Star in a Mist

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By ARTHUR STRINGER

THE PRAIRIE WIFE
THE PRAIRIE MOTHER
THE PRAIRIE CHILD
THE MAN WHO COULDN'T SLEEP
THE WIRE TAPPERS
LONELY O'MALLEY
EMPTY HANDS
POWER
WHITE HANDS
THE WOLF WOMAN
A WOMAN AT DUSK
OUT OF ERIN
A LADY QUITE LOST
THE MUD LARK
MARRIAGE BY CAPTURE
DARK SOIL
MAN LOST
THE WIFE TRADERS
HEATHER OF THE HIGH HAND
THE OLD WOMAN REMEMBERS
THE LAMP IN THE VALLEY
THE DARK WING
THE CLEVEREST WOMAN IN THE WORLD
THE GHOST PLANE
THE KING WHO LOVED OLD CLOTHES
INTRUDERS IN EDEN
STAR IN A MIST

STAR IN A MIST

A NOVEL

BY

ARTHUR STRINGER

"Fain would I climb, yet fear I to fall."
—SIR WALTER RALEIGH (1552-1618)

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On An Old Theatrical Make-Up Box

'Tis no mere chest of motley tints,
Of musty reds and whites,
But more a key to Memory,
A door to lost delights.

'Tis more the barque that ferries us
Where dreams are ever best,
The compact boat whereby we float
To islands ringed with rest.

To rapture and to easing tears,
To laughter, 'tis the key;
To all the ways of other days
The Open Sesame.

More tales it holds than e'er were conned
In Chronicle or Cid;
A thousand years of hopes and fears
Lie close beneath its lid.

Poor battered box, it holds the power
To toy with Time and Truth,
And tinge the trite with astral light
And crown the old with youth.

For Portia rises from its rim
As Venus from the sea;
Cordelia stands with loving hands,
And Juliet sighs to me.

I mark a somber Dane emerge
And mouth his troubled thoughts;
I glimpse once more grim Elsinore,
Pale Mary Queen of Scots.

Helena's eyes here come to life,
Francesca finds her rest,
And here I see Antigone,
Electra's tortured breast.

Half phantomlike I see them float
Through each familiar part,
Where lips relate dark Phaedra's fate,
Bianca's broken heart.

Yet here as well Titania
And Puck are packed away,
And all the mirth that lightens earth
When life grows over gray.

I glimpse a sylphlike Peter Pan
Step forth with elfin tread,
Where, side by side, I know abide
The Dead who are not dead.

And from it wakes and smiles the face
Of Frou-Frou and Camille;
I watch the sighs of Nora rise,
The frown of Hedda steal.

I watch them rise as from a tomb,
Those ghosts of long ago
Who laughed and cried and loved and died
In mimic mirth and woe.

Still motley-clad, in cap and bells,
I see them sob and dance,
Where swing and gleam the Gates of Dream,
The Islands of Romance.

FRANK FRENDEL

PREFATORY NOTE

A portion of this novel has been previously published as a serial in the *Saturday Evening Post*, under the title "The Call." No character in the narrative is the portrait of a living person, and in case any name duplicates that of an actual man or woman it must be accepted, of course, as purely coincidental.

A. S.

Star in a Mist

I

Even as a child Una Carberry acquired the habit of escaping from a hard and meager world of realities to a more glamorous world of make-believe. She could imagine her little iron bed to be a boat that night by night carried her to faraway islands where she consorted with princesses in flowered calico and paced starlit glades with exiled sovereigns in shining armor. She forgot the smallness of her attic room by boarding a rocket bound for the moon and there reveling in adventures that became almost as real as the events of her bread-and-butter existence. And in the drudgery of everyday life she had the fixed habit of dramatizing unsavory duties into movements of imperial importance.

Even in making a bed—and tasks of that order were imposed on her early in life—she introduced an infusion of the operatic, dancing lightly from side to side and improvising an aria of her own as she worked. She was never satisfied with the mere reciting of a nursery rhyme; she preferred to fabricate a stage setting and act out the story to its felicitous or dolorous end. Her tendency toward the theatrical may have been innate, but it had been activated, probably, by her unexpected invasion of the theater itself.

That invasion took place at the tender age of five, when a road company playing *Sappho* tarried for one brief night in the Chamboro Opera House. To the diminutive Una it proved a night of miracles.

For when the small son of the wardrobe mistress, who customarily played the illegitimate offspring of Flamant and Fanny, became an unexpected casualty because of an attack of membranous croup, a hurry call went out for a Chamboro substitute.

Una's acid-eyed stepmother, who kept what she always termed a respectable boardinghouse that only occasionally and reluctantly opened its doors to less opulent troupers playing the tanks, nursed a fixed conviction that most members of the theatrical profession were an irresponsible and immoral lot of rabbits. If this dark view of the wandering actor was based on varied and vivid discoveries in her own midnight hallways, where homeless bohemians so often sought to cushion the hardships of sleeper jumps by doubling up as man and wife without benefit of clergy, it was equally true that the acid-eyed mistress of the house had her monetary ups-and-downs. And ten dollars in cold cash, duly paid in hand, had overcome Mrs. Carberry's reluctance to surrender little Una to the evils of theatrical enterprise.

So little Una found herself catapulted into a land of miracles where she not only forsook girlhood and became a boy, but was taught to repeat a number of lines which had little meaning to her and to pretend to wail with distress when she could see no reason for tears. But the stage of the Opera House, she found, was a place of magic. It was as big and gloomy as a cave, and smelled funny. However it was different when the lights went up. It had lovely rooms with windows and doors, and a winding staircase, and a statue of a lady without any clothes on, and men and women in queer costumes, and music and dancing and colored lights and a real snowstorm that made you forget the scenery mattressed against brick walls. And it had two bright and sputtering limelights that began to sing and made Una think of a teakettle boiling on a stove-top. It brought her, too, a mysterious new mother, a beautiful lady with a beautiful voice of gold, who fondled her and wept over her until a thunder of handclapping swelled in from the big black gulf of the audience.

