmly drew the dinner guests to the far end of the room, to show them a radio in which they felt no interest. Meaningless bubbles of sound immediately burst from the instrument, as Horace proceeded to demonstrate the truth of his assertion that he didn't know how this one worked.

Young Pfeifer, in a belted overcoat and with dark pompadoured hair shining with brilliantine, also wore an air of self-satisfaction, explained by the words immediately following his formal greeting.

“I found an old record showing Mrs. Margaret McManus moved away from that tenement the first of March, 1901,” he briskly reported. “She hasn’t been in any of our buildings since, so that’s all I got, officially. But I found out something else that may help you.”

“I’m so glad,” Marjorie said. “Won’t you sit down?”

Mr. Pfeifer sat down absently, and on the extreme edge of the davenport, to show that his news was more important than physical comfort, and Marjorie, seating herself beside him, waited anxiously for his revelation.

“There’s an old chap in our office that’s been with the firm more than twenty-five years,” Pfeifer went on. “His name’s Quinn. He was middle-aged when he began, and he used to collect rents. Now he’s more than seventy-five, and works on half-time, and the firm lets him potter ’round the office and take naps at his desk. He’s a queer codger, tight as an oyster, but after you left it struck me there was one chance in a thousand he might remember the McManuses. So I asked him.”

He paused for approval, and Marjorie supplied it with enthusiasm.

“Splendid! And did he?” She leaned toward him, shining-eyed, and young Pfeifer, who was a normal youth, momentarily lost the thread of his narrative.

“He wouldn’t say he did,” he resumed after this tribute to the lady, “and I couldn’t see why. But he’s such a grumpy old chap, I thought it was just general cussedness. After I talked to him a while I began to suspect it was because he was afraid of giving the McManuses away, so then I got really interested and took him out to dinner. He doesn’t often get a good spread, I fancy,” he added complacently, “so he began to open up. It seems the McManuses were friends of his, and they left the building under some sort of a cloud. It wasn’t the rent; they paid that all right,” he handsomely explained. “But while they were there something happened that they wanted to keep quiet. Whatever it was, it’s made two or three people try to follow them up in the last twenty years. Finally old Quinn shut his trap altogether and told me I’d get nothing more out of him, but I made him promise to come and see you next Sunday. He can’t go out at night, and he’s a little under the weather this week, getting over a bad cold. I guess he’s pretty hard up. He looks it, anyway. So I told him,” Pfeifer delicately added, “you’d make it all right if he came. They say around the office he’s trying to get into an old man’s home up in Westchester where some pals of his are. But the admission fee is five hundred, and I guess he can’t make the grade.”

“Of course I’ll pay him. And you have helped me immensely.” This reminded Marjorie that there was an obligation nearer the moment, and she rose to go for her purse.

“If you’ll excuse me just a moment,” she suggested, and hurried away to her room.

She returned with a ten-dollar bank note, which Pfeifer, now standing at a window and looking out at the rain-swept park, thrust into his pocket with the air of one who scorned wealth.

“There’s something you’ve got to be a little leery about when Quinn comes,” he warned Marjorie as he rebuttoned the belted coat. “I told the old fellow you weren’t the kind of lady that would make his friends any trouble. He won’t spill a thing unless you promise you won’t. What I mean is,” said Pfeifer again adapting his language to his listener, “he won’t say a word if he thinks it will hurt Mrs. McManus. His wife knew her, too. I guess they were all pretty chummy.”

Pfeifer was deliberately prolonging the interview. It had occurred to him that this was a hard world. There were those two guys off at the end of the room, not a bit better than himself, even if they were all dolled up, yet friends of this lady and here for a pleasant evening, while he had to go out into the storm.

“You’ve been wonderful,” Marjorie told him. “Thank you so much. I’ll see Mr. Quinn any time he comes.”

She walked by his side to the door leading to the hall, and smiled at him so warmly when he left that Pfeifer returned to the cold outer world as one whose sun might rise again.

“If that young man thinks he has a job for you,” Horace advised when Marjorie joined the group around the radio set, “don’t you take it. Even the radio objects to him. Listen.”

He whirled the dials and the radio screamed urgently, as if emphasizing his advise. Through its loud speaker came successive sputters, howls, and screeches that made her cover her ears.

“For Heaven’s sake shut that thing off!” she urged, and turned to surprise a look approaching stupefaction on Osgood’s arresting face. Again she bit her lip. His coming certainly had messed things up. It must have raised a permanent interrogation-point in Miss Kennedy’s mind, and she could understand Osgood’s present amazement over the combined effect of her

changed name and this talk of jobs. The unconscious Horace, accompanying her back to the fire, prattled on.

“I admitted to Dad to-day that he had followed a really intelligent impulse in asking you to come to us,” he was saying. “As it was the first one he ever had, I thought I ought to pour a drop of water on the thirsty plant. But it was a mistake,” he added with a sigh. “It gave him a swelled head right away, and he’s acting more than ever like the late Kaiser on a bat. When are you starting in? Monday?”

Marjorie saw her way out.

“That joke is a little frazzled now,” she kindly suggested. “Let’s make another one.”

“Joke!” For once Horace’s vivid blue eyes were almost serious. “I’ve spent the morning getting your desk ready,” he reproachfully continued. “I decided it wasn’t necessary for you to wait till the first of the year. You’ll have a clean blotter, a pen that will write, ink that will flow, a waste-basket for your first work, a desk mirror to look into, a window to look out of, and me, myself, passing and re-passing every little while, like a strain of lovely music. My dear girl,” he earnestly continued, “it’s the bright face of fortune that is turned toward you, and her hands are full of gifts. In a week I’ll have taught you the business. In a few months Father and I shall have killed each other and you can run it. I see in you the future captainess of the industrial world, telling Osgood here where he gets off. You and your father are the owners of the Penn Mills, aren’t you, Osgood? I thought so. Well, you’d better be mighty nice to Miss Brown. She’s got you in the hollow of her hand, and she’ll have her foot on your neck no later than next week. She—”

“She’s got her foot on my neck now,” Osgood unexpectedly testified, and added wistfully, “Let’s listen to the radio again!”

Marjorie uttered the soft low hoot with which she greeted anything that amused her. It was an arresting sound, and her new friends were hearing it for the first time. The three faces turned to her held equal interest but varying expressions. Osgood looked rather satisfied with himself; Horace had an air of being up at auction and uncertain as to what he would bring. Kate’s first look of surprise gave way to one of understanding. Her gray eyes had warmed. There was something almost maternal in them, as if she were recalling the contrast between the youth and gaiety of the girl before her, and the tragic isolation in which that girl stood.

After the young men had departed, reluctantly and on a strong hint from the hostess, Marjorie told Kate of Pfeifer's findings.

"I must get in touch with Mrs. McManus," she added casually, "because she may be able to tell me something I want to know. On the other hand, she may not. But one thing is certain. I'm going to find her if she's still in New York."

Kate looked at her with her slight, musing smile.

"It must be something interesting."

"It is," Marjorie admitted; and both let the subject drop.

It came up again with a rush the following Sunday morning, when the buttoned boy, telephoning from the lower regions that a man named Quinn wanted to see Miss Brown, firmly accompanied Quinn into the apartment to look further into this matter of the lady's strange visitor. Marjorie sent Johnny away and gave Mr. Quinn a comfortable seat by the fire; but she understood the lad's surprise. Quinn was a sufficiently unusual caller to attract attention anywhere. He was very small, in appearance almost gnome-like, and he looked even older than the seventy-five years with which he was credited. He was not untidy, but there was about him an imperative suggestion of the need of woman's hand. His collar had escaped its rear button, his black tie had traveled toward his left ear, and the seams of his Sunday garments, while they still held, suggested that they were about to separate, an effect their wearer's little figure shared with them. In short, to seeing eyes Quinn was a touching character, and Marjorie registered a resolve not only to make this visit "worth his while," as Pfeifer had suggested, but to reward him generously if he brought her any real help in her quest.

The first moments of their association were given up to a little verbal fencing, in the course of which the visitor proved that while his brain was old, it was far from addled. After that, as if reassured by the gentleness and courtesy of this young lady, as well as by her charm,—for Quinn's aged heart was Irish,—he bent forward, his shabby hat crushed between his hands and his hands between his knees, and with businesslike directness came to the point of his call.

"You see, miss, 'tis like this," he began, his dim eyes on her face. "I'd not been willin' to bring any trouble on the Widow McManus by anything I'd say, for she was a good friend of meself and me wife, and," he added

firmly, "she wasn't one to talk. Her heart was broke while she lived down there in Oliver Street, but 'twas not from herself folks heard about it."

"I see. What you mean," Marjorie slowly suggested, "is that her daughter Lizzie had a baby while they lived there, and that she wasn't married. That was it, wasn't it?"

The old man drew a quick breath. The young lady knew, then, so he'd not be giving Lizzie McManus away.

"That was it, miss," he said with the heartiness of relief. "She had that, and 'twas no wonder her poor mother's heart was broke entirely," he added soberly. "It ain't often that a fine Irish girl an' a good Catholic like Lizzie McManus forgets herself an' her family an' her church."

"She was a fine girl?"

The young lady opposite Quinn, who was listening to him with such interest and such a queer look on her face, asked the question in a voice so low that he did not hear all the words. She repeated them in a different form and a louder tone. "Lizzie McManus was a good girl, you said?"

"She was that, miss! None better. She could have married any lad she wanted of her own sort, but there was only herself an' her mother—the father was killed on the railroad when Lizzie was seven—an' I suppose she didn't want to leave the mother. So the two of them worked themselves to death to keep up the little flat for Mrs. McManus. The widow worked out by the day at whatever she had stren'th for, an' Lizzie was a maid up-town. 'Twas the man where she worked got her into trouble—may the devil fly away with 'im!" he ended fervently.

He stopped, thinking the young lady had spoken. But apparently she hadn't. She had merely moved a few inches away from him and fixed her eyes on the fire. She spoke then, in the same low tone as before.

"Will you tell me all you know about it? You see, I know only the bare fact that Lizzie McManus had an illegitimate child."

"I don't know much, meself, for I never saw the child and neither the widow nor the daughter mentioned it to me. But I mind before they were able to move, the way the two looked," Quinn went on, willingly enough. "'Twas hard for a proud woman like Margaret McManus, that always held her head up. She felt the disgrace more than Lizzie, for well she knew there was talk an' a lot of it. Lizzie was a good daughter, but all she seemed to be thinkin' about was the man!"

He checked himself, as if he had said too much. It was a queer subject to be discussin' with a young girl. Not but that young girls knew as much these days as their elders—an' more.

"Why did they move?" this girl was asking. "Couldn't they keep up the rooms after the baby came?"

"They could an' they did. They had help, too. 'Twas the talk drove them off. Sure, y'd know what it would be! Lizzie couldn't work for a few months an' Mrs. McManus watched day an' night that no one'd get past the door. They were pretendin' it was nerves an' that Lizzie was too queer to see any one, but folks knew better. Lizzie never was strong at the best of times, an' it seemed like she couldn't come up after her trouble. But finally she got around, an' the pair of them, the mother and Lizzie, moved away one night. I went to see them in the new place, but there was no baby. I heard they took the child to an asylum an' left it there. Then Lizzie got another job an' went back to work. Glad enough they was to get away from Oliver Street, with every one suspectin' but no one sure just what had happened. 'Twas easy to see what the trouble had done to the widow. She'd set at the winda by the hour, lookin' out an' mutterin' to herself like she was carryin' on an argymint. Many's the time I've heard her at it, for I used to drop in on them at the new rooms, an' so did me wife. But all this ain't what you want to hear, I don't think; is it, miss?"

The old fellow, carried away by his reminiscences and by the girl's interest,—it was long since anyone had heeded his words, and fifty years since a girl had listened to him with that still look of concentrated attention,—pulled himself up short and nervously kneaded the shabby hat.

"I'm interested in all you can tell me," his hostess said; and the young voice as well as the young face showed that she meant it.

"I used to run in on them any time I went to the Oliver Street buildin'," the old man repeated with the readiness of garrulity, "except while Lizzie was sick. But after they left I didn't see them quite so often. In a year or two I heard Lizzie married some Catholic lad, an' that he knew all about her an' was ready to give her another chance. Sure, why wouldn't he, with her prob'ly as good as him, any day!"

He paused as if for some acknowledgment of this outburst of chivalry, but none came and he resumed his reminiscences.

"My wife died that year, an' my only boy got kilt," he said heavily. "I had troubles of me own, so I didn't think much about the McManuses. But I

heard the widow was living with Lizzie an' her husband out in the country. I know 'twas the best thing for her, bein' in the good air, so I didn't worry about her. Ye know how'tis, miss, in a big town. When our friends move from us we're apt to let them go."

Marjorie nodded.

"So you haven't seen her for years?" she interpreted.

"No, miss. 'Tis all of nine or ten years, anyway."

"Oh, then you've seen her as lately as that!" The girl who had listened so intently was immensely impressed by this.

"I have that," said Quinn complacently, pleased with his effect. "I was goin' into a big elevator up-town wan morning, when I seen a woman gettin' out of it with a face that looked like I knew it. I did, too, for 'twould be hard to mistake Margaret McManus—a fine figger of a woman if ever there was wan! An' sure it was the widow herself, with eyes as big an' black as they used to be, but now her black hair was like snow. I stopped an' spoke to her, an' at first she didn't know me, but soon she remembered me. I guess I'd changed meself," he paused to interpret with a sigh. "Lizzie was with her," he then went on, "an' a young lad; an' the three of thim had been havin' some X-ray pictures taken to find out was something the matter with the widow, like the doctor thought. I've heard of her since then, off an' on, but I ain't seen her from that day to this."

Quinn rose. He had never read the editorial injunction of the "Ladies' Home Journal" to its readers, urging them to make a bright remark at the end of a call and leave the room under cover of the laughter which follows. But his subtle Celtic instinct warned him that he could not much longer keep the interest of the interview at this high tension.

"Then you can't tell me where Margaret McManus is now? You don't even know whether she's alive?" His hearer asked the questions in a voice sharp with disappointment.

Quinn inflated his thin chest a little. He, too, had kept his *bon bouche* for the end.

"Sure I can!" he said cordially. "The last I heard of her she was livin' in Cranford. I don't know the number, but I can tell you the street an' how to get there. She's in a little house outside the town, living with the widow Wheeler. At least she was eighteen months ago, and why wouldn't she be there yet? She was queer, they said, an' gettin' queerer every day. You wouldn't be doin' the widow any harm, miss, if I told you where she was,"

he added apprehensively. "Ye see, she's old now, an' all alone, for both Lizzie an' the husband is dead. 'Twould be a bad day's work if I made trouble for me old friend."

"Indeed I won't do her any harm! You may be sure of that. On the contrary, I may be able to do something good for her. But you will never tell any one about this talk of ours, will you, Mr. Quinn?"

"I'll not, miss, if you say so."

Marjorie got up and held out her hand, and the little old man took it as if he didn't know just what to do with it, touched it gently, and, as it were, gave it back to her.

"I can't tell you how much obliged I am," she said, when he had given her the promised directions. "I want you to take this money, because you have earned it. You have saved me a great deal of trouble. This is all I have with me to-day, but if I find Mrs. McManus I will send you a check for a much larger amount."

She opened her purse and Quinn, having first made a deprecating movement, waited with the eagerly wistful expression of an old dog whose master is going for a walk. He did not look at the bank-note in his hand till he was a block away from the house and had turned a corner. Then he drew off the sidewalk and up against the shelter of a building and opened the folded bill. He thought it would be two dollars, and a vague hope whispered that it might be five. He looked at it and his hands began to shake. He blinked and looked again. Five? Yes, five and a cipher besides. Fifty dollars! His whole body shook now. He stood in the same spot, incredulously staring.

Back in her room, Marjorie slowly put away her empty purse. She had given him, as she said, all that was in the purse. But in that moment she felt as if what he had given her was worth all she had in the world.

CHAPTER XI

THE HOUSE AT CRANFORD

“WAS the old man able to tell you anything that will help you?” Kate asked the question almost perfunctorily while she and Marjorie were at luncheon half an hour later, at a small table in the dining-room of the Gramercy Park building. She evidently expected to be told that Quinn’s visit was fruitless, for at Marjorie’s reply she stiffened into attention shot through with surprise.

“I’d like to go out to Cranford this afternoon,” Marjorie suggested when she had briefly mentioned that Mrs. McManus might be found there. “Would you care to go with me if I can get an automobile?” she added without urgency. “The ride might be pleasant.”

Kate regretfully shook her head.

“I’d like nothing better,” she said. “I like motoring, and I get mighty little of it. But there’s something I must do this afternoon. If you could wait till to-morrow, it would be a heavenly outing.”

That way of putting it gave Marjorie no choice, and she agreed to the changed plan with apparent willingness but with a sense of impatient disappointment that surprised herself.

However, a chastening memory presented itself as an aid to philosophy. She could not hire automobiles until she got some money, and the way to get money was to go to the bank directly after breakfast the next morning and have her deferred interview with Richard Grant. Her impressions of bankers had been gained in the only places where she had checking-accounts, her home town and her college town. In Blakesville the president of her bank had honored her with much personal attention. He was a kindly, paternal type of man who had been a close friend of her father, and his conviction that he must guide and advise the daughter of his dead associate was followed to a degree that embarrassed Marjorie, whose prejudice against receiving unasked advice increased with every year. During her college course the bank’s representative had been a trousered old maid, helpful but inquisitive.

She entered the New York bank the next morning with a half-formed suspicion that most bankers were like one or the other of these men, that banking evolved such types, and she was surprised and relieved when Mr. Richard Grant proved to be a broad-shouldered young man in his early thirties, who had a pleasant face and a human manner, and who wore a tie with too much green in it.

She had made her appointment with him by telephone immediately after breakfast, and she personally followed her telephone message without delay. It at once became clear that Mr. Grant had looked her up in his files, and that his mind was filled with agreeable information about her. It was also clear that he regarded her with a fine and friendly amusement. In short, Mr. Richard Grant was convinced that Miss Marjorie Blake of Blakesville, who was now so surprisingly announcing her determination to be Miss Marjorie Brown of New York, and who wished her account carried in the latter name, had some whimsical plan back of that wish, which he need not enter into but which was entirely sensible and justifiable. This conviction Mr. Grant conveyed, quite easily and naturally, by the grace of his manner, while he took Marjorie's new signature and instructions; and, having sent the teller a check to be cashed for her, he handed her an impressive pile of crisp new bank-notes. But when she was ready to leave, and they stood face to face at the gate of his railed-in square of space in the big counting-room, he looked at her soberly.

"There's a point I'd like to have you remember," he said kindly. "Banking is a whole lot more elastic than it used to be, and we're glad to make ourselves useful to our clients in various ways. Mr. Cady tells me," he went on, referring to the president of the Blakesville bank, "that you're a stranger in New York, There are a lot of tips I can give a stranger: the best places to buy theater tickets, the neighborhoods that are not desirable, the restaurants and hotels to avoid and those one may safely visit—oh, all sorts of things. I don't mean that we concern ourselves with the private affairs of our clients," he took the trouble to explain, "or that we're an esoteric guide-book for New Yorkers; but your situation is unusual . . ."

He did not add that her bank deposits promised to be unusual, too, and that she herself was unusually attractive; but Marjorie mentally filled in these details. It was odd how strongly almost every man she met felt urged to help her.

"I'm afraid Mr. Cady asked you to have me on your mind," she said appreciatively, "and I'm very much obliged for the offer. I shall like to feel that I can come to you if I need to."

It was not until she had left the bank and was walking along Forty-second Street that she recalled with a smile at herself that he was the fifth man, possibly eligible, she had met since she left home. Mentally she ran over the list again. It had been easy to talk to Penny about looking for a husband, and she had thought she meant all she said. But there was something horribly cold-blooded in deliberately holding men up like insects on pins and looking them over with a view to matrimonially annexing one of them. Nevertheless, Marjorie set her jaw and did it.

The Sun God, as Kate called Osgood, would be wonderful to have around the house to look at. But, as Miss Kennedy pointed out, strikingly handsome men were usually vain and spoiled, and wives had tragic times with them. Whereas—the latter were Marjorie's reflections—such men as Tilden and Grant had enough good looks to please the ordinary taste but not enough for themselves or any one else to get excited about. As yet she knew nothing about their lives or their morals or their tastes, but she philosophically reflected that she would be given opportunities to study them all deliberately and at close range. Young Osgood was showing a disposition to settle down in her life like a cornerstone; Horace had telephoned twice that morning; and in the cool eyes of Grant she had seen the flickering lights of interest and admiration. Tilden alone remained matter-of-fact in his attitude toward her.

Reaching Fifth Avenue, she walked up to Central Park, and there deliberately tired herself out by an overlong tramp. Her nerves were better, but she could not yet comfortably fix her thoughts on restful topics, such as the qualities of her men friends. Instead, they showed a tendency to bolt toward Margaret McManus, and as there was nothing to be done about Margaret McManus until afternoon, Marjorie preferred to keep her out of her mind.

Instead she saw Margaret sitting by her tenement window "mutterin' like she was carryin' on an argymint"—wasn't that the way Quinn had put it?—or stepping out of the elevator supported by her daughter and "the young lad," and looking at her old friend with fierce, black, unseeing eyes under her whitened hair. With these visions came the other Marjorie had often seen of late, in which a dying woman gasped out her final warning against "a horde of parasites." Life was complex, but it was intensely interesting. Never before had Miss Blake been so conscious of its sweep and surge and under-pull.

Kate had gone out, announcing that she would not be back to luncheon, and Marjorie, suddenly dreading the lonely meal, postponed it as long as she

could by entering a Fifth Avenue art gallery on her way down-town, to see an exhibition of portraits by a visiting Spanish artist. It was too early for the crowd, and the rooms given over to the exhibition were almost empty. She strolled through one or two of them, glancing at the portraits and feeling disappointed. There was wonderful brush work here, and color that took one's breath away; but aside from these qualities there was little beauty in the painter's work.

She sat down before a primitive, savage, jaw-jutting bull-fighter whose sword dripped blood, and, finding that he failed to hold her interest, let her glance move slowly around the big room. If she saw anything worth closer inspection she would get up and look at it. At the far end of the room, in a rather dim corner, two figures sat close together on a bench, talking steadily and apparently very earnestly. Their backs were toward her, and at first she took them in merely as human bulks, more interested in their talk than in the pictures around them. Now, abruptly, the bulks changed to recognizable outlines, and her roving glance came to rest on Tilden and Kate Kennedy. Both were hunched forward, looking not at each other but at the floor, and in Kate's sagging shoulders there was an unmistakable effect of weariness and dejection. Tilden's attitude seemed the result of his wish to be closer to her. His head almost touched hers, and he appeared to be speaking with animation as well as with urgency. After a moment he slightly changed his position. She could see his clear-cut profile, now, resolute and firm, and Kate's also, as the latter turned to him with a quick, almost irritable movement.

Marjorie rose and left the gallery through an arch near the bench where she had been sitting, and as she went she sternly checked an imagination which showed a tendency to run away with her. It was not strange that they two should have met, or that they should have seated themselves for a tête-à-tête. What had disturbed her was the look on Kate's face—the twisted grin she had seen once before and which, repellent in itself, added years to the girl's age. The observer sighed, suddenly depressed. Life was interesting, as she had so recently told herself, but it was also confusing, and it made heavy demands on one's faith and courage.

Kate was home for luncheon, after all, and she brought Tilden with her.

"I met him," she casually explained, "and made him come along."

Marjorie was glad he was there. It was easier to talk to them both than it would have been to talk to Kate alone. Then she felt herself opening her lips

to the words that pressed against them.

“I dropped in at the Zuloaga exhibition on my way home,” she brought out.

“Did you?” Kate spoke without surprise. “So did I,” she added; and Marjorie was not sure whether there had been a slight hesitation between the sentences. “That’s where I met Doctor Tilden.”

“I don’t make a point of going to exhibitions,” Tilden easily contributed. “But in this case it saves a lot of trouble. You can say, when the other chap brings up the subject, ‘Yes, I’ve been there,’ and that ends the conversation, unless he’s one of those persistent devils. But if you haven’t been there, he’ll tell you all about it, and there’s no way of stopping him. I’ve lost hours, this last week, listening to Zuloaga criticisms from men and women who don’t know a portrait from a side of beef.”

“There’s a strong resemblance between some of those portraits and sides of beef,” Marjorie commented; and Tilden laughed and told her it was the best criticism he had heard.

After luncheon Kate excused herself on the plea of a letter to write before the ride to Cranford, and left them alone by the fire while she went off to her own room. It was part of the confusion, for she never wrote letters in her room; but Marjorie accepted the situation as if it were a natural one and lent herself to Tilden’s efforts to interest and amuse her. She had already discovered that he rarely exerted himself, except professionally, and that his usual attitude toward life was almost as detached as Kate’s. To-day he was personal, reminiscent, and unhurried. He apparently had the afternoon on his hands, though he mentioned that later he must see a patient in the building. Johnny’s arch-enemy, “a guy on the fourth floor,” had influenza—started, Tilden grinningly suggested, by the chill of Johnny’s disfavor.

Tilden told Marjorie of his early life and struggles. He brought in the mother and the two small brothers, “nice kids,” he meant to send through college. Then, as if feeling that such confidences called for some return, he definitely drew her out about her college career and her aspirations. He seemed surprised and rather pleased to learn that she had no aspirations to confide. Most women had, he reminded her: wanted to do all sorts of things that unfitted them for their big job of being wives and mothers. He showed a desire to know Marjorie’s opinion of this big job, and to be sure she shared his warm approval of it as a sufficient career; but she refused to be drawn. She had never liked Tilden so much, but she realized that he was talking with a purpose. A mental effort to tie up this purpose with the tête-à-tête in

the picture-gallery was manifestly absurd. What relation could they have? Nevertheless, her mind made the effort.