But earlier in the evening a much more motherly-looking woman of the cast had fed Una on salted peanuts, and an older fellow-artist had shared with her a bag of gumdrops, so that a cloud shadowed the child's dream-world when the beautiful new mother shot an angry upstage "don't burp, you brat" at her. But she soon lost herself in the tumult of the make-believe life confronting her. Her lamentations even became so voluble and authentic, when Jean flung Fanny from him and left her lying weeping on the floor, that a caustic voice from the gallery rather dampened the spirit of the scene by advising: "Give that calf more rope!"

It left with Una a confusion of memories. And there was much of it she could never understand. But it proved the first taste of blood to a hungry

young tigress. She decided, in her secret heart of hearts, that some day she would be a great actress.

Her Chamboro life gave her little chance for the furthering of that sedulously concealed ambition. Her one and only stage appearance, during the rest of the year, was when she impersonated "Health" in a school tableau. But since she had sprained her ankle on an icy doorstep, in her hurried anxiety to be in time for that event, her limping resolution to remain as a picture of "Health" brought her not laurels, but the sharp reproof of her teacher-director and the derisive comments of her colleagues in muslin.

Her second stage appearance came a full year later, when she appeared as a Fairy in a Chamboro Christmas cantata, an appearance condoned by Mrs. Carberry only because the production was espoused by the Methodist-Episcopal Church. Una wore a crown of cardboard covered with gilt paper, a frock of white muslin spangled with gilt stars, and in her none too steady hand she carried a gilt-papered wand ending in a gilt-papered star.

So intoxicating was this apparel and so raptly did she tread the seventh heaven of histrionic ecstasy, that at the supreme moment when the curtain went up, and only at that supreme moment, she became conscious of the fact that she had forgotten to take off the rubbers that covered her white satin slippers.

She wept silently during the entire first movement of the cantata. For she knew only too well the cause of that ripple of laughter which was eddying and re-eddying about the audience in front of her. She did not entirely give up. She went stubbornly through the movements and gestures of lusty song. But there was a sword through her heart. And when the curtain came down she flung the rubbers through an open window, flung them with a burst of passionate sobs that somewhat startled her sister Fairies. From that night forward galoshes of any form or color were as odious to her as were salted peanuts and gumdrops. In her subconscious mind, for all time, they remained as a memento of misery.

Una's third invasion of that realm of mystery known as the theater occurred many months later. It, like so many of life's great moments, came unexpectedly. She had, in fact, been crying all morning with a toothache. At the midday dinner table her misery so appealed to Sam Harsen, an ungodly and bibulous boarder from whose room an empty gin bottle was taken twice a week, that he volunteered to accompany the child on a postprandial visit to the dentist, and, if there was no blubbering, a later anodynic invasion of a matinee performance at the Opera House. The angular and toil-hardened

Mrs. Carberry hesitated over the proposal, it is true, but she finally sacrificed a fixed moral attitude on the altar of commercial expediency, Sam Harsen having proclaimed that he would stand for both the seats and the extraction.

The dentist's office was merely the shadowed doorway to a palace of rapture. It was the price one paid for all earthly happiness. For, once the ailing tooth had been extracted and proudly wrapped in a piece of tin foil, Una's rotund deliverer was joined by an equally rotund comrade who smelt of cigar smoke and cloves, and together they invaded the hushed and dim-lighted mystery of the Chamboro Opera House. There a great crystal chandelier and an abundance of plush and gilt paint translated what might have been a shabby auditorium into a realm of romance. Even the stage curtain, time-worn as it may have looked to older eyes, was transporting. It showed a vociferously vocal Prince of other days—he must have been a Prince—gallantly strumming a guitar as his gondola drifted along a moonlit Italian lagoon overhung with towering palaces and mountains of dubious geologic authenticity. The curtain's embroidery of boxed advertisements, attesting to the meritorious goods of divers local merchants, Una stubbornly refused to consider. All she saw was the singing Prince and the languid Princess reclining in crimson-cushioned ease at his feet. And the sense of other-worldness was deepened when the five-piece orchestra abandoned its pinochle, crept into its pit, and after much twanging of strings and scraping of bows charmed the ears of tremulous childhood with the joyfully melancholy beat of "The Blue Danube Waltz."

When the music ceased and the lights dimmed and the curtain went up, Sam Harsen saw that his wriggling young companion was too small for a clear view of the stage. So he promptly and paternally planted her on his own fat knees. There, with her tin-foiled tooth held tightly in her hand, she watched with wide and staring eyes the first act of her first play. The second act she watched from the equally fat knees of the man who smelled of cloves and tobacco. The third act found her back on the boarder's knees again. But of this basic instability of position she grew oblivious, just as she grew oblivious of the cigar smell and the cloves and the tooth in her hand, and of time and place, and the world itself. She began to sob in sympathy with the lovely and queenly lady whom an evil and dark-browed man seemed to be persecuting. She shook and wriggled with excitement at some adventure of dark moment which she could not quite understand. She even cried out at some vague peril which seemed to threaten the lovely and queenly lady in the bedroom scene.

For this she was subjected to a sudden cataclysmic opening of the fat knees on which she was perched, a movement which ended her outcry and obliteratingly dropped her to the floor.

"Don't take it so hard, kid," said Sam after her resurrection. "It's only play-acting."