At half-past two the presence of the hired automobile at the door was announced, and Tilden briskly emerged from his comfortable chair and held out his hand.

“Time for me to be off, anyway,” he said, and the intuition she had in common with her sisters told Marjorie he was glad to get away.

“Say good-bye to Miss Kennedy for me, please,” he added as an afterthought.

When Kate reappeared she seemed to have recovered her usual spirits, and showed a gratifying zest for the expedition to Cranford. She also approved of the automobile, and of the uniformed chauffeur, both passionately guaranteed by their proprietor to convince any spectator that they were “private.” This illusion was somewhat dimmed by the too-fervid hospitality of the chauffeur, who seemed convinced that he was the host of the expedition; but his passengers were not critical, and both enjoyed the race along Jersey landscapes that seemed to be racing with them.

At Cranford some time was lost, to the mental anguish of the uniformed chauffeur, whose heart was set on briskly getting back to town and taking more parties for delightful rides. Quinn’s last-minute directions had not been so definite as the old man thought them. But after a great deal of backing and turning and inquiring, which included a visit to a corner grocery and a spirited debate between the grocer and a customer as to where Mrs. Wheeler could be found, it was learned that she was farther along the road they were on, in the hinterlands of the village—“on a farm, like,” the customer said; and the chastened chauffeur, who had now abandoned hope of getting back to New York in time for another trip that day, gloomily took them there.

At sight of the little house which was their destination, Marjorie uttered an exclamation of pleasure. It was a charming cottage, in white and green, with French windows and trellises, its front door approached by a flagged path in a tiny garden, where even yet, in late November, a few chrysanthemums showed brave and brilliant heads. It was a far cry from New York’s reeking tenements, and Marjorie, leaving Kate the helpless victim of the chauffeur’s conversational powers, walked slowly along the flagged path, reflecting that Margaret McManus had come up in the world. There was no sign of life about the little house, save the presence of a chained dog in a white-painted kennel at the rear, urgently giving tongue to his suspicion that this visitor called for close inspection.

Marjorie rang the electric bell, and the door was opened almost immediately by a trim little woman in the middle fifties, with gray hair, a lavender gown, a face like a faded rose, and the figure of a young girl. She was so unexpected an apparition that the caller was sure she was in the wrong place. She had assumed, without giving much thought to this phase of the matter, that Margaret McManus would be as accessible here as in the tenements.

“Mrs. Wheeler?” she asked.

“Yes.” The little woman held her ground with the effect of a sentinel on guard.

“I beg your pardon,” the caller went on, “but . . . I understand that Margaret McManus lives here.”

Mrs. Wheeler produced a hesitant smile.

“Mrs. McManus does live here,” she admitted.

“May I see her? I am a stranger to her,” Marjorie confessed, “but it’s very important that I should talk to her.”

Mrs. Wheeler registered surprise and disapproval.

“Why . . . I don’t see how . . . if you are a stranger . . . Mrs. McManus doesn’t receive visitors.” Her manner changed. “Will you come in?” she added with more assurance.

Marjorie followed her into a small square reception hall, and from that into a room which had something of the delicately faded look of her guide. The white wicker furniture was chintz-covered, but the original rose of the linen had given way under time’s touch to a dim flesh tone—all save a pair of new chintz curtains at a double window, which seemed to blush violently as the stranger came toward them. Nevertheless it was a charming room, with books and gate-legged tables and an open fire. From a distant corner a small rosewood piano grinned with yellow teeth at the caller. Marjorie, chilled by her ride, instinctively made for the fire, and her companion, indicating a chair, dropped into one herself and fixed two faded but intent blue-gray eyes on her.

“Please don’t think I’m inhospitable,” she said, speaking now with the readiness of one who has come to a decision, “but I merely brought you in to explain that Mrs. McManus is an invalid. She very rarely sees anybody except a member of the family. So . . . I . . .” Her pause filled out the sentence.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t know she was physically ill.” Marjorie kept her seat and Mrs. Wheeler, having hoped that she would leave it, and already poised to rise with her, sank back into her own chair. “I don’t want to be insistent,” the visitor apologized, “but, as I’ve said, it’s very important that I should talk to Mrs. McManus, if she can possibly receive me. It won’t take long,” she added urgently, “and I will be very careful not to excite her.” The other’s blue-gray eyes clung to her face. “You’re not her daughter, by any chance?” Marjorie added, conscious of the absurdity of the question but desperately keeping up the conversation. The plump little lady seemed amused.

“Mercy, no!” she said. “Her daughter died years ago. But Mrs. McManus and I live here together, and I’m responsible for her.”

“I understand.” Marjorie did not understand anything, except that she was grimly determined not to leave that house without seeing Margaret McManus.

“If you would give me a hint of what you wished to speak to her about . . .” the other began.

“I shall be glad to. In behalf of some Western friends I’d like to ask her a few questions about a child that was born to her daughter in New York twenty-five years ago.”

Mrs. Wheeler shook her gray head.

“I’m sorry,” she said coldly, “but I am afraid you can’t talk to her about that. It’s a subject that would upset her—” she hesitated again, and then added formally—“very much.”

The door-bell rang and she rose.

“The maid is with Mrs. McManus now, because it’s the nurse’s time off. So, if you will excuse me . . .”

Marjorie rose slowly, submerged by the waters of misgiving but with no real intention of going away. It was plain that she must be more frank with Mrs. Wheeler. She must enlist her sympathy. Having come to this decision, and turning to speak, she found herself alone. Her hostess had hurried to the door, had admitted some one,—probably the returning nurse, Marjorie thought,—and was carrying on with the new-comer a low-toned discussion or argument, of which only the soft murmur of voices was distinguishable. Marjorie stood staring down at the faded rug. Then, hearing a familiar voice, she raised her eyes and met those of Kate.

“I could see you both through the window,” the latter explained as she crossed to the fire. “You won’t mind my coming in, for I’m chilled through. I could tell that you weren’t getting anywhere,” she added, “for this is plainly not the woman you were looking for. Is the other one here?”

“Yes, but she won’t let me see her.” Marjorie’s tone held flat depression. “I’ll see her later, of course, by hook or crook. There must be ways of doing it. Now that I’m so near her, it seems as if I can’t stand the delay.”

Kate turned toward the woman of the house, who was hovering expectantly in the hall, as if directing their attention to that exit.

“Is the patient in pain?” she asked, moving toward the door of the room and speaking to the unwilling hostess.

“No, her trouble is mental. She is over seventy-five, and she has had a stroke.”

“I really think you’d better let my friend see her,” Kate gently suggested. “It is evidently a vital matter with her, and, as you have heard her say, she will keep on trying.”

“But Mrs. McManus won’t speak; she can’t answer questions.”

“If my friend realizes that, she will be satisfied,” Kate pointed out. “Otherwise, she will get in touch, with the doctor and others, and she may have to be admitted, anyway. She feels that she must have the information she is after, or at least that she must make every possible effort to get it. Wouldn’t it be better to let her make the visit and satisfy herself once and for all as to how much or little this . . . Mrs. McManus, is it? . . . can tell her?”

“Perhaps you’re right. But I wish the nurse were here.”

“Is the patient excitable?—inclined to get violent?”

“No, no, nothing like that.” Mrs. Wheeler seemed under the domination of a stronger will than her own. She wavered, her blue-gray eyes on Kate’s face, plainly asking for guidance. “Well . . . if she’ll promise not to stay a minute longer than I think she ought to . . .” she qualified. “And of course if Margaret should get excited, she must leave at once.”

“I’ll promise that,” Marjorie quickly agreed.

“Then it’s all arranged.” Kate sat down by the fire with the air of one whose work is done, and Marjorie, though triumphant, glanced at her with compunction. Perhaps Miss Kennedy didn’t like to be dragged into affairs like this. She was looking tired again, and rather pale. “I’m really chilled

through,” Kate repeated, brightening under her glance. “It’s getting colder every minute, and a big snow-storm is beginning.”

Marjorie followed Mrs. Wheeler out of the room. She had not replied to Kate’s last words because she could not. Her heart was beating in her throat. At the foot of the stairway she stopped, but her guide led her past it.

“She’s on this floor,” she explained, “so that in the summer we can wheel her out on the verandas and into the garden. It’s too cold for that now, though. Wait here a moment, please, and I’ll tell her some one is coming in to see her.”

She disappeared through a door in a rear hall they had entered, leaving the visitor alone, and life stood with its finger on its lips till she returned. Marjorie, holding herself steady with all the strength of her young spirit, told herself that she had felt no such excitement in the tenement-house, though she had been conscious of a shaken heart as she stood before that closed door on the third floor. Here she again faced a closed door, but this time she knew Margaret McManus was beyond it. That made all the difference.

Mrs. Wheeler opened the door from within and nodded invitingly.

“Don’t say or do anything to excite her,” she urged in a low tone as Marjorie passed her. She closed the door but remained in the room, and the girl was vaguely conscious, also, of the presence of a capped and aproned maid, who stood behind a big chair adjusting a pillow and with round eyes taking in the new-comer. These details, and the general effect of the immaculate sick-room, with its French windows past which the snow was now spinning, Marjorie’s mind subconsciously registered. Her conscious observation, so acute as to be almost painful, centered on the figure seated in the big chair. Stopping before it, she looked down upon it, and the figure in its turn seemed drawing on its inner energies to concentrate on her.

The eyes that met her own in a steady stare were the big black eyes Quinn had described, but there was no fierceness in them now, nor other emotion. They gazed unwinkingly and at first without meaning—as unemotionally, indeed, as two jet balls. Then into them crept a shadow of expression, and the woman’s white head bent slowly in apparent recognition of the stranger’s presence. The face in which the eyes were set was big-featured, dark-skinned, and still strong, though the flesh, in appearance rather like soft Spanish leather, hung loosely on its bony structure. The woman’s figure was tall and gaunt. A bright rug was spread over her knees, and on this her brown hands rested immovably. Marjorie went close and laid a hand on one of them.

“How do you do, Mrs. McManus,” she said unsteadily. “It is very kind of you to see me.”

The white head came up again with a little mechanical jerk, and the steady stare of the black eyes was resumed, but the hands did not move, though Marjorie bent and gently pressed the one under her own. Her heart sank. What could she hope to get from this unresponsive human mechanism that had once been Margaret McManus? She took the small chair the maid now offered her, and, drawing it near the invalid, sat down facing her.

“I have come to ask you some questions,” she said very gently and distinctly, “about something that happened long ago. I have come a long way to ask these questions. Will you answer them if you can?”

“Long ago,” said the woman. It was not a question, but merely a mindless repetition, made as a child repeats something that catches its attention. The voice was deep and unexpectedly strong. It filled the room with sound. Marjorie’s excitement was decreasing, as her hope had decreased. No, she would get nothing from this tragic semblance of life. Nevertheless, she would ask her questions.

“It is about your daughter,” she announced, with the painstaking effort of one vainly trying to make another comprehend a strange tongue.

“My daughter!” said the woman. “Lizzie! Poor Lizzie!” The deep voice had changed. The words came out in a senile whimper. “Lizzie’s gone,” she ended, while the gaunt figure rocked slowly back and forth. “So’s her man. They’re both gone.”

“I know. I’m so sorry!” Marjorie bent nearer, thrilled and encouraged. She might get something then, after all, for part of the wrecked mechanism was still working. The black eyes were turned from her, and the rocking figure rocked on.

“Both gone,” crooned Margaret McManus. “Both gone!”

“I’m afraid this isn’t good for her.” Mrs. Wheeler had come to Marjorie’s side to express her growing doubts. “She gets all stirred up when she remembers her daughter.”

Margaret McManus rocked on. “All gone,” she said again, and her strong dark features twitched.

She must have been a striking-looking woman in her time. She was still a striking-looking woman, despite her illness and her seventy-five years. Her black eyebrows and eyelashes were arresting touches under her snow-white

pompadour. Possibly it was the white pompadour and those black eyes and eyebrows that gave her the suggestion of pride and resentment which now began to creep through the shell in which her lonely soul dwelt. Even her rocking and crooning could not quite destroy that effect. Marjorie touched the brown hand and spoke again.

“Mrs. McManus,” she said, “I want to ask you about your daughter’s baby—the baby that was born in the tenement down on Oliver Street. Do you know what became of it?”

The rocking stopped and the black eyes returned to her face. There was expression in them now. Marjorie met them steadily.

“The baby? Lizzie’s baby!”

“Yes, Lizzie’s baby. Do you know what became of Lizzie’s baby?” Marjorie’s breath caught, but she played her last card. “Lizzie’s baby,” she repeated, emphasizing every word, “*and Mr. Blake’s.*”

Into the black eyes fixed on hers came tiny sparks which developed into a glow. Marjorie instinctively shrank back, for the change was rather horrible; but now one of the bony hands caught her arm and held it fast.

“’Twas a crool bargain she made,” the old woman whispered. “’Twas a crool, hard bargain.”

“I know. It was cruel. You had to send Lizzie’s baby to an asylum, didn’t you?”

The old woman rocked and moaned.

“Crool,” she said again. “Crool! Crool!”

“You’ll get nothing more than that out of her,” Mrs. Wheeler decisively announced. She evidently felt that the interview had gone far enough, but Marjorie ignored the interruption. To her, for the moment, Mrs. Wheeler did not exist.

“Do you know what happened to that child, Mrs. McManus, and—where—it—is—now?”

The white head twisted round to her on the lean old neck, and a look of cunning, shot through with triumph, came into the ravaged face.

“She’ll never know!” she brought out in a sharp whisper, and added in the same confidential tone, “she—never—even—ast—was—it—a—boy—or—a—gurl!”

“Well, you’ve got the whole gamut now,” Mrs. Wheeler restively explained, “She says all that over and over, when she gets started. She’ll keep it up all day, after you have gone, and rock back and forth. But you won’t get anything more from her. That’s her entire vocabulary. Or, now I come to think of it, she may say one thing more.”

Marjorie had rather admired Mrs. Wheeler in the first moments of their brief association. Now she regarded her as a buzzing insect. Still, since apparently she must buzz, it would be as well to let her buzz intelligibly.

“How long has Mrs. McManus been like this?” she asked.

“About two years. It seems she has worried all her life over her daughter’s troubles, and two years ago she had a stroke.”

“Then she isn’t insane?”

“Oh, no, though the doctors said she worked herself up to the stroke by brooding and worrying.”

Marjorie spoke irrepressibly:

“Do you know anything about that child?—what became of it and where it is now?”

“I know that when Lizzie was married she and her husband went to an asylum and got a child and legally adopted it.”

“They did! Why, that’s just what I wanted to be sure of. What asylum was it?”

“That I can’t tell you.”

“Was it in New York?”

“I can’t tell you that, either, but I suppose it was.”

Marjorie brought out her final question on a deep breath.

“Where is it now?”

“I can’t tell you that. Mrs. McManus has been with me only three years, you see. And now, I really think—”

The deep voice of the woman in the chair rolled over them like organ tones.

“She—never—even—ast,” it repeated, “was—the—child—a—boy—or—a—gurl!”

Marjorie bent forward, took both the hands, and spoke urgently.

“Which was it, Mrs. McManus? I’m asking you now. Was it a boy or a girl?”

The look of triumphant cunning returned to the old face.

“Whisper!” said Margaret McManus, and followed her own advice. “We was too smart for her!” she hissed, and broke out into a high cackle as elfish as a witch’s laugh.

“That’s the other thing she says,” Mrs. Wheeler announced. “And I give you my word it’s all she ever says. I don’t want to be rude, but you can see that she’s getting excited.”

“You’re absolutely sure she won’t tell me anything more? A great deal depends on this.”

“I’m positive she won’t.”

“Do you know whether Lizzie McManus’s child was a boy or a girl?”

“I can’t tell you. You see, it was all over years before I met Mrs. McManus, and Lizzie and her husband were both dead. Otherwise, of course, she’d be living with them.”

“Who supports her now?”

Mrs. Wheeler flushed.

“Really,” she stiffly pointed out, “I can’t go into her private affairs with you.”

“Of course not. I beg your pardon. I see I’ll have to go at the matter in another way. But what you have told me has helped a great deal. One more question and I’ll go. What was Lizzie McManus’s married name?”

The faded face before her took on an expression that was almost startling. What was it? Confusion, surely, bewilderment—these, certainly, and strong annoyance, too.

“I can’t tell you that.” Mrs. Wheeler had recovered herself and spoke icily, while she opened the door in a manner that could not be ignored. Marjorie bent over Margaret McManus, and again touched the now restless old hands.

“Good-by, Mrs. McManus,” she said. “Thank you for seeing me.”

“Whisper!” cried Margaret McManus imperiously, and with a sudden motion drew the girl’s small head close to her lips.

“We—was—too—smart—for—her!” she hissed, and went off into a prolonged and elfish cachinnation.

The sound followed Marjorie out of the room and through the hall where Kate was now waiting. There was still a suggestion of it, like a faint echo, as Mrs. Wheeler firmly closed the front door almost on the callers' Cuban heels. From his kennel, the suspicious dog hoarsely expressed his relief as he watched the visitors make their way toward the waiting automobile.

CHAPTER XII

LIZZIE'S BABY

“I HOPE you got something,” Kate said, as she adjusted the fur robe over Marjorie’s knees, the stricken chauffeur—his hospitality as exhausted as that of Mrs. Wheeler—being too depressed to offer this attention.

“Only a little,” Marjorie admitted. “But I did get on the trail of an old scandal. It appears that there was a baby in the family ‘without benefit of clergy.’ Evidently that accounted for the McManus disappearance.”

Kate turned on her seat to look at her.

“A baby!”

“Yes.” Marjorie put on a casual air. “There’s a baby in the case. I had heard of it before, and Quinn told me more about it,” she added. “You know how these people pour forth information. The private lives of most of the tenements in Oliver Street were bared to us the day we went there.”

Kate nodded, listening intently.

“It seems that Mrs. McManus had a daughter, Lizzie, and the daughter had a baby,” Marjorie continued, with a successful effort to speak lightly. “It sounds like the house that Jack built. Lizzie wasn’t married, so they had to put the baby into an asylum. They kept everything very quiet. Then, after a year or so, Lizzie married a man who was nobly willing to pardon her past—if he knew anything about it—and they went to the asylum and got a baby and legally adopted it. Of course it must have been the same baby. Later on they both died, and the baby—who would be twenty-five now—has disappeared. I’d like to know what has become of it,” she added on a quick impulse. “That’s really why I’ve been trailing Mrs. McManus, and I may as well confess it. With the start I’ve got I think I can get the rest by putting into the hands of an agency the facts I have.”

“But why do you want to get the rest?”

Marjorie sighed.

“That’s the way my mother talked,” she absently admitted. “She told me the whole story when she was dying. She and my father were killed in an automobile accident when I was seventeen. He died at once, but she lived

several days, and she told me all about the McManus case, so that I could protect myself if the child ever turned up and made claims against me.”

“I see,” Kate said, her eyes on the storm-swept outer world.

“Mother admitted that she was always afraid of that,” Marjorie went on, increasingly willing now to put the facts before this dispassionate observer of life, “for the child really had a claim on a . . . a member of our family who had made some money. Mother had visions of hordes of parasites springing up, as she expressed it, and of a lot of gossip; but poor old Margaret McManus doesn’t look much like a parasite, and somehow I can’t feel that she ever was one.”

“Did you find her what you expected?”

The question was an odd one, and under it Marjorie’s eyebrows rose a trifle, but she answered frankly.

“I hadn’t formed any definite impression of her, except that she was a tenement woman. Now her mind is almost gone, and there’s a good deal that’s uncanny about her. But through it all a sort of strength shows, and from that and her general appearance I couldn’t help feeling that if things had been different with her, if she had been born in another atmosphere and had been given what we call ‘opportunities,’ she would have developed into an unusual woman. She must have been stunning-looking in her youth. She’s the Irish-Spanish type one often finds on the west coast of Ireland, and even yet she looks as haughty as Lucifer.”

“Evidently your mother didn’t agree with you,” Kate observed, ignoring all but the parasitic possibilities of the case. “But probably she had never met Mrs. McManus.”

Apparently Marjorie did not hear the comment.

“The change in the old woman’s condition gives one something to think about,” she thoughtfully went on. “She and her daughter were very poor when the baby was born, down in that tenement, and they were poor for years afterwards, according to Quinn. Yet she’s spending her last years in a charming cottage, with a trained nurse and every care and comfort, so it’s clear that some one is looking after her. Who would, who could, look after her except that baby, grown up now and able to do it?”

The baby had thrust itself into the conversation once more, unwanted, and very much as it had thrust itself into life.

“Was it a boy?”

“I couldn’t even learn that, or what Lizzie’s married name was. Poor old Mrs. McManus kept repeating a few sentences again and again, principally about some *‘she’* she evidently has hated all her life. The little I did get was from Mrs. Wheeler, the woman who let us in, and she was very vague.”

“It’s rather surprising to me that you should want to trace the baby,” Kate reflectively contributed. “He might be anything—a thug, an outlaw. Yet if he’s your half-brother he’d have at least a moral claim—”

“Did I say he was my half-brother?”

The manner of the speaker was that of Miss Blake of Blakesville, and the words were like icicles dropping from a height, but Kate Kennedy was unimpressed.

“No, you didn’t, but of course it’s the natural inference from what you did say. Dying women don’t talk of such things unless they are vital. I’m sorry I put it into words,” she added, “if that annoyed you.”

Marjorie drew a quick breath. “It never has been put into words so bluntly,” she admitted, “and . . . it was a shock to hear it. It reflects on my father . . . and I adored him.”

There was a short silence. Then Marjorie continued, impelled by her desire for sympathy and counsel, but even more by her persistent feeling that this woman could be trusted:

“I don’t know why I’m telling you all this, but I’m sure I can safely do it. For years, Mother said, she couldn’t really feel certain that Father was . . . that he had . . . But one night a few years before they were killed he suddenly confessed the whole thing to her, and she knew that what Margaret McManus had told her was true. After that she and Father made efforts to trace the child, with the idea of protecting me against any trouble in the future—”

“Not to do anything for him, then?” Kate interpreted.

“I’m afraid they didn’t think much about him,” Marjorie admitted, flushing. “At least, my mother didn’t. I don’t know how Father felt about it. You see, I was their only child, born two years after the McManus episode, and they both worshiped me. My mother almost went mad in her last hours, thinking of me alone in the world; and her worst fear was that the McManus clan might do me some injury. If she had been hard on Lizzie and Mrs. McManus—and she told me that she had been—she paid for it in those hours.”

“Yet you’re deliberately looking for trouble, after her warning,” Kate brought out. “That seems strange to me.”

“I suppose it does,” Marjorie admitted, sighing. “But I have reasons—Heavens, what a blizzard!” she interrupted herself to exclaim.

In their interest in the conversation neither had noticed how rapidly the snow-storm had increased in force. The windows of the limousine were coated with sleet, and through the narrow fan-shaped clearing made by the electric brush on the wind-shield, directly in front of the chauffeur’s eyes, they saw the storm as whirling white chaos, riding on a hoarse wind. Already the driver had difficulty in keeping to the road, and now, realizing that their attention was at last centered on him and the weather, he grumpily stopped the car and, getting out, put chains on the rear tires, while he reproached the universe with his heart in the words.

In the closed limousine the two girls, unconscious of this underlining of the outer wildness, and weary of the view of the heaving, troubled back below a rear window, detached their attention from him and followed their different thoughts. When he had resumed his seat and the car was struggling onward, Kate revealed the nature of her reflections.

“You say your mother’s only object in telling you about this unknown menace was to protect you from trouble?” she asked.

“Yes. That is, she wanted me to know the truth, so that I’d be able to act intelligently if anything came out.”

“Exactly. Do you want me to tell you how the situation looks to me?”

“Please do. I told you the story because I wanted your advice.”

“I thought you did.” Kate leaned back and spoke oracularly but with a slight increase of her usual air of detachment from her subject.

“Putting together all you’ve told me, we have these facts: Twenty-five years have passed since that child was born, I think you said, and you and your family have never been approached in any way by any claimant. That’s true, isn’t it? Or is there a chance that your father was approached and didn’t tell your mother about it?”

“No. She told me in those last talks that neither he nor she ever had any aftermath of the affair.”

“Yet that didn’t reassure her? She was still afraid of blackmail and parasites?”

“She thought the explanation was that she and Father had covered their tracks so carefully. Father never changed his last name, but it wasn’t uncommon, and he used his middle name and dropped his first. They had moved away out West, and neither he nor Mother ever referred to their two years in New York. Even I didn’t know they had lived here. They simply dropped those two years out of their lives. But Mother believed the McManus people were always searching for him. She lived in terror of them, and she died in terror.”

“Then . . . surely you see how wise it would be to let well enough alone! Stirring up the matter, after all these years, not only would blacken your father’s reputation but it might cause you an endless amount of trouble and publicity.”

“I’m not so naïve as I may seem,” Marjorie submitted rather restively. “Of course I’m not going out into the market-places to shout for a long-lost brother or sister. My idea is to have a quiet, exhaustive search made. I myself needn’t appear in it at all, and the other side won’t know anything about it. But I’ll learn all I can from the agency, and then, when the child is found, perhaps I can meet my brother or sister, whichever it is, in some seemingly natural way, and get my own impressions.”

“But you’re taking chances all the time,” Kate pointed out. “You took one in the Oliver Street tenement, and another in the real-estate office, and a third when you talked to Quinn. Suppose he had put two and two together. Why shouldn’t he? And you took the biggest chance of all by visiting Mrs. McManus to-day. Both Quinn and Mrs. Wheeler know now that you are interested in the McManus baby.”

“I had a plausible explanation ready, if it were needed,” Marjorie defended herself. “And—” she brought out the last sentence defiantly—“I’ve protected myself by changing my name.”

As Kate took this in silence she went on.