"And pretty punk play-actin', I'd say," amended his rotund companion.

But it was not punk to Una. For during the last act she sobbed and shook with a nervous chill so uncontrolled that she was led dazed and reluctant from her house of dreams. She was taken out, before the fall of the curtain, to be guided indignantly home through worldly streets without gondolas and to be sent early to a worldly bed quite without ethereal crimson cushions. Instead of music and moonlight she had only her memories, and her tin-foiled tooth under her pillow. But during all that long and feverish night she dreamed of queenly and lovely ladies, of throbbing orchestras and glaring lights, of a world that seemed a world of unalloyed splendor. And sometime, she told herself with foolishly clenched fingers, she would be a part of it.

She dreamed of that world, in fact, week by silent week. She passed its wide-paned portals, wonderingly, pausing to stare in at its highly colored lithographs, at its huge-lettered announcements, at its ever entrancing photographic groups. She secretly asked questions and craftily probed for information from more worldly-wise companions. But the results were not satisfying. And when the narrow life of Chamboro seemed to offer small chance of an opening into the garden of histrionics Una did what many of her elders had done before her. She solaced herself with a compromise. She fabricated a side door of her own, as it were, when she discovered that the neighboring Baxter Street gang were giving secret circus performances in the Stopler's haymow—for there were still haymows in those horse-and-buggy days—and promptly and assiduously courted the favors of Penny Stopler. She even weaned him away from the fixed tradition that haymow enterprises were sternly restricted to the sterner sex. She became one of the gang that did swan dives and flipflops on cushioning mounds of mixed timothy and clover that had an odor all their own. But slowly and stubbornly she swerved what had been mere athletic performances into channels approaching the dramatic. Instead of circus acts which involved double-twisters from a springboard and skin-the-cat and the muscle-grind on a broom-handle trapeze, she concocted stories of combat which demanded costume and make-up, always with a chalked and padded clown for comic relief, and nearly always ending with a duel to the death, wooden laths being

the rapiers and raspberry vinegar being the life-blood of the villain who was finally and appropriately vanquished.

These performances had to be about as secret as Camorro meetings in Serbia, since old man Stopler held that a haymow was no place for young ragamuffins who smoked corn silk and cedar bark and inferentially carried matches and constituted a fire hazard, to say nothing of the further fact that well-trampled hay was definitely unpalatable to horses. But that spirit of the surreptitious merely gave an added zest to the performances, to which the admission fee was one penny a person, with ten pins for children-in-arms.

Those secret performances, however, carried the seeds of destruction in their own popularity. For one happy Saturday afternoon Una's new play was being enacted in a cavern of gloom sabered by twin blades of sunlight where a million motes danced and glinted. The sword combat between a burnt-cork Zulu and a missionary clown who was appareled in red flannel drawers and a polka-dot waist and whose maternal amplitude had been capitalized by the insertion of numerous pillows aroused such shrill squeals of delight that they extended to elder ears and sent a hurried message to Stopler's Hardware Store. In the midst of the hilarity Penny's father appeared up the mow ladder, with a look of determination on his face and a buggy whip in his hand. And the reaction to that intrusion was prompt. As one man the audience and the burnt-cork Zulu and the bedrawered missionary and his fellow artists made for the mow door at the far end of the barn.

That door was high above terra firma; but, luckily, it overlooked a large manure pile, a pile of cushioning softness into which a flurry of boys and girls suddenly cascaded. And having done so, they disappeared over back fences and dispersed throughout the startled neighborhood, a fimetarious band of refugees who demanded much tubbing and scrubbing before the setting of the summer sun.

II

Una's interest in stage life did not lapse as her legs grew longer. But she encountered little food for that vague hunger until she learned that Beansy Wachsteter's father was the printer responsible for many of the Grand Opera House's handbills. That discovery endowed the ill-favored Beansy with abrupt new values. Una maneuvered to meet him often on the way home from school, manifesting a new interest in his white mice and his bird traps.

The apparently accidental result of this interest was that a few weeks later she divided with the subjugated Beansy the labor of distributing the handbills for an *Uncle Tom's Cabin* company, and with that shy and ill-shapen youth surreptitiously shared two seats in the "gods" at the first Saturday matinee, where again the mere sound of a braying orchestra and the mere sight of the rising curtain brought on a quivering of the limbs and a chattering of the teeth that both disconcerted the case-hardened Beansy and obliterated in a gush of foolish tears the earlier moments and movements of the stage spectacle.

But the performance, from the transfiguration of its heroine in the pinkest of pink lights, from the Little Eva whom the calcium sought out as assiduously as the bloodhounds sought out Eliza, to the side-splitting antics of Topsy and the tyranny of a bewhiskered Legree uncomfortably reminiscent of home conditions, remained a glorious if a somewhat acidulated dream. For months and months she lived on it and brooded over it in secret. It grew into something as beautiful as Heaven itself. It planted still deeper in Una's small brain the seed of a great determination. She would, some day, be an actress. She did not know how, but at some time, in some way, she was going on the stage.

News of that invasion of a forbidden Eden, however, crept back to Una's home circle and the lash of angry words, as sharp as Simon Legree's whip, curled about her body. But they left untouched her mind.

"I don't see what gets into you," shrilled her indignant stepparent, "sneaking off to see that stage foolery. And trying to consort with those actor folks. I know what they are. And if you were flesh and blood of mine I'd rather see you dead than one of them."

Una remained silent.

"Why on earth do you do it?"

A glint came in the girl's brooding hazel eyes.

"Because they'll show me how to be an actress some day."

Mrs. Carberry rested her lean hands on her equally lean hips.