“I changed my whole plan after I saw Mrs. McManus. She and Mrs. Wheeler are the only persons of whom I’ve asked any direct questions. Certainly in Mrs. McManus’s case it seemed safe enough, and Mrs. Wheeler doesn’t seem like a gossip. Of course I was reassured by the surroundings, too. I have a persistent hunch or intuition, or whatever you please to call it, that Lizzie’s son . . . or daughter . . . is taking care of Margaret. And if he, or she, is doing it in that fashion, surely I needn’t be afraid of him . . . or of her; need I?”

“It’s odd what snobs we all are, at heart,” Kate reflected aloud.

Marjorie flushed.

“I admit that I like cleanliness better than dirt, and breeding better than vulgarity, and education better than ignorance,” she said, with some heat. “If that makes me a snob, I am one.”

“It’s an interesting speculation,” Kate conceded, undisturbed by the snub. “Suppose you found your half-brother a coal-heaver? Or, if the baby happened to be a girl, suppose you found her a servant, as her mother was. What then?”

“That’s really about what I expected to find when I came on,” Marjorie confessed. “Now I don’t think it will be that way.”

“But if it is,” Kate persisted. “How would you feel?”

“Disappointed.”

“But if you should find the new relation some one in your own class, in the matter of education at least, what then?”

“I’ve thought about that a lot—” Marjorie began.

The automobile stopped. During their talk and their stretches of silence it had forced its way onward through the increasing drifts. Now it was on a ferry-boat headed for Liberty Street, and the driver, calmed by the knowledge of work well done, and with time on his hands, proceeded to wipe out any unpleasant impressions of his personality which his passengers might have formed in his unguarded moments. They learned that it had been “some job” to get them to this safe refuge; that they had unseeingly passed four disabled cars whose drivers, unlike their own, were unfitted by lack of skill to cope with the elements; that their driver was a married man “raisin’ a fam’ly,” and that the wages paid to expert drivers wasn’t what they should be. Drivers was largely dependent on their tips, and, while the ladies wouldn’t believe it, there had been parties so lost to shame as to reward him, the speaker, with a twenty-five-cent tip after an expedition like this. How did such parties think a man was goin’ to live? The monologue continued till the car left the ferry-boat. At the entrance of the Gramercy Park house a tendency to resume it was checked by a few words of appreciation from Miss Brown, accompanied by a tip that edged the storm-clouds with sunshine.

“I suppose you know you’re frightfully extravagant,” Kate remarked as they entered the hall, and smiled her whimsical smile over the other’s quick

retort.

“I never spend more than my income,” Marjorie pridefully declared. It was the start and finish of her knowledge of finance. She did not add that, notwithstanding earnest and long-continued efforts on her part, generous donations to charity and the existence of various dependents at Blakesville, she had never yet succeeded in spending all of the income itself.

CHAPTER XIII

MARJORIE IS WARNED

NOVEMBER passed into December, and December swept the world toward Christmas. The shops were crowded, and the crisp, cool outer air was also full of the Yule-tide spirit. To Marjorie it seemed full of wings as well. She was living at last. She could not feel that she had accomplished much, but surely she was on the way to accomplishment. She was wholly well, and deeply interested. The disquiet which had tortured her during her first days in New York had almost disappeared, except at moments. She was living more simply than ever before, yet she was surrounded by a circle of attentive friends—friends who apparently liked Marjorie Brown and knew nothing of Miss Blake of Blakesville.

Her liking for Kate Kennedy increased with every day the two were together, yet she continued to have glimpses of that strange personality which were hard to understand. On the business side of their relation Miss Kennedy was as perfect as her manner, which was attentive, deferential, proudly un-self-conscious. As time passed it held an increasingly friendly warmth, like an unspoken response to Marjorie's growing affection. Yet never for one moment did the new-comer lose the feeling that for some reason Kate Kennedy was constantly on her guard. Tilden, too, had the air of one who watches himself closely, and there were moments—only a few of these—when Marjorie looked into the black gulf of a suspicion that they both disliked her.

Toward Marjorie herself Tilden's manner remained unchanged. He called constantly, he sent her flowers and chocolates, he seated her at his right when she and Kate dined with him. He did not again advise her to marry young Kemp, and he apparently did not consider Osgood in the matrimonial running, though that flamboyant youth was now spending much time in New York, and often included Tilden in the luncheons, dinners, and theater parties he was constantly giving for Miss Brown.

As Marjorie had been promised, she was seeing many phases of New York life; and it seemed tacitly agreed that the affluent Osgood and Kemp should show her the city's gay and expensive side, while Tilden and Bob Kennedy took her to its table d'hote restaurants, its picture palaces, its out-of-the-way places of interest, its art galleries and museums. To and from

these diversions they escorted her in street cars, subways, and occasional taxicabs, which were in strong contrast to the luxurious automobiles of Osgood and Kemp; and they put her in touch with large numbers of delightful men and women who did unusual and interesting work. She became a familiar and popular figure in up-town and down-town studios. She met and liked and admired dozens of painters, actors, and actresses. She followed the new and increasing activities of women in the working world. Under the roof of one building in Greenwich Village she met women who made, baked, and decorated pottery; women who did block printing and Batik dyeing; women who made jewelry; women who taught barefoot dancing and women who painted the legs of dancers; women who made and operated marionettes; and women who made the new patch posters. In varying degrees she liked and admired them all, but her intimate circle still consisted of the first friends she had made: Kate and Bob Kennedy, Osgood and Horace Kemp junior, and Doctor Tilden.

Once the circle had widened a trifle, as if to take in Richard Grant, who had called several times and escorted her to dinners and theaters. But after making a steadfast observation of Mr. Grant on these occasions, Marjorie had again narrowed her circle, leaving him on the outside. He did not fuse with the rest. He knew who she was and, as the phrase goes, "all about her." Once or twice she had fancied herself catching, in his steady eyes, the acquisitive gleam of an ambitious young man who sees a golden apple on the tree of life. To consider him seriously would not be fair to the rest. Moreover, nothing about him intrigued her or drew her toward him. Miss Brown edged away, and Grant, who knew when he was in a losing game, and whose heart was not really in this one, philosophically accepted her reestablishment of their relations on purely business lines.

Marjorie's interest in the workers of the world was increasing as she observed those she already knew and was newly meeting, but her own vague aspiration to work had perished. She had made more discoveries about herself. She was convinced that she would never do any work above the average. She justified her present existence by her continued efforts in behalf of her two serious purposes—the one to find a husband, the other to find the child of Lizzie McManus. The latter now consisted of reading frequent agency reports which reported no progress. The former, she believed in certain moods, had resolved itself into a choice between Tilden and Osgood. Embarrassingly, neither of them seemed to realize that there might be such a choice. Tilden's manner was that of an interested friend. Osgood, despite his frequent appearances, was as unemotional as Kate Kennedy herself. If Marjorie wanted Tilden, Kate Kennedy would help her

to get him. Indeed, Miss Kennedy seemed determined that she should get him whether she wanted him or not. If Marjorie wanted the Sun God, it began to look as if she must "go after him," to quote her own words to Penny. At present she was not sure she wanted either of them. She was merely sure she did not want any other man she knew, and this represented a certain progress. Also it represented another chastening discovery. Seemingly none of the other men wanted her! It is only in fiction, she decided, that a girl bowls over every man she meets.

Both girls had become accustomed to the sight of figures rising from "the anxious bench," as Kate called the big hall settle; therefore, returning to Gramercy Park on a late afternoon just before Christmas, neither was surprised by the presence of a waiting caller. It was, however, a little disconcerting to them both to have the caller Horace Kemp senior, and Marjorie, as she gave him her hand, was conscious, also, of a twinge of conscience. He had tried to be kind to her, and he must feel that she was shockingly ungrateful. The small boy in buttons handed Kate a letter and posed in an attitude of conscious ease.

"This was to be gave to you soon's you come in," he explained, adding expansively, "an' your tel'phone's been ringin' ever since you an' Miss Brown an' Doctor Tilden went out after lunch."

The three entered the living-room together, where Kate, having torn open and glanced at her note, hastily excused herself and went on into her own room. Marjorie was surprised and rather shocked. She knew that, notwithstanding their years of association, Kate did not really like the Kemps, and she had also formed the impression that Kemp senior did not greatly admire Kate. But it was not like Miss Kennedy to leave any caller in a fireless room without the suggestion of tea. Marjorie directed this caller to one of the wing chairs and, declining his offer of assistance, touched blazing matches to the waiting logs and started a fire. Summoning the buttoned boy, she ordered tea and toast and cake sent up from the dining-room, and in preparation for this refreshment put a small table between herself and Kemp and took the second arm-chair. Outwardly she was accepting the visit as naturally as if Kemp called every day, but she was curious to know what had brought him there. She was sure his call was for her alone, and she believed that Kate also held this conviction.

Kemp showed no intention of immediately revealing the purpose of his visit, if he had one. Seated comfortably in the big chair, with his head against its back, his well-shaped hands lightly resting on its broad arms, his knees crossed and one admirably shod foot swaying easily back and forth,

he watched his hostess while she arranged the table. In the first moments of his arrival he had severely condemned the weather—snow was falling again—and he did not speak after doing so until the tea came, though his hostess, as she moved about, filled the interval with a cheerful monologue. When she sat down and handed him his first cup of tea, he drank the liquid without a stop, declining with a brusque gesture the toast and cake. Then, setting the empty cup on the table between them, he accepted with a nod her suggestion to refill it, and fixed on her face with sudden intentness the tragic blue eyes that must once have been so like his son's.

“Well, when are you coming to work?” He jerked out.

“I was going to telephone you to-morrow morning,” Marjorie began guiltily. “I'm afraid you think I'm very ungrateful—”

“Never mind all that, young lady.” She had at least graduated in his address from “young woman” to “young lady.” “Are you going to take the job I've offered you?”

Marjorie was not accustomed to interruptions nor to such brusque manners, and her response was immediate and characteristic.

“No, I'm not,” she said as curtly as he had spoken, and added hastily, “but thank you very much, just the same.”

He grinned sardonically. She could not have pleased him better than by that back-fire. From the first her spirit had interested him.

“Not coming, eh?” he said. “Why not?”

“I don't want to take any position. And even if I did, something else might come up that I'd like better, or find more promising.”

He frowned. This, to the president of the Kemp Publishing Company, was a black affront.

“You won't. But if you should, is there anything to prevent you from dropping us and taking it?”

“Possibly not, though I fancy one wouldn't get away from you very easily. But I don't want to go to work. I have some personal matters to attend to that take a lot of time. Please believe that I appreciate your offer,” she ended earnestly, remorseful over her earlier brusqueness. Apparently he did not hear her. He had joined his finger-tips together, thrust out his lower lip, and was studying her with an effect of frowning indecision, surprising because it was so unusual. At last, as if he had decided what to do, he leaned across the small table between them and spoke with deliberate emphasis.

“Young lady,” he said, “hasn’t it occurred to you yet that you’ve made a wrong start here?”

His manner underlined the meaning of his words, and Marjorie, surprised but hardly grasping what she heard, met his eyes with dismay in her own.

“I don’t understand,” she began.

“Of course you don’t; that’s the trouble. And you’ve got to understand. That’s what I’m here for—to make you understand. Not that it’s a pleasant job,” he added with something like a sigh, “but the braying young ass that calls himself my son put it up to me, and I guess for once in his calamitous life he’s right.”

The explanation, brief though it was, had given her time to think.

“What I’ve come for,” Kemp added, going straight to his point without further introduction, “is to ask you what the devil you think you’re doing here, and to tell you to get out.”

Marjorie’s lips and jaws set.

“I don’t know what you mean, Mr. Kemp,” she said stiffly. “I can’t believe that you are warning me against Miss Kennedy, as you seem to be doing. I understand that you have known her for years, and that she was an intimate friend of your daughter—”

“If you’ll stop talking for a few minutes, and give me a chance, you will understand,” her temperamental visitor snapped, while his hostess bit her suffering under lip. Kemp deserved all the disagreeable things that were said of him, and she was amazed by the fierce uprush of loyalty for Kate his words aroused in her. Nevertheless she was able to realize that the thin-lipped and sardonic man before her was trying, however misguidedly, to do her a kindness.

“I beg your pardon,” she murmured.

“I guess it’s the other way about,” he surprisingly admitted. “I suppose I ought to be begging yours. I’ve got a job on my hands that’s hard for us both,” he went on with a new quality in his voice. “I ought to be making it as easy as I can. But I’m no good at this sort of thing, and if that pricked gas-bag had done his duty, I shouldn’t have had to tackle it.” His voice, strong and clear as he denounced his offspring, ended on a flat note of depression. “But he didn’t see quite how he could do it when he had been here so much as Kate’s guest . . .” he went on uncertainly.

“That would make it harder for him to attack her in her absence,” Marjorie coldly agreed. Her whole soul was up in arms. The passionate loyalty of the Blake clan to anything they had or had annexed fought for Kate, and with it fought the familiar element of faith in her new friend, and the growing affection she felt for her. She must listen to this well-meaning bungler, unless she could keep him from saying more. She could not. Kemp senior, disgusted with his job, but robustly determined to put it through, went on with the effect of a surgeon taking up his knife for the first incision.

“What I’ve got to tell you, young lady,” he said crisply, “is that you ought not to be here with Kate Kennedy. Mind you,” he hastened to add, “that’s no reflection on her character. Kate’s a hard-working girl, and morally as straight as a girl can be.”

“Oh, then—” the strain she was experiencing made Marjorie turn to frivolity to cloak her feelings—“in that case perhaps it’s my influence over her you’re afraid of!”

“Don’t be a fool! If that’s what I was driving at, I’d have warned Kate, not you.”

The rebuke was deserved and she took it meekly.

“Then what—”

“Be quiet!” he rasped. “What I’m getting at is this. Leaving her position and moral character entirely out of the question, you’ve got to get away from Kate Kennedy. It was to get you away that my son and I offered you a job. We thought if you were in the office every day we could keep an eye on you. If you had taken the job we’d have said nothing about Kate—for the present anyway. But when you refused it I realized that you had to be told.”

Marjorie’s nerves broke.

“Told!” she snapped. “Told what? For Heaven’s sake, *what* am I to be told and why aren’t you telling me?”

“It isn’t so easy. And . . . I may not be able to convince you.”

Kemp’s quiet manner was now in strong contrast with her growing excitement. He took off his nose-glasses and drawing a handkerchief from his pocket, wiped them carefully, keeping his eyes on the work as he did so.

“And yet what I’ve got to tell you is simple,” he said, when he had put on the glasses and returned the handkerchief to his pocket. “There’s no sense in beating about the bush. You ought not to be living with Kate Kennedy

because Kate Kennedy isn't a friend of yours. That's all there is to it. But it's enough."

He rose as if his visit was ended, and looked vaguely about for his hat and coat. Marjorie rose also and faced him with hot eyes.

"No, Mr. Kemp, it isn't enough," she heatedly assured him. "You can't say that sort of thing and go away. It would be contemptible. You've got to explain."

"Oh, no, I haven't." Kemp spoke with decision. "My part of the job's over. I've done what I promised the boy I'd do, since he insisted it would come better from me. He'll be here in a few minutes—I rather expected him before this—and he can tell you as much more as he thinks best." He looked at her shrewdly. "I guess when we come down to brass tacks, what I've said isn't news to you. You must have noticed some things about Kate that have made you uneasy . . ."

Marjorie stared past him and through the window. His entire matter-of-factness had driven home his words as no excitement could have done.

"I did when I first came East with her," she heard herself admitting. "But ___"

"Of course you did. You're no fool. You've seen that Kate Kennedy was working you for something—that she had some scheme up her sleeve. And even if you hadn't brains enough to see that, you surely have realized, haven't you, that the creature hates you?"

"I . . . I . . ." Marjorie's voice broke. "I'm afraid she does hate me, at times," she confessed. "I've always suspected it, really, but I wouldn't admit it, even to myself. And yet—"

"Well, then, if you know it, get out of here. That's the only sensible thing to do, isn't it?"

"I suppose so. If I can't trust Miss Kennedy, I've got to get out."

"I tell you, the girl hates you. She's got some scheme—"

He stopped as Kate walked toward them from the rear end of the room. How long she had been there, neither Kemp nor Marjorie knew. She was dressed as she had been when she entered the house, even to her rubbers and gloves. Both observers noticed the gray pallor of her face and the strained look in her eyes, and to each the same thought came, followed by the same question. She had heard. How much had she heard? The next instant she was speaking to Marjorie.

“I’ve had a message,” she explained, in a tone that forbade comment or question, “and I’m going out at once. I sha’n’t be back to dinner. In fact, I don’t know when I shall be back. Don’t wait up for me.” She turned to Kemp. “I’m sorry I missed your call, Uncle Horace,” she said more naturally. “You’ll forgive me, won’t you?”

He muttered an indistinguishable word or two, and both stood watching Kate as she walked to the door leading to the outer hall. For an instant only she stood there, her hand on the knob. Then, she looked back at them, and at the expression in her eyes Marjorie started forward with a little rush. Before she could reach the door it opened and closed, and they heard Kate’s steps hurrying along the hall.

Marjorie returned slowly to her companion, and Kemp took off his eyeglasses again and looked at them severely. Both felt like survivors of a wreck.

“She heard us,” he said at last. “Yes, she heard us,” he added inconsequently. “She hasn’t called me ‘Uncle Horace’ for years—not since she used to spend her vacations with my girl. She did it to remind me how Susie loved her. Susie made her call me ‘Uncle Horace.’” He wiped his glasses again. “Lord, what a mess! It makes me feel like a whipped dog.”

“I don’t think she heard everything. In fact, I’m sure she didn’t. She wouldn’t let herself. I think she got our last sentences while she was coming in. They’d be enough. Just what were they? Do you remember?”

He reflected, his air so like that of a chastised small boy that Marjorie had a hysterical impulse to laugh.

“Let me see,” he was saying. “You were admitting that you couldn’t trust her, and I was telling you she hated you and had some scheme. I guess she heard that, all right.” As if the recollection of his words had strengthened his case in his own mind, he added with a quick, straight look at her. “You’ve noticed a lot of queer things, haven’t you?”

Marjorie could not answer. Her imagination had always played odd tricks with her, and the recent incident seemed to have stimulated it to hectic efforts. Kate had passed through that door with something of the dignity, majesty, and finality of a dead body borne away. In Kate’s eyes, too, there had been more than a suggestion of final farewell. Marjorie dropped into the wing chair, and, turning half around, buried her face in its back while waves of desolation rolled over her. She had tried to believe that at least she had a friend, and now she must admit that she had no friend. If Kemp was right

she had never had a friend in Kate. If he was wrong Kate would never forgive those overheard sentences. The continued presence of her visitor was unendurable and she heard herself crying out against it.

“Go away,” she gulped childishly. “Go away. You’ve done harm enough.”

“I guess I’ve made a mess of it, all right,” Kemp admitted. “But that doesn’t affect the facts, young lady. Your eyes are opened, anyhow.”

The next moment the sound of the closing door told her he had left her alone.

CHAPTER XIV

TWO PROPOSALS

MARJORIE wrapped her garment of misery around her and buttoned it close. Then, drawing from its side pocket, as it were, the bitter incidents of the past half-hour, she held them up and reviewed each in turn.

She had lost her new friend, who was also her first friend and would be her last as well; for then and there she abjured friendship. If this had been friendship—and surely on her side it had been, since only the real thing could so shatter the soul—she wanted no more of it. The price life asked for it was too high, even for a girl who had never counted the cost of anything.

For a long time she crouched before the fire,—she was on the floor in front of it now, her elbows on her knees and her chin in her hands,—trying to look at the situation with eyes clear of illusion. She had admitted to Kemp what she had hardly admitted to herself. She had realized, however unwillingly, that there were moments when Kate Kennedy hated her. But she had not confessed to Kemp the other discovery she had made. Unlike him, she even knew what Kate had up her sleeve. Looked at casually, Kate's little plot seemed a harmless feminine thing, and Marjorie had insisted on looking at it casually till her eyes and nerves ached. Now, in the light of Kemp's words and Kate's manner, she realized what it was. Her thoughts made their repeated, dreary rounds, and their conclusion, like their journey, was always the same. She was through with friendship.

Nevertheless, she had no intention of sharing either her decision or her discovery with any other human being, nor of listening to further attacks on Kate. Young Horace's brisk tap at the door, his informal "May I come in?" were bugle-calls to battle. Here he was, to develop what his father had said. All right, let him try to do it. Marjorie might admit the truth to her own soul but never to him. She straightened her shoulders and sat waiting, like a soldier in the tense moment before going over the top; but after one look at her visitor most of her fighting-spirit died. There would be no satisfaction in defeating this opponent, who looked beaten even as he came toward her.

"I met Father down in the hall," he listlessly mentioned, stopping beside her but not offering to shake hands. "We've been talking there a long time.

He told me what happened.”

He turned and stared at the fire, as if there could be no more to say, and Marjorie, though dazed by this unexpected surrender, took immediate advantage of it.

“I don’t want to hear any more,” she said. “About Miss Kennedy, I mean.”

“No,” Horace agreed. “I’m not going to say anything more,” he added as an afterthought, and sat down beside her on the rug.

“It’s good of you not to send me away,” he brought out, his eyes on the fire.

“If you’re going to stay, please don’t talk.”

For what seemed a long time—fifteen minutes, perhaps—both sat in silence. Then, “Can’t I talk about something else?” Horace asked. “I think I’d better. Won’t it divert your mind?”

She hardly recognized this new Horace, so serious, so suddenly understanding.

“Talk if you care to,” she said indifferently, wondering how any one could wish to talk. “But not about—”

“I want to talk about you,” Horace began, “and about me. I want to tell you what a darling you are and what an utter chump and failure I am. I’ve muffed everything, even the service I tried to do you to-day. Oh, I’m not going to talk about that,” he hastily explained as she made a sudden movement. “This isn’t the time. It isn’t the time to talk about myself, either,” he added bleakly, “or to ask what I want to ask you. But . . . you’re awfully alone, Marjorie, and I’ve simply got to say what’s on my mind. You’ll let me, won’t you?”

“I suppose so,” Marjorie sighed.

“I’ve been measuring myself up and trying to look at myself with your eyes,” he continued, clasping his knees with his arms in an unconscious imitation of her pose, “and I feel a little sick. I suppose every fellow has that sensation when the right girl comes along, though he doesn’t admit it any more. The usual thing is to tell the girl she’s got you, and ask her to take the hook out of your mouth, and assume that she’ll do it. I suppose that’s the way I’d have talked to you even yesterday. To-day I can’t. To-day I’m just a little boy, lost and lonely, and crying for home.” He turned to her. “You’re home, Marjorie,” he ended quietly. “You know that, don’t you?”

She shook her head, as if to brush something away.

“Don’t talk nonsense, to-day of all days,” she begged, listening to the hoarse wind that rattled the casements.

“I’m not talking nonsense. But I’ll shut up, if you’d rather I did.”

Some sense of his unhappiness reached her and drew a sympathetic response from her own misery.

“It’s hard to take you seriously. I don’t think I’ve ever seen you serious before,” she said, more naturally.

“You’re seeing it now. And I’m telling you some things I want you to know. The first is the way I felt when I met you on the train. I’ve been an awful fool. I’ve made love to dozens of girls, as Kate warned you. I never pretended to be serious about it, and they all knew I wasn’t. But when I met you, life and everything about it simply and completely changed. I never imagined such a thing could happen, and I don’t pretend to understand it. One hour I was a bored young man with a cinder in my eye, going back to Dad and the harrow because I couldn’t help myself. The next I was making a little journey through the heavenly bodies, and most of them were singing together the way they’re supposed to do when things are all right—”

“Oh, *please* don’t be foolish!”

“If this is foolishness, I’ll never be wise. But it seems to me I’ve got a lot of wisdom lately. Of course I realized that I’d have to go slow—”

“That’s why you didn’t tell me all this during our first breakfast on the train, I suppose,” she wearily suggested.

He grinned wanly.

“That was it. Knew it wouldn’t do. Wanted to, but I had sense enough to realize that I’d queer the whole show by speaking too soon, especially after Kate had warned you of the sort I was—”

He stopped short and glanced at her out of the corner of an eye, wondering how she would take the mention of Kate. She did not take it at all. Indeed, he doubted if she had heard him. She sat beside him, so close that their arms almost touched, unseeing eyes on the blaze, at least half her thoughts, he knew, busy with matters in which he had no part. He shifted his position so that he could look at her more easily. She wouldn’t mind. She wouldn’t even know that he was doing it. He fed his hungry eyes.

She looked like an unhappy child, too proud to admit her unhappiness. The room was growing dark, but she seemed oblivious of the need of lights. The firelight formed a halo around her small bobbed head. She had wept, and her eyes were red. So was her little nose. She was not so pretty as he saw her in his dreams, yet he thought she had never been so lovely. He had an almost uncontrollable impulse to soothe and comfort her. It seemed to him that he would give his life to make her smile. For at least those few moments Horace Kemp junior was sincerely and magnificently unselfish.

“I wish I could do something for you,” he muttered, under the urge of this fine emotion.

“You can’t. No one can.” She at last put into words the thought that filled her mind. “I wish I had stayed home where I belonged, among my own people,” she added brokenly, and, to her horror and his, burst into tears.

Horace slipped an arm inside of one of hers, and held it closely. It was all he dared to do, but his heart sank within him. He knew many things she did not know, and which he could not tell her. He knew what the next forty-eight hours must bring to her. He could not warn her. He could only press her arm and utter comforting sounds, such as he might have murmured over the child she seemed to be in this hour. At last she wiped her eyes.

“I’m an idiot,” she gulped. “But if you knew the high hopes I carried away from home less than three months ago!”

“I can imagine them.”