"Actress nothing! You're as feather-headed and as much a fool as that father of yours before you. And if there'd been a little honest work instead of fiddling and scribbling I wouldn't be working my fingers to the bone today."

The glint in the hazel eyes became a blaze.

"My father was a genius."

The widow's thin lips curled with scorn.

"A genius at fooling two women into believing he could feed and clothe a family! And driving folks crazy with his fiddle-scraping and his fool talk about the sonatas and things that were going to make him famous!"

Something dangerously close to hate flashed from Una's narrowed hazel eyes. "He would have been famous if he hadn't been run over by that fire engine. And you had no right to burn all those pieces of his before his body was cold."

That opposition from a quarter so unexpected brought a tremulous gasp from the older woman.

"Don't stand there and tell me what my rights are. Don't you dare. And if ever again you talk back to me I'll—I'll take a strap to you, big as you are."

Una, when she escaped to her room, wondered why real life was so flat and sordid while the world behind a painted curtain could be so gold-tinted and glamorous. But it was a world, she knew, that she was to see little of. There was no second invasion of her Promised Land. The months came and went; one big-lettered announcement was displaced by another; photograph group followed photograph group. But Una, through the drudgery of school and homework and dish-washing, could feed only on the crumbs that accident swept to her. From newspapers and magazines she secretly clipped a gallery of jewel-laden actresses. She selected her favorites, clinging to them with a blind tenacity even while she marveled that so much of their body should go undraped. She liked the younger faces; they seemed closer to her in some way. But the godlike actors sprawling in acrobatic postures

over furniture or holding up their brains with carefully posed hands failed to appeal to her. They were, of course, a part of stage life. But it was her own sex only that interested the fawnlike girl with the ardent hazel eyes.

Yet a ferment of impulses was at work, even in that interregnum of frustration. Una found a new motive for study, a new hunger for the mastery of letters, a craving for the power to read of the exploits of her pictured heroines and the path they had taken to success. She nursed, too, an ever-increasing passion for masquerade, draping herself with nets and scarfs in front of mirrors, posing and grimacing in her playmates' borrowed dresses, depicting, to the bewilderment of those uncomprehending playmates, horrors and woes which they quite failed to fathom. Whenever she came across a patch of softness, a pile of sand or sawdust, a bed of leaves, she would practice fainting. She was so adept at swooning that she could even collapse on a bare floor without bruising her bony young body.

"Catch me, King Carlos!" was her usual cry, the alliterative apostrophe appealing strangely to her ear, although she had no idea who Carlos might be or where the words had come from. She became, in fact, the best fainter in Chamboro, just as a little later she could leave a group of wondering girls popeyed by the convincingness of her cry-acting and the eerie realism of her laughter. She even designed dramas of her own and acted them out in the seclusion of a marshy hollow behind Meachem's Saw Mill. But here again her defiance of home rules was finally discovered and punished. And during the solitary confinement which that punishment assumed she pondered over the lack of romance in her humble surname of Carberry and engineered romantic situations which implied the probability of her being a changeling, the lost child of noble and affluent parents, a personage of regal importance, temporarily hidden away for reasons of state, but soon to come into her own.

It was the following spring that, in a way, she came into her own. A new lease of life was given to her unstifled aspirations, when what was accepted as a case of scarletina sent her into exile. To the end that an infectious disease might not interfere with the patronage of the Carberry boardinghouse, Una was quietly transported to the home of Aggie Mumford, an older cousin in Detroit. There, when the scarletina threat dissolved in thin air, the girl from Chamboro and her more emancipated cousin reveled in all the motion pictures that came along in their era of silence, to say nothing of a weekly play provided by a cheap stock company. Una's starved imagination found itself confronted by a banquet of romance. Those fleeting and crowded weeks, with one ecstatic memory obliterating another, were touched by only one shadow. Una, after seeing *Leah the Forsaken*, fell into

the habit of experimental stabbings with her cousin's mother-of-pearl paper knife. After a dramatic stab at her own heart she would collapse on the bed and writhe there in death throes of varying intensity. One day a door weight, in the shape of a huge iron frog, was left unnoticed on the coverlet. When the dying Leah collapsed, after her fatal knife-stroke, she collapsed in such a way that her back-thrown head descended on the iron frog as neatly as a carpenter's hammer descends on a nail. She lay there several minutes, stunned by the blow. Much cold water, in fact, had to be thrown on her face before she responded to the cries of her cousin. Still later two stitches had to be taken in her scalp.

But Una took it all in good part. It was the price, she contended, all artists had to pay for the furthering of their art.

"It doesn't make you a great artist to get your skull broken," was the dictum of the other girl. "It's when you get your heart broken. Elaine Aloona the toe dancer said that in an interview only last week."

And they sighed in unison, as though awaiting with impatience that perfecting breath of calamity.

If Una's revel in theatrics had to come to an end she at least carried back with her to the dull emptiness of Chamboro life a sheaf of memories, imperishable memories of *Camille* and *The Danites*, of *Frou-Frou* and *The Banker's Daughter*, of *Spite Of All* and *East Lynne* and *The Two Orphans*. She felt like a worn and shabby armchair that had been adroitly reupholstered in royal crimson plush.

By the time she was sixteen she knew that the die was cast, that nothing could turn her aside from her appointed destiny. And only those things which in some way impinged on her future career could altogether arouse her interest. She became more silent and self-contained, more guarded and secretive. She studied her skin and her body contours, taking a new pride in her vigorous young frame that was beginning to lose its boniness, that for all time forward was to be the cruse that held the sacred oil, the tempered steel that was to be kept polished and keen for kingly uses.

But Chamboro, she felt, was doing something to her, was narrowing her vision and cramping her soul. And by the time she was seventeen she was plotting and planning how she might effect her escape from its tree-lined suburban torpor where road companies now so seldom ventured and placid householders pushed their own lawn mowers up and down of a summer evening.