“No, you can’t. I didn’t realize, myself, how big they were, till I watched them crumble. I thought I was ready to take anything that came, good, bad or indifferent; but I wasn’t. I expected it all to be wonderful. And from the very first everything went wrong. There was the wreck and poor Penny’s death. And then . . . since then . . . I’ve been shutting my eyes and ears and trying to convince myself that I didn’t see what I saw or hear what I heard. Sometimes I could do it and feel happy for a little while. But always, underneath, I knew . . .”

She stopped. She had given him his opening, and now he could make his explanation, could defend himself. But he sat silent and at last she went on:

“I smile at myself when I think how artless and young I was. I’ll never be young again, Horace.”

It was the first time she had used his Christian name, and his heart jumped. But he merely pressed the arm he still held in his. This made her realize that he held it, which she had not known before, and she took it

away, leaving him as lonely as she was herself. He again clasped his hands around his knees, to control their impulse toward her, and answered her last words.

“Oh, you’ll be young, all right! But I know how you feel, and I oughtn’t to take advantage of an hour of depression. I know that lots of girls marry fellows simply because the girls are unsettled and unhappy when the fellows ask them. I’ve seen it work out badly sometimes, too. But, Marjorie, I can’t help feeling that you and I could go on comfortably, even if you don’t love me—and I’ve got sense enough to know you don’t. Perhaps you might, after we’re married. Anyway, it’s clear enough that you’re terribly alone. You need some one to stand between you and the world. I love you. Won’t you let me take care of you?” He stopped and waited, and when she did not answer he added, more naturally than he had yet spoken. “See here, Marjorie, I’m asking you to marry me! Will you do it?”

She shook her head.

“Dear boy, of course I won’t.”

“Why not?”

“For a dozen reasons, but two will do. The first is that I don’t love you. The second is that I like you too well to let you make a mistake. Some girl will adore you some day, and you’ll marry her and be happy ever after.”

With a despairing gesture he demolished this fair picture.

“I’ll never look at another girl,” he gloomily assured her, and thought he meant it.

Marjorie laughed shakily, and scrambled to her feet before he could rise to help her. There is something stimulating in almost any proposal of marriage, and she felt more normal. One can’t remain forever at the bottom of a pit.

“I’m going to send you home now,” she warned him.

“Won’t you let me take you out to dinner?” he asked, rising unwillingly.

“No, thanks. I’m not in the mood.”

“Then let me dine here with you? Kate’s not coming home, you know. Father told me,” he hastily added, in response to her look of surprise.

“No. I’ve reached the point where, like a heroine of fiction, I ‘want to be alone.’ Good night, and thank you for trying to comfort me. It was nice of

you to ask me to marry you," she added in a tone and with a smile that warmed the words.

He took both her hands and briskly reverted to his more familiar personality.

"It's a standing offer," he cheerfully assured her. "Whenever things go wrong with you, when a new dress doesn't fit or you're disappointed in a meal, say to yourself: 'Never mind. There's that sterling young man, Horace Kemp,—rich, gifted, charming, eligible in every way,—ready at the crack of the whip to mush through the storms of life with me.' That'll buck you up. See if it doesn't."

"I shall always like you, Horace," she told him at the door.

"You bet you will. You'll probably be godmother to my first infant. Good-by, then, if you're determined to throw me out into the blizzard."

She went to a window, watched him cross the street and strike off toward Fourth Avenue, and glanced at her watch with a sigh. There was much to think of and plan for. Of course she must leave the Gramercy Park house tomorrow. Perhaps she'd stop flirting with life and go home. Casting a farewell look at the storm, she saw a familiar figure on the opposite sidewalk and recognized it by its walk. It was Tilden, and at the sight of him a cold chill touched her spirit. He was coming to call; she was sure of that, equally sure she did not want another tête-à-tête, and surest of all that she did not want one with him. He had lunched with them that day and after luncheon Kate had left him alone with Marjorie in a rather ostentatious fashion. The girl had no wish to see him again so soon.

She opened the door, however, in response to his ring, and, as in Horace's case, was struck by the seriousness of his expression. Everybody was amazingly serious to-day. She was glad of that.

Tilden took the second lounging-chair when she had dropped into the first, and, with a rather resentful glance at the little table, waved away the suggestion of fresh tea.

"It's too late," he said, "almost six, and I've only dropped in for a few minutes. It's rushing things to come here again this afternoon, but I didn't have a chance after lunch to say all I wanted to say."

He stopped and seemed to have difficulty in finding his next words. She looked at him curiously, interested in the change in him. He was intensely nervous, but a sort of desperate determination enveloped him like a garment. He was actually gripping the arms of the chair as he leaned toward her.

“Marjorie,” he abruptly announced, “I’ve come back to ask you to marry me. Will you?”

There was a moment of silence, in which Marjorie dully told herself that life was like that. Everything comes at once.

“No,” she then said, in the tone he had used. “I will not.”

She did not turn her head as she spoke, but from the corner of an eye she saw him relax. “It doesn’t surprise you, does it?” she added. “You thought that was what I’d say.”

“I might have expected you to take it a little differently,” Tilden suggested, settling back in his chair, and he added, with somber eyes on the fire, “less as if I were offering you a new capsule.”

“You spoke as if you were. And I’d have taken the capsule,” she grimly commented. Suddenly her spirit flashed out at him. “You know perfectly well you have the answer you wanted. Since that’s true, and we both know it is, why should you expect me to soften it?” She waited for him to speak, and when he did not break the silence that lay between them, she let him have the words that rushed to her lips: “Now you can go and tell Miss Kennedy you have asked me, and the episode will be over.”

His sole answer was to hunch forward in his chair, as if bending under the weight of her tacit charge.

“You thought I didn’t know about the plan, didn’t you? Though of course,” she went on heavily, “I wasn’t sure, till you spoke, that you’d carry it out. Kate ordered you into final action this noon, didn’t she? And you were supposed to attend to the little matter when she left us alone after lunch. But you couldn’t whip yourself up to it then. Could you?”

She saw his jaws set.

“I don’t know what to say,” he muttered between his teeth. “I don’t know what I’ve been thinking of to let you and myself in for this. But I know what you think about it.”

“I’m glad you don’t protest,” she said more quietly. “And you’ve never made any pretense of being in love with me. That’s something in your favor.”

He looked at her then. She was leaning forward again with her eyes on the warming, friendly fire.

“I suppose there are limits even to what a cad can do,” he groaned, and added, sick discomfort driving him to the question, “How did you . . . did you . . .”

“Catch on?” She offered the phrase casually, as if to help him out. There was something poignant in the contrast between its lightness and the expression in the eyes she turned on him. “Oh, almost from the first,” she explained. “Before you knew I was conscious, I heard sentences between you that showed me you and Miss Kennedy were close friends, and during my convalescence I suspected that you were in love with each other, though you were both so much on your guard. Naturally, I couldn’t understand why you thought it was necessary to pose before me, as strangers. When we got here and Miss Kennedy began to throw me at your head, of course I was more hopelessly confused than ever. You see, I’m young and horribly ignorant, and I haven’t had much experience in meeting such situations.”

The admission was a surprising one for Marjorie. To Tilden it had the effect of a turn of the screw.

“Ever since I’ve been here I’ve realized that something in the nature of a plot was going on. I knew you and Miss Kennedy were for it, and that the Kemps and Mr. Kennedy suspected without understanding it, just as I did myself. It all seemed too incredible, and at first I closed my mind and simply refused to see anything wrong. Of course that couldn’t last, so I went through another phase. I’ve always been too cock-sure; I know it now,” she interpolated with a catch of the breath that was like a child’s struggle with sobs. “So I told myself it was interesting, and that I was forearmed and could safely see it through. But . . . you’ve just about broken my heart, among you. It wasn’t you,” she added fiercely. “You don’t count. You never have, really, and never will, with me. But Miss Kennedy— Well, I shall never get over my disappointment in her. Up till the last minute, even to-day, I kept telling myself she would explain it all, and that things couldn’t be what they seemed. But they are. All the time, from the very beginning, when I so loved and trusted her—for I did, oh, I did!—she was working and plotting against me. Why?” she ended suddenly. “Tell me why!”

“Surely you know.” He spoke almost absently, his mind less on her question than on the outburst that preceded it.

“Money, of course,” Marjorie submitted. “She knows I have some. What makes her think there’s enough to make this sort of thing worth while?”

“She knows all about you. She knows who you are, and what you’re doing, and what you have. But I can’t go into that.”

“Why can’t you? You owe me frankness. Just what was it you two were planning to do if I married you? Kill me?”

“Good God!” The question brought him out of his chair. He stood in front of her, staring down at her with horror in his face. Then he laughed. “If you’ve got that idea in your head, I’d better make a clean breast of the whole business,” he said, more naturally than he had yet spoken.

“I think you’d better.”

He moved away, to the end of the mantel, and, resting an arm on it, looked down at her with a new expression.

“See here,” he demanded, “you didn’t really think we were criminals, did you?”

“No, of course I didn’t. I simply didn’t know what to think. I’ve just told you I shut my eyes to everything. Even to-day, when I felt that she had gone forever—” She broke off. “I couldn’t quite see how your plan was to work out for Miss Kennedy,” she continued in a different tone. “You stood to win all the stakes while she lost them all, including you. And one has only to watch her in the moments when she’s off her guard to see that she loves you.”

He turned from her and stared down at the dying fire.

“Yes, I’d better make a clean breast of it,” he repeated, as if the words bolstered his purpose. “But Lord, how I hate to go into it! Kate and I have been in love four years,” he began, after a pause she did not break; “ever, since I started my intern work. We knew from the first that we couldn’t marry except through some miracle; but we were young and for a year or two we hoped against hope. For the last year we’ve realized the utter impossibility of the situation. I’ve got my mother to look after, and two kid half-brothers to educate. It will be years before they’re on their feet, and years more, probably, before I’m earning enough income to support two families. You see, I’m only a general practitioner, and the specialists get all the money. If I’d specialized I’d have had a better chance, but my meat is the general job. That’s the work I like to do, and God knows there aren’t any too many good, conscientious, general practitioners.”

Listening to him, Marjorie subconsciously marveled at the nature of man. For the moment at least he had actually forgotten the situation they were in and was off on this side line, defending himself, as he must often have done before, for his choice of the general branch of his profession.

Under her look he recalled himself to the real topic, and his brief animation wilted.

“Well, that’s the situation,” he went on, draggingly. “Clever as she is, Kate can’t earn much; she never has; and what she earns she spends. She’s the most generous woman I’ve ever known. She gives to every Tom, Dick, and Harry who appeals to her, and she has a list of beneficiaries that makes one gasp. Her brother would support her if she’d let him, but he has big responsibilities and his factory is just getting under headway. He needs years to build it up. Wherever we looked, there was a blank wall. Then . . . then . . .” he broke off. “Look here,” he begged wretchedly, when she did not speak, “won’t you let Kate tell you the rest of this?”

“No. Why should you put the job on her? Besides, it’s very doubtful whether I ever see her again. Go on, please.”

“You’ll see her again,” he confidently predicted, though his face had flushed under the question. “And she’ll tell you some surprising things that have a bearing on all this. But of course I’ll go on, if you insist. I was called to Chicago in October,” he resumed, “and she knew I was there when she was coming back from the West. She telegraphed me to take her train there for the rest of the journey to New York. I didn’t understand what her plan was, but she soon told me. She had decided that—well, that I should marry you and that she’d help the good work along. When the accident happened you seemed to be delivered into our hands.”

“But she’d lose you that way!”

“You can’t lose what you haven’t got,” he pointed out. “We had never had each other, and we never should have each other. We had given up looking for the miracle. It isn’t all as sordid as it sounds. Kate knows I’m under the financial harrow all the time, and worried to death about my expenses. She knew you had decided to marry. She’ll tell you how she knew it!” he hastily interjected. “She thinks I can do big work if I have a fair start. She convinced herself that I’d do enough good to . . . to offset the means we took. God, how awful it is to tell you all this!” he broke off, and took a moment to get back into his story. “Well, I was to marry you,” he doggedly repeated, “and then I . . . I . . .”

“And then?”

“And then I was to pay her a life income from your money when I got it.” He stopped again and with a dry tongue tried to moisten his lips. “Pretty little plot, wasn’t it? We agreed that she was to go abroad as soon as I

married, and live there most of the time, coming back just often enough to keep in touch with Bob. I don't know whether you've taken in their devotion to each other, they're such an undemonstrative pair. But Kate has always wanted to study in France. She had an idea, too, that Bob would be more apt to marry some day if she were out of the way. It was just more sacrifice on her part. She's had a simply hideous life so far. But what's the use of talking?"

He left the mantel and took a turn around the room, coming at last to rest before her.

"It all amounts to this: We decided that instead of being millstones around each other's necks, we'd establish each other in life. That isn't wholly contemptible, when you come to think of it."

"How about me? You didn't think much about my side of it, did you?"

"We knew you had fixed on marriage as a career. And if you had married me," Tilden said steadily, "I'd have done my best to make you happy. So you see—I hope—" he sighed—"that it wasn't so ghastly as you thought. Certainly there was nothing criminal about it. It was just a practical working out of a situation that was becoming impossible. Of course I know how it must seem . . . to you. And it may interest you to know that both Kate and I have been in hell while we were trying to put it over. That's why, as you realized, she ordered me into action to-day. We were about at the breaking-point. You see, Kate's very fond of you, too." Marjorie looked at him and his eyes dropped. "She is," he persisted. "You'll realize that before you get through with her."

"I wonder," said Marjorie, ignoring the last sentence, "why the Kemps and Mr. Kennedy were so against it."

"Old Kemp is against everything, more or less," Tilden diagnosed, in a lighter tone, obviously welcoming the side issue. "Horace, if he realized what was up, which I doubt, wanted you himself. Besides, he doesn't like Kate; never has, since they were kids together. As for Kennedy, he's as straight as they make 'em, and naturally he wouldn't want his sister to do anything that wasn't strictly according to the rules."

Marjorie frowned at the fire. Yes, men were remarkable beings. She had just shown this one the abysses of his nature, and though he had not been pleased by the view, he was already recovering from the shock of it. She detached her mind from this reflection. Save in the matter of details, what he had told her was no surprise.

“Hadn’t you better go now?” she suggested, breaking an interval of silence.

“I suppose so.” But Tilden showed a disinclination to start. Instead, he seemed to remember something. “Where’s Kate? I’ll tell her what has happened. It will be a relief to her, as it is to me,” he surprisingly added.

“I don’t know where she is. She had a note, and went out, saying she didn’t know when she’d be back.”

“That’s odd.” He looked disturbed. “When did she go?”

“About half-past four, I think.”

“Well . . .” He straightened, and looked vaguely around for his coat. “I suppose there’s nothing else I can say.”

“No, I think we’ve threshed things out rather thoroughly. Of course there are a lot of holes in your account—”

He moved restlessly.

“Kate can fill those in. Don’t, I beg of you, ask me to go into the matter any farther.”

“I won’t. I’m no more anxious to do it than you are. And I shall not trouble Kate for explanations. I doubt whether I’ll see her to-night, and I’m leaving in the morning.”

He was startled. “Leaving?”

“Of course. I’d go to-night if it weren’t for the storm.”

“But you mustn’t leave,” he broke out. “Don’t you realize—”

“I realize that you’re in no position to advise me.” He bit his lip. “Did you imagine for a moment that I’d stay here?”

“No,” he conceded, “I suppose not. Well, I’m off.”

“There’s one more question I’d like to ask before you go, if you don’t mind.”

He was putting on the overcoat he had dropped on the back of his chair, and he replied as he struggled into the garment: “All right, but I can’t promise to answer it.”

“How does it happen that Miss Kennedy knows all about me and my affairs?”

“She’ll have to tell you that herself. Good-by.” He mechanically held out his hand, but quickly dropped it. “I feel like a yellow dog. I suppose it wouldn’t do any good to say—”

“No, please don’t say anything more.”

He buttoned his overcoat, picked up his hat and gloves, and for a moment stood looking at her. Then, with a gesture of helplessness, he walked to the door. With his hand on the knob, he stopped and glanced back at her.

“I don’t like Kate’s going off like that,” he muttered. “She may be in some trouble. We’ve been out of touch all afternoon. If she should telephone and ask if I’ve called up, say I’ll be at my office from half-past seven until nine. I have some evening appointments.”

“I’ll tell her, if I see her, or if she telephones.”

“Thanks. Good-by again.”

The door opened and closed behind him. Left alone, Marjorie told herself, smiling twistedly, that it had been something of a day. She would pack now and go away the first thing in the morning, leaving a check for Miss Kennedy as sufficient recognition of the end of their association. Once she was gone, neither Kate nor her associates could trace her, even assuming that they might try to do so. She had only to warn Richard Grant to answer no inquiries as to the whereabouts of Miss Brown or Miss Blake.

Her course would temporarily cut off communication with Osgood, but this did not seem to matter vitally, though the thought of the Sun God brought a pang. Only this morning he had telephoned that he was in town, and she had promised to lunch with him to-morrow. She would do that, at least; but nothing was important. She was appalled by an increasing recognition of the vast difference between the working out of her experiment and the dreams with which she had begun it. She had done nothing she had planned to do, save to find a new setting and meet new people. And such new people! If variety was what she had wanted, she was getting it.

She laughed, startling herself by the unpleasantness of the sound. Then, drawing a deep breath, she rose from the chair and with the lagging steps of a tired old woman went to her room to pack.

CHAPTER XV

BOB GOES DOWN

WHEN her trunk was packed the little room looked tragically empty, and gazing around it, Marjorie was horrified to discover that her eyes were full of tears. She dashed them away with hot self-scorn. These people she was leaving—quite unfairly she classed them all together in her thoughts—had fooled her to the top of her bent; and now she was weeping because she was not to remain and be fooled again. This, simply put, was what her tears meant. She might as well accept the discovery that starting out with at least average intelligence—she had reached the point of admitting that it was barely average—she had degenerated into a sentimental idiot. Then a more heartening reflection came to support her self-respect. She had forgotten her dinner, and some of her weakness, at least, might be due to fatigue and lack of food.

She looked at her watch. It might be too late to get anything now, but at least she'd try to. She struggled with a temptation to have the meal sent up to her room. It would be horrible to face others with her red eyes and generally stricken air. Remembrance of Tilden's final request brought a satisfaction she had not expected to experience in connection with any thought of him. Of course she must have her meal upstairs, to be within reach of the telephone.

She rang the bell for the buttoned boy, who responded promptly and saluted with an eager hand. He had special reason to approve of Miss Brown, who had given some thought to him as well as innumerable tips. Johnny appeared to be on duty twenty-four hours a day. Certainly she had seen him in the hall early in the morning and all day long, and he, if any one, answered bells at night. She wondered when he slept, and now somewhat outraged his youthful sensibilities by delving into his private life.

“What time do you go off duty?” she asked.

“I dunno,” said Johnny, vaguely.

“What are your regular hours?”

“I dunno. Want anything?”

“Yes, I want something to eat. Can I get it?”

With passionate earnestness Johnny assured her that she could.

“Want it up here, don’t you?” he added.

Johnny approved of meals served in rooms. If the portions were large enough, he could occasionally subtract nourishment from a tray. These opportunities, and the fact that his “room” was a black corner in the attic, accounted for the boy’s willingness to work overtime. He had a convivial soul. There were at least a few tenants coming and going till midnight; and from ten on, as a rule, he could stretch out on the hall settle and contemplate the beauty of existence.

“All right. Bring me something.”

“What?”

“Oh, anything you’d like yourself. Have you had your dinner, Johnny?”

“Naw. I don’t git no dinner. I git a snack.”

“What snack did you have to-night?”

Marjorie did not know why she was pursuing this line of investigation. Possibly something in Johnny’s sharp little face appealed to her. Possibly she was dimly responding to an impulse for companionship as strong as Johnny’s was. Neither of them desired to end this agreeable encounter.

“Three ro’s beef san’wiches an’ two cups o’ cawfee, an’ two potatoes an’ a piece o’ cake an’ a hunk o’ pie,” Johnny reported.

Marjorie felt let down. Here was no child victim whose pangs of hunger she could ameliorate.

“Bring me some chicken sandwiches and a bottle of ginger ale, please,” she suggested rather faintly. The recital of Johnny’s menu had deadened what was at best a weak desire for food.

“The eclairs is good,” Johnny contributed with avid eyes on her.

“All right, bring some éclairs; but you will have to eat them. Do you feel up to it?”

Johnny ardently assured her that he did, and vanished. Evidently the prospect of éclairs expedited his service, for he was back in an amazingly short time.

“I forgot somepin’ to-day,” he subsequently contributed through a mouthful of éclair. “I fergot to give Doctor Tilden a note Miss Kennedy give me for him jest after lunch.”

“But Doctor Tilden was here then; and so was she!”

“I know they was. He was in here with you an’ Miss Kennedy come out to the elevator an’ give me a note an’ told me to take it in to him right away, like it come from the gu on the fourth floor, what’s got flu’. She—”

“That will do, Johnny. You mustn’t tell me about other people’s business.”

“But I fergot it,” Johnny persisted. “I didn’t give it to him till to-night, when he was leavin’ jest a little while ago. Then he read it in the hall and he said, ‘Hell!’ So I guess it was important.”

Johnny did not know just how the lady would take this, but he had an open mind.

“Johnny!”

“Well, he *did*! An’ I guess somepin pretty bad has happened to Miss Kennedy,” he went on hastily, as he started his fourth éclair.

Marjorie interrupted the journey of a sandwich to her lips.

“What do you mean?”

“I dunno what ’tis, but she’s went to the hospital after that old gentleman come—Mr. Kemp. An’ the tel’phone was ringin’ for her all afternoon.”

“How do you know she’s gone to a hospital?”

“She sent me out to git a cab. I didn’t hear what hospital she went to, ’cause when she was gittin’ in the cab the big stiff on the second floor yelled at me to git him a taxi, too. An’ when I went out in the snow an’ brought it, what d’ ye think I got?” Johnny bitterly continued, forgetting, in his sense of injury, Miss Kennedy’s affairs. “‘T’anks! T’anks, me boy,’ says he, jest like dat. But Miss Kennedy give me a quarter. She always does.”

“All right, Johnny; take the rest of the éclairs and run along.” Marjorie had again remembered that she must not discuss Miss Kennedy’s interests with the hall-boy.

“I guess p’raps sumpin happened to ’er brother,” Johnny hazarded as he filled a grimy fist with the remaining éclairs.

Marjorie wheeled on him so suddenly that he dropped one of the delicacies.

“What makes you think that?” she demanded, with a sharpness that surprised herself.

“Oh, I dunno. Only he ain’t been here for a couple days, an’ she looked awful when she went out. I heard her say hospital to the taxi-driver, but I didn’t git the name.”

“Good-night, Johnny.”

Marjorie’s knees were shaking, and she sat down abruptly as the door closed after the boy’s exit. She had remembered Osgood’s warning. But of course there was nothing in it. Or was there? And if there was, wouldn’t Kate have told her? The mental answer was immediate: Kate would not have told her in the conditions that accompanied their parting. Kate might have come into the room to tell her—very probably had come for that purpose. Then, having heard what she had heard, Kate had gone forth in silence, save for her brusque message. Marjorie felt dizzy and frightened. She had other emotions she did not stop to analyze. But it was clear that she could not spend the night in this uncertainty and suspense.

She dropped the sandwich she was still holding, and, going to the telephone, called up Doctor Tilden’s office, with no thought of the definite farewell that had just taken place between them. But a faint, prolonged ringing was the sole response she heard after she had given the number. She did not need the operator’s crisp report, “They don’t answer,” to know that Tilden was not in his office. And yet—she looked at her watch—he had promised to be there. It was only half-after eight, and he had said he would be there till nine. Notwithstanding her growing excitement, her brain worked alertly on the problem. If he had left, wasn’t it because Kate had telephoned him and called him away? Of course there was a chance that he had responded to an emergency call, but wouldn’t he, in that case, have telephoned her, that she might pass on a message to Kate?

The forgotten plate of sandwiches met her eyes, and again the thought came that she ought to eat something; that lack of food explained at least part of her sensation of weakness. She sat down with the commendable purpose of being sensible. But even as her hand moved toward the plate she jerked it back, conscious of the futility of an effort to swallow food. One of Johnny’s sentences echoed in her ears: “I guess p’raps sumpin’s happened to ’er brother.” It was pure surmise on the boy’s part, of course, and she might have met it with the indifference it called for but for other echoes that came with it—echoes of Osgood’s warning. What was it he had said? Munroe was “an unusually ugly customer.” His specialty was “getting even” with those he had a grudge against. He had been threatening to “get” Kennedy. There was no question that her interference and Kennedy’s had upset all the carefully made plans of the thin-lipped youth. Or, rather, it was she who had

interfered and Kennedy who had paid, because she had drawn him into her affairs.

At the thought a tremor shook her. She cowered more deeply into her chair, while her imagination, never under strong control, ruthlessly called up picture after picture and made her look at each. Kennedy was dying. He was dead. She saw Kate bending over him, saw the look with which Kate turned away. . . . If Kennedy died it would go hard with Kate.

And yet . . . Osgood's warning had been given more than two months ago, and even as he gave it he had added that there was nothing to worry about, and had intimated that he himself was taking some action to safeguard Kennedy. No doubt he had done so at the time. Was he still continuing to do so?

She sprang to her feet and paced the floor. To keep still was impossible. To walk seemed equally difficult, for that absurd trembling continued. An inspiration came to her, and again she hurried to the telephone and called up the hotel from which only that morning Osgood had jubilantly telephoned. She was amazed by the relief she now experienced in the knowledge of his nearness. The instrument was fastened to the wall, and she found herself holding to it for support as she waited for the connection. If she had brought harm to Kennedy, however innocently— At the operator's indifferent report she went limp: "Mr. Osgood is not in his room."

He wouldn't be, of course, Marjorie dully reflected. Nothing would be as it should be on a night like this. Then she stiffened into attention and something like hope, for the operator was speaking again:

"Mr. Osgood may be in the dining-room yet. I saw him go in to dinner about an hour ago. Shall I page him?"

"Oh, if you will! Thank you so much!"

Something in that exclamation must have touched the operator, who was a nice girl. She said kindly, "Give me your number and I'll call you if we find Mr. Osgood."

Marjorie gave it and went back to the chair before the fire, resuming her crouching attitude and stretching her shaking hands to the blaze. Though the room was warm, she felt chilled through. The telephone rang again, and her heart jumped under sudden relief as Osgood's voice came over the wire. She spoke with controlled excitement. She was now absolutely convinced that something serious had happened to Kennedy.

"Mr. Osgood," she asked, "are you free this evening?"

The response was immediate: “I can be. I have a friend dining with me, but we’ve just finished dinner, and I’ll get rid of him.”

“Oh, if you will! Can you come right down to me?—to Gramercy Park?”

“You know I can. I’ll be there in fifteen minutes.”

It was clear that Osgood realized something was up. It was also clear, Marjorie told herself as she went back to her vigil before the fire, that he was unaware of any mishap to Kennedy. He wouldn’t have been dining peacefully with a friend if he had known his sister’s defender was injured. But how could he know, even assuming the fear was justified? Who would notify him? Marjorie got up again and walked the floor. Driven by the need of action, she once more tried to reach Tilden at his office, only to get the same maddening report: “They do not answer.”

Osgood was almost as good as his word. Within twenty minutes he breezed into the room, looking more than ever like the Sun God Kate called him. Even in the panic of the moment the pagan in Marjorie Blake responded to the young man’s pagan beauty, as it always did. Evening clothes became him, but he should have been clad in skins and vine leaves. He shook hands, serious-eyed.

“Anything wrong?” he asked quickly.

“I’m awfully afraid so.”

She told him her fears and his brilliant face darkened.

“But, after all, it’s pure guess-work,” he pointed out.

“I know. But . . . she went to a hospital. She had a sudden call from some one there.”

“But why need we assume that it was Kennedy? A woman like Miss Kennedy must have dozens of friends who would call for her in an emergency. She’s the efficient kind one would think of.” Something deep in Marjorie registered and wept over the tribute. “Besides, wouldn’t she let you know if her brother was hurt?”

“Not necessarily. You see, we’re very recent acquaintances, and our association is really a business one. She might not feel—” the last words came out leaden-weighted—“that she could trouble me.”

The Sun God’s bright face clouded still more.

“I see. That does complicate it. But how about Kennedy himself? Have you telephoned to his rooms?”

Marjorie looked at him with respect. Men were amazing. They thought of everything.

“It never occurred to me,” she said, abashed. “But I know his number, for I’ve often heard his sister call him up.”

She mentioned it and Osgood hurried to the telephone. But, as Marjorie had felt, it was not a night when things went smoothly. There was no answer to the ringing of Mr. Kennedy’s bell, and after repeated efforts Osgood hung up the receiver.

“I don’t know what we can do now,” he confessed, looking at her anxiously. “And you’re worrying about this thing a lot, aren’t you?”

“Of course I am. I got him into it.”

“My sister got him into it, if he’s in it,” Osgood reminded her. “But, frankly, I don’t think he is. You see,” he looked rather self-conscious, “I’ve had him guarded.”

“Had him guarded?” Marjorie quoted the words in surprise.

“Yes. Let’s sit down comfortably and I’ll tell you about it.” As she obeyed he nodded at her with more assurance. “It’s this way,” he continued, leaning forward and fixing his brilliant eyes on her. “I felt responsible. Betty told me a lot more about Munroe than I passed on to you the day we met. So I hired two detectives, one to shadow Munroe and the other to look after Kennedy—without Kennedy’s knowledge, of course. I didn’t want to worry or annoy Kennedy, but to look after him seemed the least I could do.”

“You’re simply wonderful,” Marjorie told him with conviction, and her heart rose. She began to think she had let her imagination run away with her.

The Sun God’s chest swelled a trifle.

“Oh, well; I had to, don’t you see?” he explained with a gesture of proud humility. “And to tell the truth, the reports I got from the man shadowing Munroe weren’t very reassuring. They made me realize that he’s a pretty vile specimen. But the point to remember is this: with both my men on the job, don’t you see that nothing could happen to Kennedy?”

“It does seem as if nothing could.”

“Just the same, we want to be sure he’s all right,” Osgood illogically admitted, and he added urgently: “We ought to find out where he is; but how can we do it?”

For the moment he was as helpless as if he were not a man, and Marjorie watched him with mingled surprise and reproach. But again he proved worthy of his sex.

“How about calling up some of their other friends?—some one who knows them well,” he suggested. “Of course we don’t want to start anything or make him or ourselves ridiculous. But we might make a few tactful inquiries—”

“Of course. And the Kemps are the people to ask. I don’t know why I didn’t think of them before. My brain doesn’t seem to be working to-night. The father goes out to their country place, but Horace often goes to his rooms in town. You’ve seen a lot of him these past weeks and he won’t think it strange if you call him up.”

But Marjorie’s voice flattened as she gave the number. They could hardly expect information from this source. She had seen both the Kemps within the past four hours, and they had not known of any accident then—or had they? Surely not, or they would have told her. Or would they? Was that, perhaps, what Horace’s changed manner meant, and his unwillingness to speak of Kate? Yes, Horace might have known, but his father, she was sure, had not. She remembered the “long talk in the hall” Horace had mentioned. Possibly Horace had told his father then. But would he tell Osgood anything now? Osgood turned from the telephone.

“Mr. Kemp is out,” he reported, “but he’s expected in by ten o’clock. Evidently he keeps early hours and is a good little boy. We’ll reward him by calling him up again.”

As if the discovery of young Kemp’s virtues had cheered him, he returned to the fire, his radiance again undimmed, and with a casual “May I?” selected and lit a cigarette. Then, standing with his back to the blaze, and the room’s soft lights playing around his spectacular head, he blew out a series of smoke rings and smiled at her gaily. She was again impressed by man’s power of throwing off care. Apparently he had forgotten Kennedy. He eliminated that suspicion, however, by his next words:

“I believe we’re making a mare’s-nest of this,” he said. “We’re letting our imaginations run away with us. We’ll feel cheap when we know the truth.”

He looked at the plate of sandwiches and the warming ginger-ale.

“Are these your substitutes for dinner?”

“Yes.”

“Then eat them.”

He offered her the plate, opened the ginger-ale and filled the glass, and made himself generally useful. Marjorie munched her sandwich and looked at him thoughtfully, immensely cheered by his matter-of-fact attitude, and almost convinced that he was right.

“You ought to be framed,” she suggested, under the influence of these reassuring reflections.

He laughed and flushed.

“Don’t make fun of me.”

“I’ve always thought so. You really ought to be framed, and of course you know it. How do you feel about it? I’ve often wondered if men thought as much about their looks as women do.”

“If they do they’re awful pups,” Osgood said, his flush deepening until face and hair had a uniformly copper tone. “Have another sandwich.”

“No, thanks. I’m interested in this research work I’m doing.”

“Isn’t the ginger-ale hot? I’ll ring for some ice.”

“If you do, we’ll have Johnny on our hands the rest of the evening.”

“Who’s Johnny?”

“An infant here who does the work of three men. But you haven’t answered my question. How does it feel to be so good-looking that every one regards you as a permanent art exhibit?”

“Gee whiz! you ought to know!” Osgood ejaculated, hurriedly refilling her glass.

“Of course I know how a girl feels about it,” Marjorie admitted simply. “I hoped you’d tell me how a man felt.”

“I minded it when I was four,” he confessed, “and my mother used to take me into the drawing-room and exhibit me to her friends as a Cupid. I haven’t had much admiration since then. How about calling Kemp’s rooms now? Hadn’t I better?”

“It isn’t time yet. He won’t be home.” But Marjorie mercifully dropped the subject. Now that her emotions had quieted and her brain had resumed its normal functioning, she thought she had made an interesting discovery. She had begun to suspect during the past month that Osgood was in love with her. Now she believed she was mistaken. If he had been, surely her

earlier anxiety and distress would have aroused in him some of the emotional response which had swayed Horace. That meant—she deliberately held her mind to the thought to keep it occupied—that of the five men she had met and seen much of since she came to New York, only one, young Horace, really loved her. Tilden didn't bear thinking about, and the splendid youth before her, while he evidently liked and admired her and enjoyed being with her, was treating her very much as he treated Kate, with a gay camaraderie warranted to kill any incipient shoots of sentiment. She decided that this was his habitual manner with girls, and that he assumed it as knights of old put on their armor in tournaments. And how he must need it! A Sun God entirely surrounded by Osgood gold must seem fair game to every girl who met him.

“How have you escaped capture?” she asked curiously. “What's your secret?”

He blushed again. There was something very likable in the modesty of this superb youth.

“I mean it!” she persisted. “You might as well tell me. I don't want to marry you. I wouldn't marry you in any circumstances,” she added encouragingly, suspecting that this statement cheered him.

He grinned.

“Oh, well,” he said confusedly, “I fancy you know something about the art of side-stepping matrimony.”

“Of course I do. That is, I know how a girl does it. Her case is simple. All she has to do is to say 'no' and look flattered and sympathetic. But how does a young man acquire the art of letting a girl down gently but firmly when she's after him in full cry and he sees the grim intention of matrimony in her eyes? What does he do?”

“Unless he's paralyzed by the horror of his position, he runs like a hare,” Osgood told her, “and he never looks back.”

Marjorie nodded.

“You travel a great deal, don't you?” she asked, and they both laughed.

The interval of nonsense had immensely refreshed them. For the time Marjorie had cast off her apprehensions almost as easily as Osgood had dropped his. But now, as they looked at each other with eyes in which smiles still lingered, they remembered what had brought them together.

“Perhaps you’d better telephone again,” the girl said rather heavily, under the weight that again settled upon her; and the young man hastened to the telephone. This time he was successful, and she leaned forward, watching him and listening to the end of the conversation she could hear. After his first question she saw him stiffen into close attention, and realized that his responses to the long recital at the other end of the wire were purposely guarded. At the end he hung up the receiver and approached her deliberately, as if giving himself time to think. She rose with an unconscious impulse to meet his news standing.

“You’ve got to tell me the truth,” she brought out. “You’ve got to tell me every word he told you.”

He nodded.

“Of course. I intend to; and then we’ll decide what to do.”

“What happened? Tell me!”

“What we were afraid of. Munroe got him—the damned rat!” The words came out with a snarl. The Sun God was transformed into a figure of fury. “He shot him down, outside his factory, early this afternoon. At least some one did, and escaped. And just before it happened the ’tec I had shadowing Munroe was set on by a gang of toughs and left unconscious in an East Side alley. It isn’t very hard to put the two episodes together, is it?”

“You mean that Mr. Kennedy is . . .”

“No, he’s not dead. They’ve got him over at the Post Graduate Hospital, and they’re doing their best to save him; but Kemp’s afraid there isn’t much hope. He’s immensely relieved to know I’m in town. Both he and his father have been at the hospital this evening, but Miss Kennedy wouldn’t see them or let them do anything. That was odd, wasn’t it?” Osgood interrupted himself to ask.

“Not very.” The words were so low he had to bend forward to hear them.

“Well, I’m going over there. Miss Kennedy can’t keep me from helping, for God knows I’m in this thing. I’ll have every good surgeon in New York to help us, and we’ll pull him through if it can be done. Kemp was worried about the financial end, for he said he thought both the Kennedys were rather up against it, just now, and they wouldn’t let him help. That’s where I’ll come in strong, if I can’t come in anywhere else,” he ended tersely. “If money can save him, he’ll be saved.”

He picked up his coat and jerked it on as he went toward the door. "I'll call you up as soon as there's any news."

"I'm going with you."

He stopped to look at her hesitatingly.

"Hadn't you better keep out of this? There may be publicity, you know, though I'll try to prevent it. I know some wires I can pull. But you mustn't take any chances of getting into the newspapers."

"I'm going with you," Marjorie repeated. "Probably Miss Kennedy won't see me, but I'm going anyway. Nobody's interested in Marjorie Brown," she added drearily.

"All right. But hurry up. I'll run ahead and have a cab at the door by the time you get downstairs."

Three minutes later Marjorie found him and Johnny out in the snow, vieing with each other in useless calls and whistles. The few cabs that passed through the storm-swept square held passengers.

"All right, we'll walk," Osgood decided. "It's only a few blocks. Are you up to it?"

"Of course."

He caught her arm and half led, half dragged her as they battled, heads down, through the drifts. Speech was impossible. All the breath they had was needed for the task of beating forward against the wind. But after a journey that seemed endless they reached the big hospital and hurried into the shelter of its hall. There, at Osgood's question, the desk attendant shook his head.

"You won't be able to see Mr. Kennedy, I'm sure," he said. "He's very low."

"Then I'll see his sister. What's the number of the room?" When he got it, Osgood turned to Marjorie. "While I'm gone you see the person in charge, whoever it is," he directed. "Give orders in my name that everything of every kind is to be done for Kennedy. Get every surgeon in the hospital on the job, and have the surgeon in charge call in all the specialists he thinks can help. You understand: absolutely nothing to be overlooked, and there is no expense limit. Then wait for me in the reception room, and I'll come and report as soon as I can."

Marjorie nodded. She could not speak, and the Sun God, very much a Sun God in that hour, hurtled down the hall.

Marjorie found the physician in charge and entered upon a depressing interview, brightened only by the official's interest in the case and his acceptance of her as a friend entitled to information. Kennedy, it at once appeared, was in a bad way. Three bullets had entered his body, but only one was a serious menace. That one, however, was very serious indeed, for it had entered the abdomen. All three were out now, but the operation had exhausted the patient, and of course in such cases there was always the danger of peritonitis. But the injured man had a superb constitution and unlimited pluck, and these might pull him through. His sister was a wonder, too—cool-headed and extremely capable. She had been at the hospital since before five; and her brother had recognized and spoken to her when she came in just before the operation.

Yes, the surgeon was their best, a noted man, and everything had gone as well as could be expected. Mr. Kennedy had a good room and a splendid nurse, and his sister was with him every minute. Yes, the speaker was sure Doctor Ross, the surgeon in charge, would be glad to have help and consultants. He, Ross, was again due at the hospital in a very few minutes, and the matter would immediately be put before him and the specialists he suggested would be called in. Everything would be done—though, indeed, thus far nothing had been neglected. And one must not despair. The hospital records held cases just as serious, which had ended in complete recovery—this last in kindly recognition of the caller's increasing pallor.

Marjorie thanked the doctor and made her way to the waiting-room, where Osgood soon joined her. His brilliant young face was very serious, and even his burnished hair seemed to have lost its look of shimmering vitality. He dropped into a chair beside her.

"It's touch and go," he admitted. "They'll probably know by morning. I'll stay here to-night," he decided. "Not that I can do anything except to yelp for more doctors and nurses. I've got another nurse on duty already, for I could see that Miss Kennedy was all in. She won't leave her brother, but she can sit in the one comfortable chair in his room and get a little rest. I feel responsible for it all," he ended wretchedly.

"You had nothing to do with it. It was I who led him up to Munroe, as a target," Marjorie added bitterly.

"You couldn't have done anything different, being what you are," Osgood said, and ended with a sigh. "Poor Betty! It will go hard with her if

Kennedy dies.”

Marjorie did not answer. In that tragic moment she did not care what happened to Betty. But surely Fate would not be capable of the ghastly irony of sacrificing a man like Kennedy to save a girl like Betty Osgood!

“Did you ask Miss Kennedy if she would see me—or if I could help in any way?”

“Of course.” But he looked embarrassed. Privately the Sun God had been somewhat staggered by the definiteness of Miss Kennedy’s refusal to see her friend. “She can’t see any one,” he explained. “Naturally, she’s half crazy with anxiety.”

“And she holds me responsible for the whole thing,” Marjorie murmured.

“That may be it. It isn’t a bit like her; but perhaps she does.” Osgood’s expressive face cleared again. That, of course, accounted for Miss Kennedy’s expression—as if she almost hated the girl before him.

“They’ve got Kennedy’s own doctor there now—Tilden,” Osgood went on; and Marjorie was relieved. Kate had found him, then. “I had a talk with him, and he’ll consult with the surgeon about who else to bring in. I’ve asked him to give most of his time to the case. He’s an awfully nice chap. I’ve always liked him, but never so much as to-night. He understands my position perfectly, and realizes that it’s only humane to let me do all I can. We’ll have half a dozen specialists here within an hour. That’s one reason why I’m coming back. But I’ll take you home when you’re ready to go. I’ll have them telephone for a cab, and they ought to be able to get one within half an hour.”

“No,” Marjorie said, “I can’t go.”

He looked surprised.

“But what’s the use of staying?”

“I know I can’t do anything. I’m worse than useless. I’m in the way. I’m nothing to those people in there. I’m worse than nothing, for I got them into this. And yet, some way I can’t go. That’s all there is to it. I won’t try to explain it. I simply can’t go.”

Osgood looked at her with solemn eyes.

“I know. You feel as if, perhaps, after all, something may come up you can do. And if it does, you must be here to do it. That’s exactly the way it is

with me.”

His understanding eased the girl’s heavy heart.

“You’re very good to me,” she told him.

“I want to be. We’re in this thing together.” He added irrepressibly: “Good Lord, we’re in it up to our necks! I never dreamed that one could be hit so hard by a thing one wasn’t directly responsible for.”

“Neither did I.”

For a moment they sat silent, contemplating the discovery they had made. Then swift steps came along the hall and Doctor Tilden entered the room. He looked tired and care-worn.

“Oh, Miss Brown,” he said without other greeting, “Bob knows you’re here, and he wants to see you. Will you come right in now, while there’s a quiet interval?”

As he hurried her to the elevator he went on in a rapid undertone:

“He’s got something on his mind. I don’t know what it is, but it worries him so I want him to get it off. Of course he can’t talk much. Don’t let him, and don’t talk to him. Perhaps he thinks you’re blaming yourself and wants to reassure you. It would be like him to think of that. Here we are.”

In an upper hall he opened the door of a private room, and with suspended breath Marjorie crossed the threshold. She took in, without seeing them, three moving figures in the room—Kate and two nurses in very fresh white uniforms. Her gaze was on the bed, on Kennedy’s big figure, across which the bedclothes were folded. He lay on his back with his eyes closed, his color livid, his whole effect that of a body whose soul has departed. She walked uncertainly toward the bed, and one of the nurses caught her by the arm and gently supported her.

“It’s the ether,” she explained in a low tone. “It makes one dizzy. The room is full of it still. He’s only been out of it a little while. But he wants to see you.”

It was clear that he did. He opened his eyes at the sound of the voice and smiled slightly. His hands and arms were under the bed covering. Marjorie smiled back at him with quivering lips.

“It was good of you to see me,” she managed to say.

He answered with difficulty.

“Wanted . . . to . . . tell . . . you . . . not . . . your . . . fault . . . whatever . . . happens,” he said, spacing his words and speaking on the flat level of a note or two. “Remember . . . that. Don’t . . . worry.”

The message came almost as automatically as if it were ticked over the wires, and as Marjorie listened tears gushed from her eyes. “Some . . . thing . . . else,” the sick man brought out. “Kate!”

At the word Kate Kennedy came forth from the shadows of the room.

“Yes, dear,” she said, and bent over the bed. She was standing beside Marjorie, but she did not look at her or recognize her presence in any way. The eyes of the injured man, slightly glazed, turned from one face to the other.

“Kate . . . take . . . her . . . hand,” he directed faintly.

“Yes, dear.”

Kate Kennedy’s beautiful voice, which had always made Marjorie’s nerves vibrate, held modulations she had never heard in it before. Kate would do anything her brother asked, and the voice showed it. But the strong cold brown hand she gave Marjorie lay in the girl’s without response.

“Look . . . at . . . her,” the voice from the bed directed.

Again Kate obeyed, and as she looked her face twisted violently, under a sudden strong emotion.

“That’s . . . right.” Kennedy’s voice was almost inaudible and his eyes closed.

One of the nurses bent over him, waving them back. Their clasped hands fell apart. Tilden, too, had hurried swiftly toward the bed. In response to his quick gesture Marjorie left the room.

In the corridor she became conscious that Kate was still with her, her back against the door she had just closed, as if she needed its support. Marjorie thrust out impulsive hands and drew them away again. There was no response to her emotion in that impassive face.

“Well, Miss Blake of Blakesville,” Kate said in the tone of an exhausted swimmer, “I hope you’re satisfied. For now you’ve taken his life, as you’ve always taken everything else that belonged to him.”

Marjorie stared, her heart contracting. Kate was raving, of course, was mentally overwhelmed by the strain of the hour.

“Say anything you wish,” she said gently. “I know how you feel.”

“Do you? I think not.” Kate’s beautiful voice held nothing now but bleak despair. “And yet perhaps you ought to. You’re his sister, too, you know.” Again Marjorie’s wet eyes brimmed over. This was horrible. She wanted to call the doctor or a nurse from the room Kate was guarding, but she could not move or speak. “You don’t seem to understand yet,” Kate jerked out. “Well, you’ve got to. You’ve got to realize that it’s your brother, too, who’s dying in there. It’s the brother you’ve been tracing so stealthily these past months. You’ve found him now.” She swung a fierce arm backward toward the room they had left. “There’s your brother! There’s Lizzie McManus’s son! You don’t believe it? Oh, you’ll have proofs, all right!”

At the look in Marjorie’s eyes she burst into muffled, hysterical laughter. It was a reminiscent sound, holding a nerve-twisting suggestion of Margaret McManus’s elfish cackle. The next instant she had turned and reentered the sick-room, closing the door as she went and leaving Marjorie to stare unseeingly at its polished panel.

CHAPTER XVI

THE GAME ON THE SHORE

MARJORIE became conscious that Osgood was beside her, was speaking, was at last urgently touching her arm.

“You were gone so long I came to see what was the matter,” he explained; and then, apprehensively, as she turned and he caught her expression, “is he . . . dead?”

“No, not yet.”

Osgood put his arm through hers and led her along the hall.

“There’s hope,” he said, in the elevator, as they volplaned to the main floor, “lots of hope. I’ve been talking to some of the specialists. I called in half a dozen of them, off my own bat, to save time, and two of them—the biggest men in town—are in Doctor Ross’s office now, talking to him. They’ll see Kennedy in a few minutes. Perhaps what I did wasn’t medical etiquette,” he went on, “but who cares a button for etiquette when a man’s life’s in the balance? I told Ross—the head surgeon, you know—I was just trying to help him; that he was the boss and that he could eliminate any of ’em he didn’t like and substitute others. He’s all right, too—not one of the pig-headed sort whose little authority means more to them than a patient’s life.”

He continued to prattle, and Marjorie took in at least half his words—enough to understand what he had done and to be glad he had done it. It was exactly what she herself would have done if she had been in the situation without him. But she said little, and Osgood, understanding as always, plainly did not expect her to talk. His object was to divert her mind. He did not succeed, but she recognized the effort and was grateful.

“And, by the way, Kemp’s here again,” he added as an afterthought. “He came just after you left, to see how things were going and we met in the waiting-room. Of course he didn’t know you were here, and when he found you were he said he’d sit tight till you got back.”

Evidently sitting tight had wearied young Kemp, for they found him restlessly wandering about the lower hall, wearing the look of irritable

gloom a man takes on when he is faced by anxieties he cannot sidestep. He brightened slightly as he greeted Marjorie.

“Is everything all right?” he asked at once. “I mean, he’s still alive, and all that?”

“He’s alive, but I’m afraid it’s principally ‘all that,’” Osgood said. “There’s Ross now,” he interrupted himself to point out, “leading a bunch of specialists up to Kennedy’s room. If you’ll excuse me, I’ll go and stick around and see what happens.”

He hurried off in pursuit of “the bunch” and Kemp took Marjorie back to the sitting-room.

“Sit down and try to be quiet,” he urged. “You’re all in. Better still, why not let me take you home? You can’t do anything here but lose sleep and knock your nerves into a cocked-hat, and that won’t help Kate or poor Kennedy. I know how you feel, but it’s simply absurd to blame yourself for this.”

Marjorie looked at him remotely.

“Did you know about this when you were with me to-day?”

He nodded.

“I had just come from the hospital.”

“Did your father know?”

He looked shocked.

“Of course he didn’t . . . while he was talking to you. If he had he wouldn’t have . . . I met him down in the hall just as he was leaving,” he added more quietly, “and I told him then.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

His eyes shifted.

“There was nothing you could do. The operation was going on at that time. Father and I decided you oughtn’t to know till morning.”

“I’m not going home,” Marjorie said, and the decision with which she spoke ended the conversation. Horace roamed around the room, stopping at intervals to look out at the windows, or to finger the worn magazines on the table without opening any of them. A thin man, in an overcoat that shouted the tale of his poverty, entered the waiting-room, and, taking a seat as far from them as he could get, lowered his head and stared at the floor. Every

time a step came along the hall, which was very often, he started and looked wildly toward the door. When they passed on he resumed his former position and drooped forward in his chair, an inert mass, crushed by the weight of the hour.

“His wife, or some one else he loves, is on the operating table,” Marjorie decided: but the reflection, which ordinarily would have aroused her interest and sympathy, meant nothing more than the mere surmise. In truth, nothing seemed to mean much to her now, though she took in her surroundings with the sharpened perceptions that accompany high nerve tension. She saw the bald spot on the new-comer’s head, and realized that he had been running his fingers through the rest of his thin hair, making it stand up like fuzz. She watched the rambles of Horace and wondered why he didn’t sit down. She saw doctors, nurses and white-coated orderlies pass the door, and she drew into her nostrils the hospital smell which is like no other odor. Only the edge of her mind touched Kennedy and the revelation Kate had made. It was as if part of her brain had closed against the incredible truth.