She had to get away from it all. It was no longer a matter of uncertainty. It was not an impulse; it was an obsession. She seemed dominated by a force as implacable as the migratory passion that sent the robins and bluebirds northward in the spring.

Twice, while she waited for some release, she defied her stepmother in particular and the world in general by saving odd nickels and dimes and creeping secretly to matinees when the darkened Opera House unexpectedly opened to a band of refugee players forlornly working their way back to New York. Their performances were as ragged as their road-worn costumes. But once again Una sat rapt and tingling through a copiously prompted enactment of *Frou-Frou* and *Camille*. It was an experience that only added to the burning fire of her resolve. She fell to nibbling chalk and tea-leaves, convinced that no beauty could approach the white-faced charm of a languishing Camille. She even at a respectful distance dogged the steps of a graying Armand she had seen an hour before showering money on a faithless lover, to behold him enter a grocery store and emerge with a frugal armful of eatables in a paper bag.

On another occasion, drawn by that magnet of romance, Una took money not her own. Her theft and her presence in that place of sin known as a theater being discovered, she was sent supperless to bed by her all but speechless stepparent, who meted out to her an artful and assiduous campaign of punishment. Yet no loneliness and no indignity of those punitive weeks could shake her sullen resolve.

The months dragged on, and she fed on the paltry crumbs of theatrical news that could be gathered from stray Sunday papers with picture supplements. She treasured any inkling of stage activities. She came to learn among other things, that New York was the home of all things theatrical.

From the day of that discovery the mere sound of the words “New York” stood for something resplendent, something above the sordid actualities of Chamboro. It suggested palaces and courtly ways, gardens and music, vague grandeurs, bewildering and vast adventures. She felt the call of it, as an exile feels the call of his own kingdom. She studied it on the map; she treasured every word as to its ways and as to the paths that led to it. She became cunning and circuitous in her quest of knowledge. She brooded over her actress gallery, studying the gowns of her favorites. She secretly purloined and paraded about in the apparel of others. And when a volume of Shakespeare came into her possession she plunged into it as a heat-nettled boy plunges into the cool and assuaging waters of a swimming hole. Much of it she could not understand; some of its situations she could only guess at.

But she wandered into it, deeper and deeper, as a child wanders into a twilight garden, knowing that at every turn vague beauty is hidden and beyond every shadow a fairy may lurk. She even fell into the habit of weaving her own dramas, of imagining her own vast exploits. But in every dream and every adventure she finally resolved herself into a queenly being bowing before the plaudits of a vast and clamoring audience.

She began to chafe under the thought of inactivity. But the idea neither faded nor altered; she continued to nurse it with the calm and all-effacing resolution of a crusader. The events of life flowed by her, as they do with young and old. But they flowed by with a misty and dreamlike indistinctness. Her memorable moments were those when some stray word came from her Promised Land, when some new knowledge of her kingdom reached her. She was happy only when accident or intrigue seemed to bring her a step nearer that one end on which her first and last thought was concentrated. She went about her homely duties blank-faced and self-immured; but all the while that taloned bird of ambition was clawing at her vitals.

Then her moment came, and she faced it, not as a shy and ignorant girl, but as a woman of will and experience steeled to exacting movements.

III

Una's moment came with the discovery that *The Milk White Flag* company, then playing the Chamboro Opera House, held a leading woman who years before had been a church singer in Chamboro—a happy incident of which the ever-active press agent was not altogether neglectful. To a certain portion of Chamboro, it is true, this one-time church singer had sunk to unspeakable depths of degradation. But this did not deter the resolute Una from seeking out the demigoddess of *The Milk White Flag* in a shabby room on the third floor of the Commercial Hotel, where the goddess was surrounded by the material evidence of having consumed several gin rickeys. Una, scarcely discomforted by the faded eyes and the skin like a smoked lamp chimney, calmly told her mission and asked for her information.

The faded eyes stared at the ardent and innocent ones. The stare was so prolonged that a flush covered the freckle-spangled pink and white of Una's thin face. Then the older woman lighted a cigarette and laughed.

"Stage-struck, eh?" she heavily inquired. Yet beneath her sneer she envied something about that younger and quieter girl. What it was she could not quite fathom. But in the end she felt that it was the other's youth, her possibilities, her sense of promise.

The consciousness of this touched the older woman into a quick and unreasoning impatience.

"Why are you rubes so nutty about stage life?" she angrily demanded, staring at the girl with the poplin dress and the opalescent hazel eyes.

The girl calmly explained that she was not stage-struck and not "nutty." She had thought it over. She knew that her only chance to succeed was on the stage, and on the stage alone. She knew it would be hard work. But she would do anything, anything at all, if she could only get a start.

The woman tossed away her cigarette and laughed.

"If that's the way you feel you'd better go down and see Bob Steger. He'll soon put you wise to what stage life is!"

Una calmly inquired as to who and what Bob Steger was.

"He's our manager," the woman answered, lighting another cigarette.

"Where can I see him?" Una asked.

"The only way I know is to go down and dig him out o' the bar for five minutes!" And Una knew the movement of the other woman was a conscious signal of dismissal.

She was neither shocked nor disillusioned. She was too concentrated on the issue at hand to waste time on other problems.

Three minutes later she found herself staring into the puffy face and the libidinous veiled eyes of Bob Steger. She disliked him, she mistrusted him, from the start. But that, too, was a mere side-issue.