Hours seemed to pass. In reality only fifteen minutes had elapsed before Osgood came back.

“They had a consultation after the examination,” he said, “and of course I wasn’t in on either. But after the powwow Doctor Ross graciously gave me a few moments of his time. I don’t think they got anywhere. Evidently some of them are more optimistic than others. That’s about all I get out of it. Ross is the optimistic kind, thanks be. So is Tilden. That’s lucky, for they’re the men who’ll be with Kennedy most of the time, and their mental attitude is tremendously important, if you ask me. I know one or two old medical birds who could make me turn my face to the wall and pass away, just by coming into my sick-room to look at me.”

Osgood was the type whose anxiety drove him into words and still more words. He seemed unable to stop talking, whereas Kemp, that incessant chatterer, was now glumly silent. Marjorie was conscious of a vague wish that the noise Osgood was making would cease, but it appeared to help the thin man in the corner, who had raised his head and was listening to it with interest and attention. He seemed impressed by the discovery that these prosperous-looking young things from another world than his were up against trouble too, and as dazed by it as he was.

“What amazes me,” Osgood went on, “is how little these big specialists seem to know . . . or at least how little they’ll admit they know. Surely, after

all their experience, they must realize just about what percentage of chance Kennedy has, but they won't come out and give it. They—”

“They don't know nothin’,” a harsh voice from the corner broke in, so suddenly that both Osgood and Marjorie started. “Take it from me, young feller, they don't none of 'em know a thing.”

“Oh, I wouldn't go as far as that,” Osgood mildly protested. “I think they know a lot they don't tell us—and perhaps it's just as well they don't,” he ended with a sigh.

“They don't know nothin’,” the thin man passionately reiterated, rising from his chair to give added impressiveness to his words. He was ready to die for his conviction. “Look what they done to my woman,” he hurried on. “They took X-rays, an' they took blood tests, an' they took specimens; and the more they took the less they knowed an' the worse she got. And now, tonight, all of a sudden, when she's near dead, they're operatin' on her. An', take it from me, not one of 'em knows what they're operatin' for. Why didn't they operate when she was strong enough to bear it?” he demanded, his hoarse voice rising gustily. “If they can help her now, they could have helped her a whole lot more by gettin' to work sooner. Why didn't—”

He stopped on a high note. From the threshold a man in a white uniform was beckoning to him.

“It's all right, Dillon,” he said. “She got through splendidly. Want to come up to the ward and look at her?”

“Huh!” Dillon heaved himself to his feet and stared, goggle-eyed. “Say, Doc,” he stammered, “you . . . you mean it's all over?”

“Surest thing you know.”

“An' . . . an' she's goin' to git well?”

“You bet she's going to get well.” The young doctor, not averse to showing visitors what a fine fellow he was, came into the room with a benevolent glance at the spectators of the little scene. “Come on now and take a look at her. Of course she isn't out of the ether yet, and she won't be for hours, so you trot home after you've seen her and get a night's sleep. Here, here, man, pull yourself together,” he added quickly, hastening his steps. Simultaneously Osgood jumped toward the thin man and caught him by the arm, while the doctor supported him on the other side.

For an instant he stood between them, swaying and swallowing hard. Then, “Did ye hear that?” he asked Osgood. “Did he really . . . say it?”

“Of course he did. It’s all right, old man, and we’re glad,” Osgood assured him, bracing himself to bear the weight which still limply rested against him. The thin man drew a quick breath and pulled himself together.

“All right, Doc. I’ll go an’ see her,” he managed to say.

“Better go home,” the doctor soothingly advised, “and come back early in the morning.”

The man laughed, and the laugh turned to a strangled gulp.

“I’ll be O. K. in a minute,” he apologized. “It came so sudden like. I’ll see her right now, Doc,” he added more naturally.

“Come along, then.”

Osgood stepped back, and the doctor, with a friendly arm through the thin man’s, led him from the room. At the door the husband turned and smiled back at the girl and the young men he was leaving. His thin face was radiant, but the smile that winged its way to them was sheepishly apologetic. He stumbled across the threshold and went down the hall with the doctor, a life-long convert to the glory of modern surgery.

“There,” said Kemp; “that’s the sort of thing that happens. That’s what these fellows can do, if you want to know.”

Osgood nodded. He, too, had been braced by the incident; but Marjorie continued to stare at the walls of the room.

Fifteen minutes later Tilden came in to them.

“It’s more encouraging,” he said. “He’s holding his own, and he’s more hopeful, himself, than he was. When he sent for you,” he told Marjorie, “I’m sure he thought he was going. Now he has made up his mind to keep on fighting. That will help a lot.”

“There’s no immediate danger then?” Kemp asked. “I mean, no danger of his dying to-night?”

Tilden shook his head.

“Not now, I think. He had some bad sinking spells earlier in the evening, but his heart’s responding to stimulation better than we dared to hope.”

“Then I’m off,” Horace decided. “And won’t you be sensible, too?” he urged Marjorie, “and let me take you home?”

“Better go,” Tilden advised. “I’ll be here on duty all night, and Doctor Ross is to sleep at the hospital, so we can get him at a minute’s notice. Don’t

undress, if it will make you more comfortable not to; but you can lie down near the telephone, and I promise to call you if there's a serious change." Tilden's eyes were shining and he looked bucked up. He was anxious about Bob, but it was highly stimulating for a young physician to be on a case with so many big men.

"And if there's a change," Osgood contributed, "I'll come and get you. I've taken a room opposite Kennedy's, and I'm going to live in this hospital till he's out of danger. So you can feel that you've got a permanent messenger boy on the scene of action."

"How good you are!" Marjorie gave him her hand. "I'll go then, since you all want me to; and I'll stay in the living-room, where I can hear the faintest tinkle—"

"I'll order a taxicab;" and Horace raced off to do it.

Half an hour passed before the cab came. Marjorie and the two young men filled the long interval by walking up and down the hall abreast, to the severe disapproval of several hurrying nurses and orderlies.

"You'll lie down too, won't you?" the girl asked Osgood.

"Oh, yes," he carelessly promised; "I'll get some cat-naps; but I'll be on the job, just the same."

The storm, which earlier in the evening had seemed all that a hard-working storm could be, had let itself out a few notches; and the cabman who finally responded to the call expressed grave doubts of his ability to get his passengers even as far as Gramercy Park.

"We may get stuck in a snow-drift any minute," he gloomily predicted. But he landed Marjorie safely at her door, and Horace, bidding him wait there, determinedly accompanied her upstairs, arousing Johnny from his meditations on the settle to act as chaperon. Young Kemp seemed as conscious as Marjorie had been that it behooved her to keep an eye on her reputation.

"If you're going to be up and about all night, I want to see that you're comfortable," he masterfully announced. "Here, Johnny, make a fire." A few minutes later, with the lad's assistance, he drew the big divan close to the fireplace, set a reading-lamp at the head of it, and swung into position within reach of the occupant's hand a reading-table and a collection of books and magazines, each of which he sternly scrutinized before adding it to the growing pile.

“If you read I want you to have something cheerful,” he announced, and gazed discontentedly at the empty wood-box.

“All right, Johnny; you and I have got to fill that,” he decided.

Despite Marjorie’s protests, he accompanied the lad to some mysterious under-cavern of the house, from which both subsequently emerged, their personal luster somewhat dimmed and their arms full of logs. The box filled, the fire blazing, lamp and reading-table in position, he looked about for more worlds to conquer, and, finding none, reluctantly held out his hand.

“I have a suspicion, Johnny, that our hostess is willing to have us leave her,” he told the boy. “It’s almost midnight, and, though you may not be familiar with them, certain rules of etiquette govern the little matters of social calls. So we’ll say good-night to the lady and tear ourselves away.”

Johnny grinned and fingered the crisp dollar bill in the right-hand pocket of his tight-fitting trousers. It had been a profitable night for Johnny.

“Horace,” Marjorie suddenly asked, “did you know all the time that Bob Kennedy is my brother?”

Kemp’s face sobered.

“Yes, I did,” he admitted, and added hastily, turning his eyes from her twitching features, “but we mustn’t talk about that now.”

“No, we won’t talk about it now. Good night.”

“Remember that no news is good news,” he reminded her from the door. “If you don’t hear from the hospital, you’ll know everything is all right. That’s the way Tilden and Osgood left it.”

“I know. Thank you again. Good night.”

She heard the high voice of Johnny as the pair went down the hall, its clear notes unmuffled by consideration for sleepers. Her ears caught the slam of the elevator door as the pair shut themselves into the car. She returned to the divan and sat down on it, leaning back and staring at the flames.

Sleep, she told herself, was impossible. She must hold herself in alert readiness to go to her brother at any moment. To her brother! At the words something caught at her heart and for an instant stopped its beating. But the next moment she seemed unable to realize that the man she had just seen on what might be his death-bed was really her father’s son.

He had told her not to worry, whatever happened; and he had made her and Kate clasp hands. In what he believed was his last hour he had thought of them both—of her peace of mind, of Kate's future. For she was sure that he had consigned Kate to her care and protection. It must have agonized him to contemplate leaving Kate alone in the world; and abandoning, too, those other responsibilities of which Kate had spoken. Those had to do, of course, with the care and the comfort of his grandmother, Margaret McManus. It was he, then, who was giving her the luxury that surrounded her, in her helpless old age. She was Kate's grandmother, too; for now Marjorie was taking in, subconsciously, the different relationships. Kate, of course, would be Lizzie McManus's child by Lizzie's second marriage, half-sister to Bob, and therefore no closer in the tie of blood than Marjorie herself. But the two had been brought up together; that made all the difference.

Yet Kate had sat in the room of the faded chintz and the yellow-toothed piano, and had let her talk to Margaret McManus, knowing how safe that tragic interview would be; just as Kate had gone with her to the tenement and to the agents' offices, serene in her conviction that the McManuses had hidden their trail. Why hadn't Kate wanted her to find Bob? The question answered itself. Kate wanted nothing to come up, for the present at least, to interfere with her plan and Tilden's. But why had Bob let the situation remain as it was? That was hard to understand. Other things, however, were suddenly clear—Bob's manner, the friendly look in his steady eyes, his constant but wholly unsentimental attention. Bob had been on the watch over his new sister, all along, and he had welcomed her into his life with that elaborate dinner he could so ill afford, the dinner Betty had so tragically interrupted, the dinner through which, perhaps, he was to lose his life!

Marjorie's mind swung back to Kate. There had been an understanding between Kate and little Mrs. Wheeler. She, Marjorie, was to be got rid of, if possible, but if she proved persistent she was to be admitted to the Cranford cottage, since admission could bring her no nearer to the truth than refusal. Yes, all these episodes had worked out smoothly, as Kate's plans usually worked out. But one of Kate's plans had not worked out. The face of Tilden swam before Marjorie, followed by a return of the picture she had seen of the two on that bench in the gallery, heads close together, shoulders hunched depressedly, as they planned and schemed. . . .

No, she could not sleep.

But, strangely, she could play—for here was a playground to delight the heart of any child. It was a long stretch of seashore, with a vivid blue sky overhead, brilliant sunshine, and waves pounding in upon the sand with a

force that threatened her and her companions. There were two of these companions—bare-legged human mites like herself, in tiny one-piece bathing-suits. One was a small boy and the other a small girl, and both seemed older than herself—five or six, perhaps, to her three. To protect themselves from the waves they had built breastworks of sand, and behind these they stood together, shrieking ecstatically as the sea rolled toward them. The wet brown legs of the boy flashed as he scampered about, gathering stones and scooping sand to strengthen the protecting barrier. But the waves came nearer and nearer. There was only one way of stopping them now, it seemed. If the children clasped hands and formed a circle inside of their wall, the waves could not break through. It was a wonderful game.

The little boy hurried the two little girls, pushing them together. He caught their hands and clasped them close, then completed the circle himself, and the three youngsters howled defiance at the ocean. The biggest wave of all roared toward them, implacable and resistless; and as it reached the breastworks and reared a white crest above them, her playmates turned to Marjorie and she saw the faces of Kennedy and Kate.

She was awakened by the fretful summons of the telephone bell. The fire was out, the room was cold, and the bulb of the reading-lamp glowed dimly through the light of a sun-flooded morning. She hurried to the instrument and the voice of Osgood came to her ear.

“Hello! All right?”

“Yes. How is . . .”

“About the same; a little better, if anything. I’ve Just talked to Tilden and Doctor Ross. They’re up on their toes. I don’t think they expected to get him through the night, though they both pretended they did. However, they’re really hopeful now. Suppose I come over and have breakfast with you and tell you all about it?”

“Please do. What time is it?”

“Half-past seven.”

“I’ll meet you down in the dining-room at eight sharp. Will that do?”

“It will be fine.”

Marjorie flew to the bath-room and as she splashed, the memory of the night dream came to her. How happy those children had been! Again she felt the ecstatic, terrified thrill that accompanied each uprush of the waves

against those breastworks built by children's hands. It had been a true dream. The waves were rushing up, the fight was on, and the sturdy boy, Bob, was overthrown; but Kate was with him, fighting on, while she, Marjorie, had slept! She had slept for seven hours while those waves crept nearer and nearer her brother, and his other sister kept watch.

Across the small table at which she and Kate had eaten so many breakfasts together, Osgood looked at her curiously.

"Did you get any sleep?"

"Yes," she confessed, flushing.

"So did I. I didn't expect to, of course, but I did. Odd how one can drop off at such a time. I suppose it's Nature's little trick to keep us going," he added kindly, realizing her embarrassment.

"Now tell me everything. But, no, eat your breakfast first."

"I can do both. Watch me."

The Sun God had accepted his second cup of coffee and devoted himself with energy to bacon and eggs. "There isn't much to tell," he went on. "I was in and out of the sick-room till about three o'clock, to the disgust of the night nurses and Tilden. I've got four nurses on the job now, you know," he complacently mentioned. "I don't believe in two nurses, each on a twelve-hour stretch, in a crisis like this. They looked on me as a cumberer of the earth, but I was so nervous I couldn't keep away. At three I lay down, largely because I hadn't the cheek to project myself into Kennedy's room again for an hour or two; and, if you'll believe it, I slept till six."

"I'll believe it," she said dryly. "What about Kate?"

"Oh, she was with them all night, but they didn't seem to mind her. She isn't the kind that gets under people's feet, you know. The doctors say she's a wonder in the sick-room."

"I have reason to know that." Marjorie told him about the railroad wreck and he listened absorbedly, interrupting his attention only to accept more eggs and bacon and some fresh muffins.

"So that's how you met her," he commented. "I wondered. She interests me, that girl," he went on, absently buttering his fourth muffin. "She's the sort that cares for only two or three persons in the world and stakes all she's got on them. I could see that Tilden's in love with her; he showed it at every turn—unconsciously, of course. But, whether she cares for him or not, it was clear enough that last night she simply didn't know he was on earth. For her

there were only two beings in the world—herself and her brother. She'd have done all the work if the doctor had let her. And, by Jove, she'd have performed the operation if she and Bob had been out of reach of surgeons! She's that kind."

Marjorie agreed with a heavy heart. No one knew better than she did the splendid qualities of Kate Kennedy; and surely no one had better reasons than she to realize the unexplored caves that lay in the other girl's nature. Why did Kate hate her? That was what she could not understand.

Osgood pushed back his chair and rose briskly.

"I'd better go to the hospital and get on my job of being in the way," he cheerfully told his hostess.

"Wait. I'll go with you."

They plunged out into a glowing white wilderness and plowed through drifts broken only by the resentful kicks of other pedestrians. Any street-clearing system New York possessed apparently knew nothing about Gramercy Park. This time Marjorie wore high boots and rubbers. She would have enjoyed the struggle through the snow if her spirits had been less leaden and her mental state less confused. She was deeply grateful to her companion and told him so.

"I think you're amazing about all this," she said. "I don't know any one else in your position who would have done so much."

"I think you know lots who would."

"I'm not thinking of the money backing," Marjorie went on earnestly. "By the way, I'm going to take all that off your hands when settlements are due, and later on I'll tell you why. Lots of men would have given the financial help," she underlined, in a tone that checked his protests. "What I'm talking about is your sympathy and understanding, and the fact that you're giving all your time to this matter and living at the hospital. You know perfectly well that most men wouldn't have felt that they had to do it."

Their arrival at the hospital entrance made it unnecessary for Osgood to respond to this tribute, and they hurried past the inquiry desk and on toward the elevators.

"We'll go straight to the room," Osgood announced as they entered a waiting lift, "and get Miss Kennedy or Tilden out in the hall if they won't let us in. Then we'll have the facts at first hand. That reminds me to tell you that so far we've been able to keep the thing out of the newspapers. If

Kennedy dies—” Marjorie shuddered—“we can’t, of course. But the son of one of the biggest editors in town happened to be my roommate at New Haven, and he did a lot of telephoning for me last night and temporarily fixed things up. He and his father did it for Betty’s sake, of course; they saw the situation she’d be in if the truth came out.

“The police have got Munroe, too,” he continued, when they left the elevator. “They have proof that it was he who set his pals on the detective, to get him out of the way, and the whole police department has it in for any thug that hurts an officer. Munroe will get all that’s coming to him, and then some; for it seems that Mooney, the sleuth I hired, was smashed up pretty badly. I got in touch with his side-partner right away, for of course I felt responsible for Mooney, too, and I’m having him taken care of. He’s getting along all right. I had a report before breakfast this morning.”

Osgood’s nerves were still driving him to chatter, but to-day Marjorie was interested in the steady monologue.

“The lad I’m sore on is the detective I had guarding Kennedy,” he ended as they reached the patient’s door. “It seems Kennedy noticed him hanging about, and threatened to kick him if he saw him again. So the chap naturally relaxed his vigilance a bit. Can’t exactly blame him, either. He was in a cigar store around the corner when Kennedy was shot. It was he who got Munroe, though, so that helps his case. Took him single-handed, late last night.”

Osgood tapped softly on the sick-room door and immediately opened the door and put his head around it. In response to a signal he passed on into the room, but Kate came out and joined Marjorie in the hall.

“Doctor Ross and Doctor Gurney are making an examination,” she explained.

Marjorie put a hand on her arm and drew her away from the door and Kate followed automatically. Marjorie was startled by the change in her. She seemed ten years older than yesterday, and her eyes had the stare of a sleep-walker’s.

“What do they say?”

“Nothing.” All the music had gone from Kate’s beautiful voice. It was like a cello out of tune. “There isn’t much they can say,” she went on, instinctively responding to the urge of Marjorie’s hand on her arm. The two walked slowly down the hall side by side.

“If there’s no change I’ll be at the flat in an hour or so, to have a bath and get some fresh clothes,” Kate said in the same tone. “I didn’t undress

last night.”

“I’ll have everything ready for you. Have you had any breakfast?”

“I don’t know. I don’t think so.”

“Come as soon as you can. I’ll have your breakfast waiting, too.”

Marjorie’s heart was aching savagely. She had an incredible impulse to put her arms around the remote figure by her side, to hold it close and comfort it. She grimaced over the impulse. She could imagine Kate Kennedy’s firm, quiet withdrawal from any such demonstration, could see the look of surprise on her face. What right had she to offer sympathy when her continued presence in the other’s home was an offense against good taste; when there was nothing she could say, and nothing she could do, except to leave quietly during the day. In the hinterlands of her mind matters lurked that would sometime have to be taken up between them: but this, emphatically, was not the time to do it. Even if she were brave enough to attempt such a thing, she doubted whether Kate would hear her.

As if Kate read her thoughts, she spoke abruptly. There was no harshness in her voice—merely the continued flatness of exhaustion and strain.

“Perhaps you’d like to stay on at the apartment till the crisis is past,” she suggested, and added without feeling, “as you seem to be interested.”

The listener experienced no resentment over that final clause. She would not have resented anything Kate said.

“Yes,” she answered. “May I?”

“Of course, if you like. I shall not be there, except to bathe and change.”

Kate turned to walk back to the room and Marjorie turned with her, calling on her courage and finding with gratitude that it responded.

“Won’t you let me get a room and bath for you at the hospital, close to your bro—close to Bob?” she begged.

Kate looked at her, humanly now and rather as if she were seeing her for the first time.

“No, thank you. It’s very kind of you, though, to suggest it. And I suppose this is as good a time as any to tell you that I’m sorry I spoke as I did last night. It wasn’t decent of me.” She fetched a deep breath and added drearily, “Bob wouldn’t have liked it.”

“Don’t think of it again. I understand perfectly.”

Marjorie knew better than to say more. She realized, too, that it would be best for Kate to be forced to make the short daily journey back and forth to Gramercy Park, as thus she would have air and exercise she could get in no other way. They reached Kennedy's door.

"May I come in and see him, a little later?" Marjorie asked.

"Not this morning, I'm sure. They're to have a lot of consultations. Perhaps this afternoon. They won't let him talk, you know."

"I know. And I don't want to be a nuisance, as Mr. Osgood says he is."

Kate's strained expression relaxed again.

"He's very kind. I'll thank him for it . . . sometime."

"He feels responsible . . . as I do."

Kate hesitated, her hand on the door. She seemed to remember something and then to decide that it wasn't worth remembering. She entered the sick-room and closed the door, leaving unspoken the words that had been on her lips.

Marjorie went back to the waiting-room and stood gazing through a window there till Osgood came to make his report.

"It's nip and tuck," he admitted. "But there's no immediate danger. Of course if peritonitis sets in . . ."

"I'll go back to the apartment, then, and get ready for Kate," Marjorie announced on a long-drawn breath of depression.

"I may as well walk back with you and pluck you from the drifts at intervals," Osgood suggested; and she realized that he was glad of the excuse to get away from the atmosphere of the hospital. When they reached the entrance of the apartment building, however, she did not ask him in. She had things to do. She must get ready for Kate; she must make Kate comfortable. She longed to be about that task.

She drew a hot bath and added lavender salts to it. She laid out Kate's fresh linen, put clean towels on the bath-room racks, and watched and corrected Johnny's misguided methods of making a fire. She ordered a breakfast which was to be sent upstairs half an hour after Miss Kennedy entered the building. Then, following these activities, she went slowly to her own quarters, and the calm little room received her as if she had always lived in it. The least she could do was to leave Kate in undisturbed possession of the apartment during the short time she was at home.

She heard the latch-key turn in the front-door keyhole, and later a splashing in the tub proved that her house companion was having at least the refreshment of a bath. She also heard Johnnie arriving with the breakfast tray, and wondered if Kate would eat anything. At eleven o'clock, entering the deserted living-room, she was not surprised to find the breakfast intact and cold in its covered dishes. But Kate had at least drunk all the coffee; and a few minutes later, seated in a dark corner of the upper hall with the tray on his lap, Johnny consumed grape-fruit and cold omelet and French rolls, his appetite unimpaired by the fact that two hours earlier he had also eaten the breakfast of the guy on the second floor. Some folks had their troubles. Johnny knew that. He had also discovered a strange tendency on their part to stop eating when they had sickness or trouble. Personally, that morning, Johnny had no troubles. Life was a banquet and he was its guest of honor.

CHAPTER XVII

OSGOOD SPEAKS

AFTER that, for more than a week, the days were much alike, differing only in the changes from hope to anxiety, to despair, and back to hope, which are the usual accompaniments of life in a sick-room where the patient's condition remains critical. Immortal Hope's visits were always brief. She remained at Kennedy's side only long enough to smile at his attendants before departing.

"Tilden and I are the only men who think Kennedy has a chance," Doctor Ross mentioned to Marjorie in a rare moment of expansiveness and on a day which happened to be Christmas, though no one in the group around Kennedy attached importance to that fact. "We've got too many on this job, anyway," Ross added irritably. The surgeon in charge was getting restive under the suggestions and vagaries of his associates.

Marjorie went to the hospital twice a day, morning and evening. The rest of the time she remained at the apartment, subject to call and incidentally a sympathetic hostess to callers who shared her anxiety. Osgood was constantly in and out. He came to breakfast every morning, and if permitted would ecstatically have come to luncheon and dinner as well. His manner was changing, and his eyes when they rested on Marjorie had begun to wear a new look, the look of eyes that have suddenly cleared to the meaning and beauty of life. But even in this crisis Marjorie had a saving though subconscious realization that this is a critical world. Deep interest in Kennedy's condition was felt in the Gramercy Park building, and she reminded herself that this interest, if possible, must be untinged by suspicion.

Young Horace Kemp telephoned daily, and usually came in at the tea hour, but neither he nor Marjorie again referred to the matter of Kate's revelation. Horace evidently felt that the topic was a delicate one. He had lost the care-free manner that fitted him so well, and wore the expression of one who had bathed in a hidden pool of sorrow. At intervals he assured Marjorie that she had wrecked his life, but it was plain that he found a melancholy pleasure in playing his new rôle. She gathered that his father was disturbed by it, and that attractive girl stenographers in the Kemp offices had expressed alarm over the change in him.

“Don’t I make your heart bleed?” he asked Marjorie, in a lighter moment than usual. “I’m only dropping in, Woman, to let you look upon your Work!”

He sank into gloom again when warmly assured that his condition aroused no sympathy in her. She added that he undoubtedly ate three heavy meals a day and slept eight hours every night, and Horace flushed under the charge, which happened to be justified.

Tilden, too, for a time ignored everything but the supreme interest of Bob’s condition. He passed Marjorie’s apartment-building every evening on his way to dinner, and after a few visits which ended almost as soon as they began, he fell into the habit of lingering for a cigar and a chat before the fire. Once more his hostess was called upon to admire the ease with which men can ignore and seemingly forget unpleasant episodes. Tilden’s manner was increasingly cordial and friendly, but surprisingly matter-of-fact and wholly un-self-conscious. She could see, however, that he was much worried about Kate.

“She’ll go to smash if she keeps this up,” he said, during a call made toward the end of the week. “She doesn’t eat and she doesn’t sleep, but there’s no use talking to her. She doesn’t even hear me. She’s making the fight with Bob, and the only time she knows there’s any one else in the universe is when some one does something for him.”

Osgood had spoken of that, too, Marjorie remembered.

“If I didn’t know her so well,” Tilden mused aloud, “I’d almost doubt her love for me.”

Marjorie shot a quick look at him, and realized that he was speaking with entire unconsciousness and sincerity. Yes, men were amazing creatures, and she was learning a lot about them. It was what she had hoped to do, but not in these conditions.

As if suddenly realizing that here, perhaps, was something he could do for Kate, Tilden went on.

“I don’t know whether you realize how hard a life Kate has had,” he said with his first touch of embarrassment. “I wish you’d try to. It might help you to understand her. And . . . perhaps you’d like to, now?” The last sentence was a question and she answered it as such.

“Yes. Tell me about her.”

Tilden went on willingly, settling back in his chair with his characteristic air of having the evening on his hands. In reality he had exactly ten minutes:

“Kennedy, Lizzie McManus’s husband, you know, wasn’t successful,” he began, “and his grievance against life was ingrowing and made him a hard man to live with. He turned the screw, by becoming a drunkard. Lizzie and the children had a bad time of it. They fought for everything they got, and they got mighty little. They knew what it was to be cold and hungry for days at a time. In fact, they were never properly looked after. Kennedy had old Mrs. McManus on his hands, too, and he didn’t let Lizzie forget it. He flew into rages and abused Lizzie and the children, and that sort of thing naturally added the last touch to the family misery. Finally he drank himself to death, and Lizzie went soon after him. Bob and Kate were old enough to earn a living by that time, but they both realized that their only chance lay in an education, so they worked their way through college and supported their grandmother while they were doing it. I don’t know whether you knew that?” he interrupted himself to ask.

Marjorie shook her head. Her throat ached. This was the life that Bob had lived while every desire of hers had been gratified almost before she experienced it!

“Why didn’t they make an effort to find us?” she asked in a low tone.

“Kennedy might have done it—the father, I mean—if he had known who Lizzie’s lover had been.” The listener stiffened under the words, but Tilden continued unobservedly: “He never knew. Lizzie loved your father to the last day of her life, so she’d never make him any trouble; and old Mrs. McManus’s obsessing fear was that your father might appear with a claim. She knew he spent years trying to trace Lizzie—You know that, too, I suppose?” he interrupted himself to ask.

“I didn’t know anything at all till my father and mother died,” Marjorie admitted with a sigh. “All I got then was my mother’s point of view—never my father’s.”

“Well, it’s better you should know the conditions,” Tilden said, abruptly rising to go. “You understand a little better, perhaps, why a girl like Kate, high-spirited, passionate, fiercely devoted to her own, would feel that she and they had rights which almost justified her part in what we tried to do.”

“Yes, it’s easy enough to understand that,” Marjorie conceded. “But I wish she had claimed their rights in another fashion.”

“There were good reasons why she couldn’t do that. She’ll explain them to you when the time comes. There’s another point I want to make,” he brought out. “I don’t suppose I can make it. I know you won’t consider me an authority on the subject. But I do want to say that I know Kate as no one else but her brother knows her. And this thing, which she has done far more for me than for herself, is the only thing I’ve ever known her to do that wasn’t up to the standard. She has had to fight her way all through life, with everything against her, but up till now she has always fought fair. Dozens of her friends would tell you that Kate Kennedy has the finest sporting spirit they know. You believe that, don’t you?”

“Yes,” Marjorie admitted, “I believe that.”

“It’s good of you to believe it,” Tilden said gratefully, and went away.

Of Kate, Marjorie saw little. They exchanged a few words when she went to the hospital, and these were colored by the patient’s condition. If Bob seemed better, Kate knew who she was and gave her the good news as she would have given it to any inquiring friend or acquaintance. When Bob was worse Kate seemed unable to distinguish Marjorie from the other shadowy figures around her. Bob himself Marjorie did not see again. The “No Admission” card was in the door slot, and the detail that she was a half-sister of the stricken man obviously did not count even with the few who knew it.

One morning, after ten days of this, Marjorie, entering their common sitting-room with the impression that Kate, as usual, had left close upon her hurried bath and breakfast, found her still sitting by the fire. She was leaning back in an attitude of relaxation she had not fallen into since the shooting, stretched out in one of the wing chairs, with her hands behind her head and her feet on the fender. A half-smoked cigarette was between her lips, and for the first time the breakfast tray on the table at her elbow was almost empty.

Marjorie’s heart leaped, not with relief alone, for she had already learned by telephoning to the hospital that the previous night had been the best the patient had experienced. There was joy in seeing Kate in that familiar pose and place, and there was the old sensation of comfort in her presence, as if they two belonged together. But of course they did not, Marjorie’s pride tried to remind her. Here was the girl who had deceived her, who had plotted against her, who had shot out at her, after Bob’s operation, a tongue of flame. It was not the memory of these things, however, that caused Marjorie’s instinctive retreat. She could forgive them all—indeed, had already forgiven them. She wished to remain, and she turned to leave the

room only because she was sure Kate did not want her there. She told herself in that moment that she was like a persistent, devoted child, determinedly tagging at the heels of an older companion who did not want it, would not slacken step for it, hardly knew, perhaps, that it was following. She opened the door softly, and was stopped by Kate's voice.

"Don't go."

Marjorie turned back and went toward the figure by the fire. Her heart pounded, and self-contempt took her by the throat. She *was* a tagging, unwanted child, ready to forgive and forget anything if only that hurrying figure just in front of her on the highway of life would stop and hold out a hand. She experienced the weariness of such a child, and, in this moment, its pathetic uprush of hope.

"I want to thank you."

Kate's voice sounded natural again. She looked up at Marjorie with her charming smile. Her eyes were clear, but her face was colorless and very thin. She had lost ten pounds in the past fortnight.

"I wish I could do something worth while," the younger girl murmured.

"You've taken a lot of trouble to get ready for me here, every day," Kate went on, speaking with her familiar effect of detachment, but cordially and appreciatively—in short, much as she might have spoken to Johnny. "I must have been vaguely conscious of it all the time," she continued, "but I don't seem to have really taken it in till this morning. Baths don't prepare themselves, and breakfasts don't grow on tables before the fire. Thank you again."

She was still smiling as she might have smiled at any one with whom she was on pleasantly formal terms, and Marjorie's throat contracted. So great seemed the distance between them that Kate might have been talking to her across the width of the world. It was tragic to have that human message come as a mere convention, to see that familiar figure so dim and so far away. She made a desperate effort to bridge the gulf between them.

"Doctor Ross seemed very hopeful about Bob this morning," she said. After all, they were both Bob's sisters.

A light flashed into Kate's worn face.

"Yes," she said, and again "Yes," lingeringly, unctuously, as if fully savoring the flavor of the word. "They say he'll surely get well now, unless there are further complications. I can't see any reason why there should be

more complications. He's so strong and so plucky, and he's being watched so carefully every minute . . .”

Her voice died to a murmur. She was leaning forward now, looking into the fire and obviously talking to herself, putting into words, simply for her own reassurance, the cheering reflections that came to her. It was plain that she had almost forgotten her companion, and, after a moment's hesitation, Marjorie turned and left the room. There are limits to what a proud nature can accept. Miss Kennedy's interest in her, set for a certain task, had accomplished that task and dropped her. She did not even hear her go.

Back in her own room, Marjorie sat down in its one chair and ordered herself before the bar of her common sense. She was chilled through by this indifference. Kate, she told herself, had not only failed to hold out a hand to her. She had thrown her back as a victim to the wolves that also pursued her. With set eyes Marjorie Blake contemplated the vision that had brought her East. It had not wholly faded out, but it was growing dim, and the relentless routine of Blakesville stretched before her almost alluringly.

“I'll go back,” she suddenly decided. “Nothing here is as I thought it would be, and I've made a mess of all I've attempted. I'll go back as soon as Bob's out of danger. Perhaps he and I can keep in touch a little, if he's willing, though I know he'll never let me do anything for him. But Kate—why in Heaven's name do I like her?” she asked her troubled heart. “But, anyway, Bob's better. She can't take the comfort of that from me.”

Osgood presented himself just before luncheon.

“The goose hangs so high that we've got to go outside to look at it,” he jubilantly announced. “Can't get the right perspective in here. Let's celebrate by going up-town for lunch. What about the Plaza or the Lido Venice?” He seemed to have taken on, for that morning at least, the gaiety Horace had so abruptly dropped.

“You deserve a good meal,” Marjorie admitted, “and you ought to have it. I can't go, but please go yourself.”

“Alone? I guess not!” The Sun God shook his glowing locks at her.

“Then stay here for lunch, if you like,” Marjorie conceded. “Though Heaven knows there's nothing exciting about our menus.”

“Better a stalled ox here than anything in any other restaurant,” Osgood declared, tossing his hat on the couch, flinging his overcoat on top of it, and buoyantly approaching the fire. “Is a stalled ox something to eat? Not that it matters. Whatever it is, I'll eat it with you, if it's served. I mean it,” he said,

suddenly stopping short and fixing his brilliant eyes on her. "I want to be with you; I want to be with you all the time."

"That's nice of you." Marjorie was finding comfort in the discovery that others liked her, even if Kate Kennedy didn't.

"Marjorie!" Osgood had placed himself in front of her, as she sat in her favorite chair before the fire, his back to the blaze, his brilliant eyes intently on her face. "Don't move or speak," he added impressively. "I've got something to ask you. I may appear a trifle abrupt, but this seems a good time. Will you marry me?"

She shook her head at him.

"Tut, tut! These high spirits of yours will get you into trouble yet," she predicted. "The moment your anxiety lifts a little you do something foolish. Some day you'll come out of a moment like this and realize that a girl is leading you to the altar."

"Don't joke. I'm frightfully in earnest."

"Dear boy, you're nothing of the sort."

"I am! I am!" Osgood persisted, and, to her dismay, she saw that there were tears in his brown eyes. "And you've got to take me seriously," he added, moving away from the revealing firelight and quickly shutting his eyes to get rid of the unmanly moisture. "You've simply got to take me seriously. I'm all tired out, and I want to be loved and comforted."

"I won't take advantage of this mood," Marjorie promised, though a rainbow had stretched before her through the prism of those tears. A light note seemed necessary and she firmly held to it. "I must remind you that less than two weeks ago you told me you always flew from matrimony and never looked back!"

"You're mistaken," the young man assured her with dignity. "I didn't say anything about myself. I was discussing the subject in a broad and general way, talking about other men's troubles. I'd never fly from matrimony. I'd only fly from the wrong girl. Why—great Scott, Marjorie!—I've been dreaming of you all my life, and I knew you the minute you came," he ended firmly; and then added, not quite so firmly, "Or, anyway, I knew you soon *after* you came!"

Marjorie laughed, rather shakily, and as if encouraged by the sound he suddenly sat down on the floor in front of her chair, clasped his arms around his knees, and finished his proposal in that unusual position.

“You speak of time,” he said. “As I believe some one has remarked before me, love isn’t measured by weeks, or years. If it comes to the point, you know, looked at as an aid to getting acquainted, the last ten days have taught us more about each other than we could learn in ordinary years. It’s at times like this that real character comes out. That’s true, isn’t it? Or is it merely bromidic?”

“It’s true. And you have come out splendidly,” Marjorie hastened to admit. “As for me,” she added with a sigh, “I’ve been of no earthly use to any one, any more than I’ve been at any other time in my life. I suppose I meant a lot to my father and mother,” she went on moodily, forgetting the topic of the moment in her introspection, “but since their deaths I really haven’t meant anything to anybody, even to myself; and the worst thing about it is that I’ve always subconsciously known it. I tried to be cocky and independent. I pretended to think I was immensely clever. I knew I wasn’t. I came away from home to see if there was anything in me a new life might bring out. But there isn’t,” she somberly ended. “I’ve learned that lesson once and for all.”

“There is! There is!” Osgood jumped to his feet to emphasize the assertion. “There is a whole lot of love for me in you, darling. I’ve seen it growing. I’m not much good myself. That is,” he hurriedly went on, realizing that this was no moment to belittle what he was offering the lady, “I’ve not done much yet. I barely scraped through college, and I don’t suppose I’d have done anything at all in business if I hadn’t Father back of me. No one has ever called me clever. But Father says I’m learning something every year, so perhaps I’ll work out all right. I know I’ll work out all right if you’ll take me.”

“I wonder.” Marjorie looked at him thoughtfully. She recalled her assertion to Penny that the man she married would be a combination of Solon the Wise, Bayard the Pure, and Richard the Lion-Hearted. David Osgood did not come up to those specifications, but in the deep humility of the moment she inwardly admitted that he was offering her much more than she deserved.

“If it’s really true that we’re the same sort—” she continued.

“We are! That is, I am. What I mean,” said Osgood, pulling himself together, “is that you’re simply wonderful. If you took me in hand you could even make something of me.”

“I haven’t been thinking of love lately,” Marjorie mused aloud, watching him as he stood expectantly before her.

“I know, darling. I oughtn’t to have spoken yet—”

“But there hasn’t been a minute when I haven’t been depending on you. You’ve been so loyal and understanding and sympathetic and kind—”

“For Heaven’s sake, don’t idealize me,” he anxiously interrupted. “You’ll come an awful cropper if you do that, and then find me out.”

“I’ve never liked anyone so much.” As he started toward her she stopped him. “And somehow, when you’ve been around other men have seemed invisible. Is that love?” she ended anxiously.

“You bet it is! Or, if it isn’t, it’s good enough for me!”

“I’m not sure. And, anyway, it’s absurd for us to talk about marriage. You don’t even know who I am!”

She watched him closely as she spoke. Possibly he did know, very well, though she had written to Betty after the latter’s escapade, asking the flapper not to betray her to any one. Betty had sent a hurriedly scrawled promise, and evidently Betty had kept her word, for Osgood’s eyes held Marjorie’s with no change in their clear depths.

“What difference does that make?” he loftily demanded. “If it’s money you’re thinking about, that’s the one thing we Osgoods ain’t got nothing else but, as the darkies say. I always wanted to marry a poor girl, if I could be sure she wasn’t looking on me as a meal ticket. Good Lord!” He crimsoned to the roots of his red-brown hair. “You see, I’ve never proposed before, so I lack the finesse most fellows get from practice.”

“You do, David. You certainly do.”

He seized her hand ecstatically.

“But you’ll risk me just the same, won’t you? Oh, Marjorie, *do* risk me!”

“I’ll think about it. We’ll both think about it. In the meantime I’ll feed you. Come along.”

Young Osgood was desperately in love, but he was human. Also, he was hungry. With a shake of the head and a deep sigh, but without more argument, he followed her to the waiting meal.

CHAPTER XVIII

HENRY BLAKE'S SON

AT the hospital, which they entered two hours later with high hearts, grave faces again greeted them. There had been another of the abrupt changes that had marked this case from the first.

"His heart's weaker," the nurse complained, talking to them in the hall outside of Kennedy's door. "Not much, but a little. His temperature is rising, too," she added, with the resentment of one who sees a fancied victory turning to defeat. "There doesn't seem to be any reason for these symptoms, but there they are. We've telephoned for Doctor Ross. Mr. Kennedy wants to see you, Miss Brown," she added, more naturally. "He asked to be told when you came. He knows that you come every day and it seems to please him, though you haven't been allowed to come in. But to-day he has something on his mind, so Doctor Ross thinks we'd better let him get it off. Wait here. I'll see if he's ready now."

A moment later she reopened the door and nodded. Marjorie walked straight to the bed under the quiet welcome of her brother's eyes. She bent and kissed his cheek, putting into the caress all she could of acceptance and welcome.

"That's . . . nice . . . of . . . you," he muttered gratefully, his eyes still on her. She was appalled by the change in him. It was hard to realize that the powerful man of a fortnight ago had become this masculine wraith.

"You see, dear, when I was here before I didn't know," she explained. "Kate told me. So now . . . I *do* know."

For answer he feebly reached out, took one of her hands, and pressed it.

"It's . . . mighty . . . queer, all . . . this. I . . . never . . . expected . . . it." He moved his head restlessly, glancing around the room. "Send . . . them . . . away."

She looked around. There were two nurses in the room, and with a glance at the door she sent them into outer space. They went unhesitatingly, the second pausing on the threshold to send back a look urging caution. Marjorie sat down in the chair that had been placed in readiness for her. She was almost sure that this was a dream.

“Dear Bob,” she heard herself say, “is there anything I can do? If there is, for God’s sake give me the comfort of doing it.”

He faintly pressed her hand again.

“May . . . not . . . get . . . through . . . after . . . all,” he jerked out. “Got . . . to . . . make . . . every word . . . count. Worried . . . about . . . things. Grandmother’s . . . all . . . right. Leaving . . . enough . . . to . . . take . . . care . . . of . . . her. Not . . . enough . . . for . . . Kate, too. Want . . . you . . . to . . . keep . . . eye . . . on . . . Kate . . . in . . . sickness . . . or . . . trouble. Understand? Not . . . easy . . . to . . . ask . . . this. Harder . . . to . . . leave . . . Kate . . . unprotected.”

“I’ll take care of Kate,” Marjorie promised, “as if she were my sister!”

The hand that held hers abruptly released it. Kennedy’s eyes, strangely deep in their sockets, looked up at her with something shocked and resentful in their depths.

“Isn’t . . . she . . . your . . . sister?” he demanded, in a voice suddenly stronger. “Don’t . . . you . . . admit . . . it?”

“Of course, dear.” Marjorie spoke in the cajoling tone one uses to a child. “She’s your sister, so she’s mine, too.”

He frowned, looking confused and unhappy.

“You . . . don’t . . . really . . . admit . . . it?” he asked, with a boyish break in his weak voice. “You . . . resent . . . what . . . she . . . tried . . . to . . . do? Is . . . that . . . it? She . . . told . . . me . . . about . . . it. You . . . won’t . . . acknowledge . . . her? Then—” the head he had tried to raise sank back in the pillow, and he closed his eyes as if the interview were over—“if . . . she . . . isn’t . . . your . . . sister, Marjorie . . . I’m not . . . your brother.”

“Bob, dear, I’ll do anything and everything for Kate. Haven’t I promised? What more can I say?” Marjorie was in tears. This scene, she knew, should not go on; yet how could she leave him in such disquiet?

“I’ll adopt her as my sister, if you wish,” she added eagerly, suddenly convinced that his fever was responsible for this unreasonableness, and that she must humor him.

“But . . . good Lord! . . . if . . . I’m . . . your . . . half-brother, why . . . isn’t . . . she . . . your . . . half-sister?” He fairly pumped out the words. “She . . . came . . . into . . . the . . . world . . . only . . . five . . . minutes . . . after . . . me. . . .”

He stopped, exhausted, and with a hopeless look at her again closed his eyes.

“Never . . . mind,” he muttered. “Better . . . go . . . now. Getting . . . tired.”

Marjorie could not speak. She had taken in not only his words but their full revelation. He was not demanding, as she had stupidly thought, that she accept Kate merely because Kate was his half-sister. He was telling her the incredible truth that Kate was her sister, too; that the same blood ran in Kate’s veins and in hers. Kate Kennedy was as much Henry Blake’s daughter as Marjorie Blake was; and in that instant, with an uprush of feeling that brought her to her feet, Marjorie felt that she had always known it. That was why she had so fully and so freely forgiven. That was why she had been the persistent, tagging child, refusing to be ignored, refusing to be sent back. Why shouldn’t she have felt that tremendous, pulling bond? Kate Kennedy was not only the elder daughter of Marjorie’s beloved father, but Kate Kennedy was much more like Henry Blake than Marjorie was. Both Kate and Bob had his coloring, his eyes, the shape of his head; and a thousand times Marjorie Blake had seen on Henry Blake’s lips Kate Kennedy’s quizzical, characteristic smile. That, she now knew, was one reason why she had loved it. Their voices, too, were like his. All these things which were now so clear, she had not recognized. But she had recognized something bigger than mere resemblance. Her self-respect rose from its knees, and her heart rose with it.

She leaned over her brother, speaking to what seemed an immobile mask.

“Bob,” she said, very clearly and distinctly, “there has been a misunderstanding. Nobody told me Kate was your twin. I thought she was the child of your stepfather. You see, everything has come so suddenly that I couldn’t take it in. But it’s clear now, and I love you both. Try to understand. I’ve loved Kate from the day I met her. There’s nothing in the world I won’t do for her. Isn’t that what you want me to promise?”

“Yes.”

Kennedy had opened his eyes as she spoke. Again he reached for her hand and pressed it.

“All . . . right . . . now,” he articulated. “Funny how . . . we . . . think . . . people . . . know all . . . about . . . us. Thought . . . of . . . course . . . Tilden

. . . or Kemp . . . had told you . . . or Kate . . . herself. Guess . . . they . . . weren't . . . thinking . . . of . . . such . . . things."

His voice was almost inaudible. Marjorie straightened.

"Don't try to talk any more. Everything is understood. You're going to get well. I'm sure of it. But in any case, dear Bob, trust me."

"I will . . . I do." A look of content came over the gray face on the pillow. "That's . . . good," he gasped. "That . . . helps . . . a lot. Won't . . . worry any more."

A nurse entered with determination, and, hastening to the bedside, put her fingers on her patient's pulse and frowned at Marjorie.

"You've let him talk too much," she severely assured the visitor.

"She's . . . made . . . me . . . happy," Kennedy murmured, almost drowsily.

"He's going to get well, and we're to have a wonderful life," Marjorie said, looking down at him as he again lay with closed eyes.

"Ah!" The nurse smiled and her face softened. She thought she understood. "I should think he would get well, after that," she said briskly. "But go now, please. We mustn't let him get too tired."

She looked on with approval while the girl laid her cheek against the patient's, in a wordless farewell. A little later, when the visitor had gone, she watched the sleeping face on the pillow and nodded contentedly.

"I thought that would help a lot," she told the second day nurse, referring to the supposed romance. "We ought to have let her in sooner. And it *has* helped. Sometimes such things are just enough to turn the scale."

Marjorie went in search of Kate and found her talking to Osgood, a little distance down the hall. With a glance she eliminated the young man from the party, and, taking Kate's arm, led her to the waiting-room. To her relief, it was empty. She closed the door and faced her sister.

"Come and sit down," she said quietly. "I want to talk to you."

As the other mechanically obeyed, Marjorie sat down close to her and tried to catch Kate's eyes. But Kate was staring through the window. Only the shell of her was there. Her brain and heart were in her brother's room, and Marjorie knew it.

“He isn’t so well this afternoon,” she muttered. “They’re worried. They’re very much worried. I can see it. And we thought all the danger was over.”

“He’s better now. He’s going to be better still. And he has just told me,” Marjorie went on steadily, “what you and I are to each other. You see, Kate, I didn’t know. How could I?” She added the explanation she had made to Bob. “I thought you were Bob’s half-sister.”

Kate turned her eyes at this and looked at her for a moment. Something like a flash appeared in their somber depths, but the next instant it died out and the eyes dropped.

“Haven’t you known, really?” The question was asked without much interest.

“Of course I haven’t. How could you imagine for a moment that I knew? Surely you don’t mean that you thought I’d known for the last two weeks!”

Kate nodded.

“I did think so,” she admitted. “But what does it matter?” She broke out irrepressibly. “Oh, what does anything matter if Bob’s going to die? I must go back to him,” she ended in a different tone, starting to rise.

Marjorie laid a compelling hand on her shoulder.

“Wait just a moment.” Miss Blake of Blakesville was handling this situation—not the persistent helpless child.

“Bob would want you to wait,” Marjorie added. “He wants us to be friends, as well as sisters. You’re all he’s thinking about. But if he lives, and I’m sure he will,” she added firmly, “I think he’ll give me a little affection, too. I need it, Kate. Do you realize how utterly alone I am—or was? I’m not now. For some reason, I’ve never felt alone since I met you. I couldn’t understand it. I simply felt it. And when you turned from me I wanted to run after you like a crying baby,” she added with a catch in her breath.

Kate’s head dropped. She was listening now.

“I don’t know how you could feel that way. But I felt it, too,” she admitted, “from the very first. I hadn’t expected to feel so, and I didn’t want to, but I did.”

She moved restlessly. Even yet, though she was listening and replying, only half her mind was on what was being said.

“We can’t talk here,” she pointed out.

Osgood opened the door with a reassuring smile.

“I don’t want to interrupt,” he apologized, speaking to them both from the threshold, “but I knew it would relieve you to hear that Kennedy’s heart action is natural again and he has fallen asleep. It’s a splendid thing for him, and they want him to sleep on. So Tilden has cleared every one out of the room, except one nurse, and he has put another nurse in the hall to guard the door. Tilden himself has gone to Ross’s office.”

Kate put her hands to her face, with the gesture of one distraught.

“I daren’t believe it,” she whispered. “An hour from now they’ll tell me he’s worse again. I shall go mad if this keeps up!”

“They won’t tell you he’s worse. He’s going to get well.” Marjorie’s voice was quietly convincing. “Will you let us know as soon as he wakes?” she asked Osgood.

“Of course.” He closed the door and slipped away. Kate sighed wearily. It was the long sigh of one drawing in and exhaling a suspended breath.

“I’m getting hipped,” she confessed. “I’m afraid to hope, and despair drives me crazy. And of course I haven’t had much sleep. The bond between twins is terrible,” she went on almost sharply. Apparently she had forgotten what they were talking about before the interruption. “I think I’ve had every pang Bob has had since he’s been hurt. It has always been that way with us. Even when we were children, and separated, each of us knew if the other was sick. All twins aren’t like that, I know, but we are.”

Life’s tricks were incredible, Marjorie reflected for the thousandth time. If Kate had said as much as this in their talk before the fire, the whole situation would have been cleared up. But Kate had thought she knew.