"So you want t' get a start on the stage?" he repeated as he continued to stare down into that youthful and ardent face with the hazel eyes that were as melting as an animal's. Then his contemplative gaze sank lower, studying her figure under its white poplin, the figure which, for all its boylike flatness and straightness of line, was so suggestive of unwasted vital force, of fresh and uncontaminated youth. As he stood there, staring down at her, he became suddenly thoughtful.

The racial intuition of the girl in the white poplin told her what his thoughts were. She knew what that veiled and unwavering stare implied. But she had her ends to attain. She could not afford to be squeamish.

"Got any folks?" suddenly asked the man. Then, in answer to her quick look, he added: "Anybody to beef and chew about you tryin' to break away?"

Una explained that she had none who counted.

"Got any money?" was the next practical demand.

Una, pink up to the eyes, confessed that she had only eleven dollars. What the possession of that sum had entailed, the minute frugalities, the denials, the craft and guile, she did not think it necessary to mention.

"Ever been to New York?"

"No," admitted Una, but her heart leaped at the mere mention of that magic name.

"Willin' to go?" suggested Steger. Go! She would have swum through lakes of fire to go. Her voice shook a little as she acknowledged that she was willing to go.

Steger, with his eyes still on that virginal and boylike figure, felt through his pockets and counted his money. He seemed to be thinking deeply.

"Then I'll have to advance you a ten on your first week's salary," he said with a large carelessness, as he folded the bill lengthwise and put it in the girl's hand. "You see, this show's closing in two days, and we won't hit Broadway till Monday morning."

He took out a card, thought for a moment, restored the card to its case, and from another pocket took out a small scratch pad. On this he scrawled an enigmatic line or two, with an equally enigmatic initial or two appended to it.

"You'd better go straight through to New York," he explained as he handed Una the slip of paper. "I'm givin' you a line to this house o' Madame Georgie's. She'll look after you till I get there. She's all right. You just do what she says. Then I'll get you the right sort o' job with one of the Broadway people."

The girl stared down at the card. On it she saw inscribed a Thirty-Third Street address. Had it been a passport into Heaven she could not have held it more hungrily. But behind it all, above and beyond anything she could define, was some small cloud. There was the shadow of something which her thought could not penetrate.

"And I can depend on you?" her puffy-eyed liberator was half-quizzically inquiring.

"I'll be in New York tomorrow night," was the girl's placid reply. But under that crust of calmness was the glow of a creeping and burning volcano.

"And in three days' time I'll have a job for you," was Steger's even more inflammatory declaration. Then he suddenly looked up. "By the way, what's your voice?"

"My voice?" echoed the girl.

"Yes, what d' you sing? What *are* you?"

His jaw dropped as he noticed the look of utter perplexity on her face.

"For the love of Mike," he gasped, "ain't you even got a voice? Ain't you even been doin' concert work or amateur theatricals or nothin' like that?"

She met his eyes bravely enough, though she saw Heaven receding from her like a shore line sinking under its engulfing waters.

"I've—I've never sung in public. I've never really done anything on the stage. But I'm willing to learn. I'd go through anything to learn!"

Steger, watching those opalescent and limpid eyes, once more became contentedly thoughtful.

"Well, I'll fix you up in some way," he told her, letting his eyes dwell on the pale and budlike glow of her girlish cheeks. He patted her on her narrow shoulder. It was not a paternal pat. But she knew, in some way, that it would not be wise to shrink from that touch of his hand.

"You stick to me, little one, and I'll see you come out on top!" he averred. "I'll make you an actress if it breaks me!"

Una compelled her gaze to meet his. Again she was aware of some remote small trouble, no bigger than a man's hand.

"How can I ever thank you!" she murmured. And Steger, who thought she might possibly be going to cry or make some sort of scene, led her to the door with a self-deprecatory "That's all right!" Then he looked guardedly about to make sure the interview had passed unobserved from other quarters. When she had gone he stood there with his hands in his trousers' pockets, contented and meditative, with an anticipatory and not unexultant smile on his lips.

Una herself stumbled out into the open sunlight, a little dizzy with the sense of something climactic, a little drunk with the thought that her first step had been taken. Then she compelled herself to think calmly and severely of just what she would need, what she would have to buy, what she would have to leave behind.

Her relinquishments, she knew, would not be great. She even looked about the maple-shaded streets of Chamboro with a vague sense of condescension; it was a cocoon that her expanding spirit had outgrown. And never, during the rest of that busy day and the long night that succeeded it, did she experience one qualm of doubt or one moment of hesitation.

All she thought of was to get away without detection. She condoned her coming flight with the claim that no one would miss her, that she was no longer wanted there, that even to make them understand was out of the question. Nor did it rest with her. It was something beyond the trivialities of daily existence, something beyond the clothes and sleep and bread-and-butter of life. These, she felt, would in some way take care of themselves.

And the thought of her solitude did not oppress her; for practically all of her self-contained and wistful childhood she had been alone in spirit.

When, early the next morning, she slipped silently down through the quiet house, she knew she would have fought like a wildcat with any unforeseen figure that sought to bar her way. As she lugged her large and plethoric rattan suitcase down through those walls which had once meant home to her, she knew no tightening of the throat and no sinking of the heart. She merely knew that it would be two hours before her flight was discovered: and by that time she would be miles away from Chamboro, well on her way to New York.

The thought of that unknown city did not overawe her. She was possessed by a vague yet great ache of eagerness, a blind and unreasoning passion to reach the new world awaiting her, the world that she was to conquer. She could no more have turned back than a spawning salmon, once intent on the headwaters of its river, could have been deterred by rock or rapid or waterfall. The wisdom or the unwisdom of it she debated as little as the vine leaves that climb toward the light. She had heard the call. Before her, dim and alluring, she saw some far-off road of glory. And every inch of her eager and active young body responded to its appeal. Her veins, pulsing in time with the hurrying car wheels on their rails, sang with the lightest of all wines, the wine of youth.

IV

It was almost night when Una reached New York. Nine hours in a day coach had wearied her body and dulled her mind. Her food, too, had been both inadequate and ill-chosen. With ebbing vitality came a change that tended to bewilder her. It brought in its wake her first vague apprehension as to the future, her first gnawing nostalgic uneasiness of spirit at the bigness of a world in which she was such a microscopic unit.

Even the vaulted vastness of the terminal train shed took her breath away. In and out of this train shed, like snakes in and out of a cave, crawled train after train, every car filled with people, every traveler intent on unknown tasks and unknown destinations.

Una's mind had never before wrestled with such immensities. The mere thought of such crowds, of such countless hordes, made her shrink in on herself and filled her with a creeping sense of her own insignificance. The smoke, the clangor, the sheer intricacy of movement, suggested something underworld and indecipherable. And every passing face, she could see, was sufficient unto itself, a shuttered face immured in its own thoughts, taken up with its own ends.

Yet as she emerged from the station to the deck of the North River ferry boat she found herself confronted by that panorama of Manhattan, by that vision of a man-made city, unparalleled in all the world.

This, she told herself with a tingle of mixed terror and expectancy, was New York. This was the New York she had dreamed of as the arena of all the arts, the Mecca of the fame seekers, the birthplace of stars.

She stood at the boat rail, blinking across gray water at the interminable huddle of towers. Her wondering eyes took in the ramparted skyline where office buildings of steel and stone rose tier by tier into the twilight. Some of them were already spangled with lighted windows and here and there others were crowned with floating plumes of steam and smoke. Beyond them and below them she saw the serried banks of human abodes, like the crowded homes of cliff dwellers, where they stretched away as far as the eye could see. Already, along the battlemented silhouette, electric sky-signs were beginning to glow and wink and jewel the lonely twilight with warmer tones.

"That's New York," Una said without knowing she was saying it.

"I guess you're right, baby," said a fat man beside her. His insolently appraising eye, as he moved a little closer, took on a light that was not altogether avuncular.

But Una disregarded him. She had other things to think about. She let her gaze go back to the crenelated array of roofs and water tanks, lofts and steeples, towers and chimneys, in the softening glow of evening. They seemed to the gazing girl the domes and minarets of a dream city remembered from some other life.

Yet the beauty of the panorama was shadowed by its very vastness, the apparent endlessness of the close-shouldering building-tiers, the suggestion of countless millions, so stupendous that the sheer contemplation of it ended in a sort of mental choke. When she tried to think of those uncounted millions, each with its claim on life as urgent as her own, reason itself seemed to turn away and hide its head. It made her a little dizzy.

An earlier afternoon rainstorm had left the air sweet and clean. But through its clarity, on that dusky ferry deck, rose the smell of engine oil and steam, the tink-a-link of the iron ratchets where the ferries nosed into the slip-ends, the rush of water as the reversed engine rocked the narrowing dark berth piles. Yet more memorable and more penetrating than all was the ammoniac odors from the driveway for horses, running the full length of the ferry center. It startled her with the tang of something familiar, the smell of friendly stables in the town she had left behind her. And never again did Una sniff that unexpectedly homely stable smell without remembering her first hour in New York.

As the ferry veered and went plowing up against the running tide she began to notice the people about her, the newspaper-reading night toilers headed for their hive of industry, the more gaily dressed couples moving cityward for their evening's entertainment. Sometime, she reflected, they would be crossing that river to see her. The richness of the women's apparel filled her first with a vague wonder and then with a vague envy. They seemed of another world, intent on interests that were not earthly interests, touched with a sort of mystery she could not define, so wise and assured and self-immured that they remained unimpressed by the city that loomed and glimmered before them.

Una found them depressing. But, with the resilience of youth, she made an effort to reorganize her emotions. The immensity of this new world disturbed her, but she refused to be frightened by it.

She sought and found consolation in the slip of paper, carefully folded in her pocketbook, which was to be the Open Sesame to that still gloomy palace of wonders. She told herself that she would at least not have to wander about, a homeless stranger. She found a new fortification in the thought that she had a key to the unknown door, that a room awaited her there, that she too would soon become a member of that complex organization, a worker in that busy hive. She would make it receive her. She would do more: she would make it acknowledge her and bow down to her.

The fire of this feeling in some way burned itself out by the time the disembarking throngs were carrying her along into a second clamor of cab drivers and porters and expressmen. She pushed through that barking and yelping crowd, lugging her overfilled suitcase at her side. She tried to set her face and make a pretence at unconcern. Her arm ached, but she was determined to reach Thirty-Third Street without help. For this she had two reasons. One was that no trail might be left behind her. The other was to save her money. She knew little of the extent of the city; she was too inexperienced to think of streetcars.

In ten minutes' time she was both tired out and hopelessly at sea. She put her suitcase down on the curb, against a lamppost, with no longer any sense of direction, fighting back the tears of exasperation that kept rising to her eyes. As she stood there an out-dated one-horse cab drew in at the curb beside her. A solicitous voice was calling out to her: "Keb, lady, keb?"

Una looked up and saw a fat man in a faded green overcoat and a faded green plug hat. His face, as ruddy as the meat of a blood-orange, was offhandedly contented and bland. It struck her as more companionable than any face she had yet seen in all that strange city. It brought an echo of courage to her drooping spirit.

"Yes, please," she said, with a sudden wave of audacity.

"Where to, m'm?" inquired the green-coated figure as he swung a hand back to the knob of the cab door.