“Sit back and be comfortable,” she begged. “You might as well. You can’t go to Bob now, you know.” And Kate, still automatically responding, pulled herself into an easier position in the stiff corner chair.

“Father Kennedy didn’t take Bob away from the asylum as soon as he took me,” Kate went on, without interest but as if to talk about Bob meant a lessening of her own tension. “He took me as soon as he married our mother. That was the first condition of their marriage. He wouldn’t take Bob, said he couldn’t afford it. I suppose he expected children of his own, but he never had any. That was one of his grievances. I don’t think he’d ever have taken Bob if he could help it. But about a year after their marriage another family wanted to adopt Bob, and Mother was almost frantic. She had an understanding with the asylum people that she was to take him herself as

soon as she could, so they had to let her know about the new opportunity. Of course she gave Kennedy no rest until he went to the asylum and got Bob. Up till that time we had both been delicate children—fretting for each other, the asylum doctors thought. After it we were both well, at least, and took our kicks and cuffs and hard knocks cheerfully, because we were taking them together.”

This, Marjorie realized, was all she had gone back into the past for, to prove her claim that she and her brother were interdependent. But it had started her on a train of reminiscence she might be induced to follow up.

“We had plenty of kicks and cuffs,” she underlined, without feeling.

“I know. Doctor Tilden told me.”

“Did he?” Kate looked surprised, and seemed at a loss to account for the confidence. She paused, plainly turning it over in her mind. Then, as if she had suddenly realized to whom she was speaking, she fixed her eyes on Marjorie and went on, addressing her directly now, but as detachedly as before.

“I don’t suppose Joe told you what our illegitimacy brought upon us,” she resumed, while Marjorie flinched under the words. “He doesn’t know much about that himself. But children are terribly cruel, and in some way, wherever we went, it always leaked out at school that Kennedy wasn’t our real father, and that, in fact, we had no father. He drank a great deal,” she dispassionately interjected, “and I suppose he talked about us when he was drunk. Anyway, as I’ve said, it always got out. And though the children didn’t understand what it meant, and Bob and I didn’t either, we were shunned and jeered at as if we were criminals. Seeing us so wretched at school and so badly treated at home broke our mother’s heart, and she died soon after Kennedy drank himself to death.”

Suddenly it seemed to Marjorie that she could not bear any more of this, and she looked about with an almost frantic desire to escape. But Kate talked on dispassionately, like a beautiful toned phonograph, freshly wound up.

“Grandmother watched it all,” she was saying, “and when we were old enough she told us what it meant and who our father was. She had followed him up and knew where he was and all about him. She even learned about you, and as soon as she did she told us. She was sure then, that it was the same Henry Blake, because your name was the same as that your mother

had signed on the agreement between them. Grandmother has all our papers, by the way: birth, baptism, adoption . . .”

Again reminded by this point in her story that she had a listener, Kate turned her eyes upon Marjorie.

“Grandmother kept track of your father as long as he lived, and she read in the newspapers of his death and your mother’s. She had always fiercely hated your mother, and she taught us to hate her, too, as well as you and your father. At least,” Kate stopped to consider this, “she tried to teach us,” she went on more slowly. “She hadn’t much effect on Bob. Though we look so much alike, our natures are different. As soon as he was old enough to think for himself, he began to tell me that what had happened wasn’t your fault, and that it was silly to blame you. We were both rather thrilled by the existence of an unknown sister, you see, and we used to talk about you a good deal.

“But I couldn’t see the situation as Bob did, even when I was a child. Grandmother’s hatred grew with the years as she watched us suffer. She suffered, too, poor woman, for Kennedy treated her abominably. I suppose if we had all been reasonably happy she might have softened. As it was, her hatred grew, as I have said, and she inoculated me with it. Every time I had a particularly hard struggle, every time things went wrong with us—and they were always going wrong—” she parenthesized with the first bitterness she had shown—“Grandmother reminded me of our father’s other daughter, who, through no virtue of her own, was having everything.”

“And so you hated me,” Marjorie summed up. “That was natural enough.”

“Yes, I’m afraid I did. And Grandmother added all the fuel she could to the hatred.”

“Shall you always hate me, Kate?”

Kate shook her head. She had talked herself into a more normal mood. She was increasingly influenced, too, by the knowledge, which she had finally taken in, that her brother’s sleep was constructive and encouraging.

“I don’t know,” she said, refusing to meet Marjorie’s eyes. “It was hard to hold the hatred sometimes, after I met you. In fact, I found myself loving you. But the hatred must have lived on under the new feeling, Marjorie. This last experience proves that. If Bob dies—” for a moment she closed her eyes, to shut out the sight of that black gulf—“well, if he dies, I suppose I

shall not feel anything,” she ended heavily. “And if he lives, I shall be so grateful that nothing else will matter.”

She stopped, apparently trying to remember what she had been about to say when this digression came up. A young doctor in a white surgical coat opened the door, glanced in at them, and frowned.

“Better leave this door open,” he curtly advised, and propping the door back against the wall hurried away. Neither of the two girls he addressed heard him. Kate looked at her wrist-watch. Assuming that Bob’s sleep was continuing, it had not yet lasted fifteen minutes.

“You may as well know the whole story,” she went on with a sigh. “I suppose this is as good a time to talk as any, since there’s nothing else I can do.”

“Yes. Tell me as much as you can.”

Of course Kate was right. This was as good a time as any. Yet it was not in this fashion Marjorie had expected to find and claim a sister.

“I grew up with the notion of getting something out of you,” Kate continued. “I’ll save time by admitting it at once. Not by making any legal claim, for Bob and I had sworn to Grandmother that we’d never do that. But in some other way. I used to talk about it to Susie Kemp, Horace’s sister, when I went there. And Horace, who was always hanging around, like the usual small boy, overheard some of my talk. After that, whenever he got angry, he’d throw it up at me. That kept it in our minds, of course, and in his. Naturally, it made me furious, too, and I’ve never forgiven him, though he has developed so much better than I thought he would.—Oh, why am I telling you all this?” she broke off to ask wearily. “I know exactly what you think of me. I can see your point of view, but it doesn’t seem to matter. Nothing matters . . . but Bob.”

“Go on,” Marjorie urged in a low voice.

“Oh, well . . . if you will have it so.” Kate took up the recital as if it were a physical burden. “While I was at college I thought of ways and means of getting from you what I thought was due us. I had no idea of injuring you in any way, you see—” her lips twitched sardonically—“and I had pledged myself never to ask you for help. So it wasn’t easy to shape my course ahead. However, life wasn’t treating me well, and I was getting desperate. After working my way through college I tried teaching, but I loathed it, and of course, feeling that way, I wasn’t a success at it. Then I went into secretarial work and research—a dog’s life,” she interjected. “The only

things I ever got out of it were the letters that helped me with you—those I'd had the forethought to take West with me. So everything seemed driving me toward you and the carrying out of my old plan.

"I still didn't know how I was to go about it, but, naturally, my first need was to know more about you. With the first money I was able to save I went out to Blakesville and hired a girl detective to get a job in your house and give me inside information. She certainly got it," Kate dryly conceded. "She was Annie Riley, your waitress the last three weeks you were home. She reported to me every night, and after she had been with you a few days there was mighty little about you I didn't know, from the state of your mind to the value of your lingerie. She would add details about that," the speaker indifferently interpolated, "though I warned her not to. She was tremendously impressed by your clothes."

She stopped for a moment, as if to brood over Annie Riley's feminine weakness.

"Well, she was a wonder," she went on, after a brief silence which Marjorie made no effort to break. "Annie overheard your entire talk with Miss Penny, in which you explained that you were leaving home and why, and Annie reported every word of it to me. That report cleared up the whole situation. Till then, I merely planned to meet you and form an intimacy, but I didn't know how I was going to use you. After that talk of yours my course was plain. I knew exactly what I was going to do."

"Oh, Kate!"

The cry burst from Marjorie's lips, and Kate stopped to look at her. A deep flush, of the kind Marjorie had seen on it once before, dyed her face from chin to brow.

"Not pleasant to listen to, is it?" she said. "Not pleasant to tell, either. I knew it wouldn't be. But I owe it to you, if you want to listen. Bob would want me to make a clean breast; and there's a ghastly sort of comfort in being frank with you at last, after the schemes and evasions of these past months. However, perhaps I'd better stop. Besides, Joe told me he gave you the rest of it."

"He did, but please tell it, just the same. Your side of it is what I want to hear."

"My plan was very simple, but it seemed practical," Kate continued, relaxing and resting her head against the chair's tall back, in a more comfortable attitude than she had yet assumed. Marjorie, stiffly upright in a

cane-seated chair beside her, realized what a relief from the other's high tension lay in even such a talk as this.

"It was easy for Annie to find out exactly what train you were taking, though you both tried to make a mystery of it," Kate continued. "I took the same train myself, intending, of course, to establish a traveling acquaintance with you first of all and thus to try to build up a friendship. It happened by a bit of luck that Joe had been called to Chicago to a patient who had been a classmate of his. He wasn't quite ready to return East, but I telegraphed him to get on our train when it reached Chicago, and to come back to New York with us. He obeyed me, as he always did.

"He has told you all that part of the affair, so I needn't go into it. But I do wish you'd try to understand my viewpoint. You say you want it, and I want you to have it. I had persuaded myself that my plan wasn't any worse than the schemes of match-making mothers. You wanted a husband." Marjorie's color rose under this massacre of her sensibilities, but Kate proceeded unobservingly, "I was ready to hand over to you the best prospective husband I knew of, the man I loved and wanted myself. I knew I could never have him. I knew that sooner or later he'd have to marry a girl with money,—several of them have wanted him,—and I honestly thought it might as well be you. I knew he was clean and decent and honest, a fine man and a good doctor. I knew he would make any girl an excellent husband. Was there anything in all that to justify you and Bob and the Kemps in looking on Joe and me as moral lepers?" she ended drearily.

"Go on," Marjorie repeated. She had no heart for side issues just now. Moreover, she knew the question was purely oratorical.

"Of course they didn't know what I was trying to do," Kate resumed, "but they knew who you were as soon as you came on, and that I was up to some scheme to get money from you, as I had foolishly proclaimed that I would do. I even had to borrow from Mr. Kemp to get back home. My private detective and my Western journey had cost more than I expected, and Bob had all he could handle. He's taking care of Grandmother, you know, and paying half the expenses of the Cranford cottage, besides the nurse's wages and doctor's bills.

"Did Joe tell you that Mrs. Wheeler is his mother? She married Wheeler when Joe's father died," Kate explained when Marjorie shook her head, "and Wheeler himself died within five years, leaving her with two little boys. Joe pays the other half of the cottage expenses, and it is wonderful, of course, to have Mrs. Wheeler there to be responsible for Grandmother. By the way, I

had to go out there the day before you saw her, and prepare Mrs. Wheeler for your visit. It was understood that she was to get rid of you if she could, and if not I'd take a hand. I didn't care how it worked out. I knew Grandmother couldn't tell you anything. . . . Where was I?"

"You had borrowed money—"

"Oh, yes. Of course I didn't dare to let Bob know what I was doing, or he'd have quashed the whole thing," she went on heavily. "However, I'd talked so much when I was a young fool, before I knew better than to talk, that they were all watching for later developments. As soon as I telegraphed Mr. Kemp for the money to come East, he leaped at the conclusion that the journey had something to do with you. I think he was actually afraid I'd do you some harm, socially or professionally. Bob was uneasy, too, though not for that reason. He suspected, as Mr. Kemp did, that I had gone West to get into touch with our unknown sister, and that I had no idea of letting the unknown sister know who I was. When I brought you back, Bob raved and protested, but what could he do? We had a big scene the first night you got here. Horace Kemp had telephoned Bob the minute he left us, and you may remember that Bob came right down to the flat. Then, the next day, Bob talked things over with both the Kemps, so I had all of them working against me from the start. Horace's being on the train was just bad luck. I hadn't looked for that. But I'm getting ahead of my story. Or don't you want any more of it?"

"I want it all."

A small woman, red-eyed and fearfully expectant, entered the waiting-room, moved about as if trying to make up her mind to remain there, and finally drifted out like an autumn leaf in a stiff breeze. They did not speak until she had gone.

"Go on, please," Marjorie said again.

Kate nodded. She had reached the point in her story where she could not meet the eyes of her listener, but her voice remained steady.

"My original plan was beautifully simple. I was to meet you on the train and make myself agreeable. Joe was to meet us, supposedly by accident, and be introduced to you as an old acquaintance of mine. But you and Miss Penny stuck to your state-room so closely that I was getting desperate. There seemed to be no way to get at you. I was almost discouraged when the wreck came and you were thrown right into our hands. That seemed providential. I took it as a sign that I was justified in what I was doing."

The hearer shivered.

“You must admit that they were friendly hands you fell into,” Kate reminded her, understanding the recoil. “The thing looked like fate, so I was immensely encouraged. Both Joe and I were right on the job, in the most natural way in the world, and for the best of reasons—because there was no one else to look after you. I didn’t see why everything shouldn’t go smoothly from that point on. I changed my plans and let you think Joe and I were strangers to each other. I was afraid if you knew we were old friends you would discover that we were in love. We wouldn’t be so much on our guard, you see. But an unexpected element entered in.” She stopped. “I don’t think I’ll tell you about that,” she brought out after a pause. “You wouldn’t understand, and perhaps you wouldn’t even believe me.”

“I may not understand,” Marjorie said dully, “but I shall believe.” Even in this situation all her emotions merged in that inexplicable faith in Kate.

“Thank you.” For a moment Kate considered the significance of the admission and decided that she understood it. “I suppose you will,” she put in, “because the appalling frankness I’m showing breeds confidence. Perhaps I couldn’t have shown it in other conditions. But, as I’ve said, only one thing matters. I’m talking to you as if I were a spirit. I almost feel that I am.”

Marjorie merely nodded.

“The new element was simply this,” Kate went on. “Almost from the moment we met I felt an idiotic, inexplicable undercurrent of . . . of interest in you . . . of something like affection. I was appalled by your injuries, instead of being grateful for the opportunity they gave me. I actually expected Joe to ignore all the other passengers and give his whole attention to you. He couldn’t understand that. I hardly understood it myself. But that’s the way I felt.”

“I remember,” Marjorie contributed. “I heard you urging him.”

“Did you? Then that will make it easier for you to believe me.”

“I realized, too, that you and Doctor Tilden were old friends,” Marjorie thought it time to mention.

“M-m, that must have puzzled you, when we repudiated the friendship during your convalescence.”

“It did.”

“And perhaps,” Kate suddenly interpreted, “you think my interest in the beginning was merely to keep you alive to carry out my plan.”

“No, I think you did it because you liked me. I knew you did. Your voice, and manner, and touch all proved it. And they all changed when I got well,” Marjorie added with a sigh.

“Of course they did. I didn’t want to like you. I loathed liking you; and yet, in spite of myself, I did like you, increasingly.”

“I went through all that, too.”

“I know. I saw you going through it, and it made things harder for me. I felt like a sentimental idiot, and I despised myself for being one. Then I’d think of my mother and of my old grandmother, and of Bob’s childhood and my own, and of all we suffered, and it would harden my heart. It was easy to hate you when I thought of those things.”

“I can understand that.”

“I’m glad you can. It was a horrible experience to go through—” Kate shuddered—“a hideous see-saw of the emotions. I felt disloyal to my family and myself, because I couldn’t keep on hating you. But . . . I simply couldn’t. I couldn’t hurt you, either; I couldn’t even bear to hurt your feelings, though one of the things I had promised myself I’d do was to remove some of your self-satisfaction and cock-sureness.”

“You have removed it,” Marjorie said grimly. “I’m not self-satisfied now, and I’m not sure of anything, except that I’m a failure.”

Kate took this without comment.

“As I’ve said,” she resumed, “as soon as we reached New York, Bob and Joe and the Kemps were all against me. Joe had been hard to handle from the first. I’d had a terrible time getting him into line, though before that I had led him easily. However, I didn’t much mind fighting them all. I’ve always liked a good fight. But when I realized that I had to fight myself, too, it was sickening. And of course, above and beyond everything else there was my love for Joe and his love for me and the knowledge that we had lost each other . . . I begged Joe, the very day of Bob’s accident, when he came to luncheon, to end the impossible situation then and there by asking you to marry him. He finally promised he would, and right after luncheon I went to my room to give him a clear field. Instead I wrote him a note calling the whole thing off! I gave the note to Johnny to take into the living-room, as if it came from a patient in the building. Joe has another patient there, you

know,” she stopped to explain. “But Johnny put the note in his pocket and forgot it.”

“I know.”

“You seem to know everything. I didn’t call Joe off because I was losing him,” Kate added quickly. “I had made up my mind to that. It wasn’t even that I was afraid he’d be unhappy. I didn’t think he would be unhappy. Almost any man can be happy if he has a beautiful wife and no financial cares,” she mentioned with a dim shadow of Henry Blake’s smile. “Joe would have been all right. But I wasn’t sure you would be. I had been watching you, studying your temperament. It had come to me how alone you were, how little love you had. It seemed to me you needed the real thing. But Joe didn’t get the note. He was asking you to marry him, while I was frantically combing New York to find him and bring him to my brother’s bedside. I suppose that’s what you’d call the irony of fate, not to say retribution; isn’t it?”

She laughed on two harsh notes, and Marjorie nodded again, not daring to speak.

“But in the meantime,” Kate resumed, “I had exhausted myself by all these reactions. I’ve been having nothing but reactions lately,” she flung out; “and those I had about you were like these I’m having now over Bob. For instance, when we went to Cranford. I had been touched and softened by your desire to find the family, though of course I didn’t want you to do it and interfere with my plans, even when by that time the plans were rather chaotic. But in the automobile—do you remember?—you made me think your only reason for seeking your father’s child was to protect yourself and carry out your mother’s warning.”

“I didn’t mean to do that. Ever since I learned the truth I’ve been determined to find my brother . . . or sister . . . some day. I had two reasons. One was my loneliness. The other was a wish to . . . well, to do what my father had left undone. I was sure he’d want me to.”

Kate nodded.

“You see, I didn’t know you felt that way. I decided then that underneath your apparent sweetness you were really as hard and cold as your mother, and your mother had been like granite. Sometime I’ll tell you the way she acted the night Bob and I were born. She was there, you know, cold as ice and bitter as gall—”

“Don’t!”

“I’m sorry, but I can’t help it. It’s the source of all this trouble. If, that night, your mother had shown one spark of human feeling toward our poor mother and grandmother, all this never would have happened. You see what she did to Grandmother, and, indirectly, what she did to me.”

“Surely, you needn’t say any more about her!”

“Needn’t I? Then why am I saying anything at all? For what your mother did, made Grandmother what she became, and made me what I became.”

Marjorie rose and walked to the window, where she stood looking at the white world outside.

“Well, that’s that,” Kate said simply. “I came back from Cranford almost hating you.” As Marjorie turned she met her eyes and held them. “I went through another reaction. And it wasn’t hard to hate you again when I sat by Bob’s bed at the hospital,” she ended, with quiet finality.

“We both have a lot to forgive,” Marjorie said. “Can’t we both do it?”

“I hope so. Certainly if you can forgive, I ought to be able to. And at least you have the whole story now.” Kate stood up, facing her. “Except the worst thing of all,” she ended drearily. “You know that, too, but I’ve got to take my full dose by speaking of it.”

For a moment she stood silent, as if vainly trying to bring out her next words. “It’s . . . the financial side,” she then said with a rush, while Marjorie followed the explanation through the shrill interruption of her own thoughts; “it’s the devilish, contemptible bargain I made with Joe for a life income to be paid from your money, when he got it. That whole phase of the thing is unmentionable. I was bitterly ashamed of it when I made it, and, well . . . it’s been an iron in my soul ever since. Even now, when nothing seems to matter, the thought of that gives me a sort of nausea—”

“Don’t say any more about it,” Marjorie begged. “Don’t think of it again.”

“I’ll think of it, all right,” Kate grimly told her. “Now I’m going back to Bob. I won’t wake him if he’s still sleeping, but I can’t stay away from him any longer.”

Marjorie walked toward her, and for an instant they hesitated, facing each other uncertainly. Osgood paused at the door to look in on them. He was restless and uneasy under the loneliness caused by this long tête-à-tête. Kate held out her hand and he hurried into the room to take it.

“You’ve been an angel to Bob,” she said. “Sometime . . . I’ll thank you properly.”

She nodded to Marjorie and turned to leave the room. Marjorie stopped her. She could not let Kate go like that. She had felt the current of emotion surging beneath the other’s words.

“He’s to be your other brother, Kate,” she told her, simply. “I’m going to marry him.”

Kate stood still, looking at her, and as she looked her face twitched, as it did in moments of deep feeling. Marjorie caught her hands.

“Kate! Don’t wait till Bob gets well. Take me now!”

Kate uttered a little laugh that was half a sob and abruptly dropped her hands. The next instant, with an almost fiercely possessive gesture, she had caught her sister in her arms and their wet cheeks clung together.

Osgood watched the two with a puzzled interest, shot through with rapture. He didn’t understand what all this talk of brothers was about, but it was clear that there had been some serious trouble between the girls, and that it was straightened out. He was glad of that. Another thing was even clearer. Marjorie had decided to marry him. His clean young heart rose, singing.

“Now I’ll go to Bob,” Kate said, and left the room.

Osgood opened both arms.

“My turn,” he tensely announced, and closed them again when the girl he loved walked into them.

In the outer hall the little red-eyed woman caught a glimpse of the pair and unconsciously smiled. A passing interne stopped to enjoy the tableau. Neither Osgood nor Marjorie saw them. Miss Blake removed her cheek from its close contact with David’s scarf-pin and sighed contentedly.

“I’ve got a lot to tell you.”

“It can wait,” Osgood assured her. “The one thing I want to take in is that you love me.”

Marjorie’s eyes, raised to meet his, were caught and held instead by the deeply interested eyes of the young interne. He had a nice, understanding face, but he spoiled the moment and she precipitately withdrew from her lover’s arms.

“Those people are watching us,” she gasped. “We must talk somewhere else.” But Osgood, with a look of quiet authority, turned and closed the door.

CHAPTER XIX

THE FAMILY

ROBERT KENNEDY did not die. "He hadn't the nerve to," Tilden explained, "with the reputations of five specialists and one general practitioner hanging on his recovery, not to speak of the slavish devotion of two perfectly good sisters and the four best nurses in New York. Now that he's convalescent, I'll show you a thoroughly spoiled man, if you want to see one."

"Meaning me?" Kennedy asked lazily.

He was sitting up for the first time, in a gorgeous dressing-gown presented to him by his sister Marjorie, who had just been reading aloud to him till her throat ached. On his other side his sister Kate was paring a hot-house peach for him. The eyes of Osgood and Tilden met, and their brows rose as they surveyed this sybaritic scene from the outer darkness to which both girls seemed to have consigned them.

"What price bridegrooms to-day?" Osgood asked. "What chance, if any, do you think we'll have, old man, when we marry these two women? Of course," he went on reflectively, "the fact that you and Kate will have to live near us in Philadelphia, so you can run the new hospital, will help some. But I'll bet a hundred Bob Kennedy will be coming there every week-end; and from Saturdays to Mondays our wives won't know we're alive."

"Selfish beasts," Bob commented; and for the second time in their association Marjorie saw the irrepressible, boyish grin he had flashed on her the day they met. He ate the peach, with due regard for the new dressing-gown. "I'll be so busy for the next five years, filling the factory orders Dave and his father have given me," he added, "that I sha'n't have time to think of any of you. Better let me gather rosebuds while I may. Hereafter life will be one Kennedy clip after another."

"It's simply wonderful how easily you arrange things," Mrs. David Osgood mentioned to her husband two months later, during their honeymoon at Palm Beach. "I spent hours and hours trying to persuade Bob and Kate to take some of my money," she went on, "and I merely irritated

them. Then you casually arrange to build a hospital and give Doctor Tilden a big life job, and to educate his brothers through the Osgood scholarships, and the whole problem is solved. And you throw a huge business Bob's way as carelessly as if it were a gingersnap, and, behold, his future is assured, too! But what can I do for them? That's what I want to know," she ended, urgently.

"You can build a dandy house for Kate and Joe in Philadelphia, as a wedding present," Osgood pointed out, "and you can furnish it. And when their youngsters begin to come, you can educate 'em all and be a fairy aunt to 'em. Besides, there are always birthdays and Christmases, you know. There's nothing to prevent you from giving 'em a few automobiles and fur coats and grand pianos every few months, is there?"

"Your brain is simply amazing," Marjorie mused. "I can't get used to it. You think of everything."

"Well, there's that, of course," Osgood cheerfully admitted. He had changed his note since his marriage. No husband can cherish an inferiority complex when his bride spends her time pointing out his superiority to other men.

"I'm not developing," Marjorie went on. "All I'm thinking about the whole time is you! The only decent thing I've done since I left Blakesville is to put poor old Quinn into the Home he wanted to enter; and that only cost me five hundred dollars, though of course I can keep him supplied with everything he needs. It's simply disgusting to be so useless and feminine and hopelessly behind the times," she added ruefully. "Honestly, Davy, I'm only fit to have a family."

"We can do with one," her husband complacently assured her. "Father wants a dozen little Osgoods gamboling about. He has mentioned it. But I've told him he'll have to be satisfied with six or eight, to begin with, anyhow. Eh? What? Oh, yes, of course. Stop blushing and we'll talk about your dear brother Bob and your dear sister Kate. I'm not complaining, darling," he added earnestly, "and I'm not a jealous man, as I hope you know. But I *am* rather looking forward to the time when little Kate and little Bob will brighten our home, and slightly divert your mind from their unparalleled aunt and uncle!"

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *Miss Blake's Husband* by Elizabeth Garver Jordan]