Una, consulting her slip, read the address out to him. He pursed up his lips and sat staring at her as she lifted her suitcase into his musty-odored vehicle. Then she stepped inside after it. She was so excited that the cab driver had to call back twice to her to swing the door shut after her. Yet she felt, as her tired body leaned back in the worn cushioned seat, that her troubles were over, that the last move was being made. It would take more money than she had counted on, but it would get her safely to her new home. It would also, she felt, create a more favorable impression there.

She stared out at the passing streets, the white glare of electrics, the illuminated saloon fronts, the inexplicable and never-ending streams of people. She sniffed the moist, warm night air eddying in on her hot face. That air seemed heavy with something exotic, as though laden with spice, drowsy with its humid September heat, unlike any odor she had ever before encountered. She was startled by the sudden stopping of the cab. A hand groped back, turned the knob, and let the door swing open.

Una stepped out and lifted her heavy suitcase after her. Her first foolish impression, as she looked up at the blank-walled five-storied house, was that it stood in a street where there were no "yards," where every building elbowed close against its neighbor, as though the entire block had been cut from a solid block of brownstone and then scratched with lines and stippled with windows and doors. Then she remembered the cab man, who sat looking down at her without moving from his seat, but with his head turned about, cranelike.

"How much is it?" she asked, opening her pocketbook. She tried to speak casually, but her fingers were trembling.

Instead of answering her question the ruddy-faced cab man asked her one of his own.

"You ever been there b'fore?" he inquired, with a wag of his great head toward the silent house front.

"No," answered Una, still holding her pocketbook. This time he turned bodily about in his thronelike seat. He was becoming uncomfortably interested in her affairs.

"Ever been in New York b'fore?" he next inquired.

"No," was the girl's reluctant answer.

"Got friends here?" he demanded, lowering his head so as to see under her hat brim.

"N-no!" faintly admitted the frightened girl. The cab man meditatively sucked his lip. It made his guileless ruddy face look even more guileless.

"Why'd you come here?" was his next question. A fear of detection, of frustration, began to take possession of Una. She hesitated. Although she moved and walked alone, dark forethought was at her side like a Nubian nurse.

"To study," she equivocated. Her heart sank as she saw the green-coated figure swing down from the cab seat. He startled her by suddenly flinging

her suitcase in through the still open door of the carriage.

"You ain't goin' in there," he said, quite without emotion.

"I've got to!" cried the girl.

"Oh, no you haven't," was his placid retort.

"Why?" demanded the girl, wondering, for one weak moment, if she had fallen into the hands of a highwayman.

"Never you mind why," he said as he made a motion for her to re-enter the cab.

"But I've got to!" repeated the obdurate girl. "I was sent here."

"Then you got your numbers mixed," calmly asserted the cab man. He was again sucking his lip. "Get inside and I'll take you to a house where you c'n git a two-dollar room, to a decent house."

The girl drew back. She was openly afraid of him, even while some inward intuitional voice was proclaiming him honest, as honest as the day.

"But Mr. Steger said I had to wait for him here," she weakly persisted. She felt a huge and fatherly hand on her shoulder as she clutched at her suitcase.

"Who's Mr. Steger?"

"He's the man who promised me work," was Una's half-sobbing answer.

"Did he!" snapped the cab driver, with a quick and scoffing side-look at the house front and its curtained windows. Still again that inner voice was telling Una that this ruddy-faced man was her friend, that he was right, that he was saving her from something perilous. She did not resent his hand on her arm.

"Look here, child, I'm wise to this town. You ain't. What you want is a nice clean hall room wit' clean people till you outgrow them pinfeathers o' yourn. Now git in—git in, or I'll tack a time charge to that fare o' mine!"

Some primal instinct, as she stood staring up into that kindly claret-colored face, again told her that she was wrong and he was right.

She climbed back into the cab, fighting to keep down her tears. She lay weakly back against the musty cushions, feeling herself being drawn deeper and deeper into the heart of a strange city that was already incomprehensible to her, a strange city where she had already found and lost a home, where there were so many vague things to menace and intimidate her. She was

puzzled and bewildered, but hope had by no means withered from her heart. Her youthful eyes, staring out into the night, saw a moving-picture house gay with electrics and lithographs. It stood out, like a familiar word in a foreign script. She remembered that this was a part of the life she had come to enter, that somewhere in some corner of it was a place for her.

Her spirits came back to her. She even had the heart, when the cab man deposited her before a humble-looking red brick house with old-fashioned iron balconies, to object to his demand for a fifty-cent fare, serenely oblivious of the fact that earlier in the evening he had inwardly decided that she was to be just two dollars his debtor. But there were many things which were still unknown to Una.

V

Una drew a deep breath and looked about her room. It was hers, for one week at least. For it, after withstanding the inquisitorial inspection of Mrs. Binner, the owner of the house, she paid two dollars, with another extortionate twenty-five cents for a latchkey, a flat, small piece of steel strangely different from any key she had ever seen.

Una's room was seven feet wide and eleven feet long. Its walls were covered with sulphur-colored paper, much soiled above the washstand. Behind the door stood a row of hooks under a shelf strung with a calico curtain. In front of the window stood a single chair with a compress-board fitted over its broken cane seat. But beyond this the room was as bare as a vault, as empty of accessories as though a spring flood had swept it clean. The only residuary sign of life was the row of newspapers folded along the shelf-bottom.

Una turned these newspapers over, studying the pictures, one by one. Then she looked at the room again. Then she sat down on the bed. Weariness weighed upon her. But an unrest, such as she had never known before, made this weariness seem a thing of little moment. She grew resentful of the encaging sulphur-colored walls. She longed for another glimpse of the city that hummed and murmured below her. Yet she dreaded to venture out, remembering the inquisitorial eyes below-stairs. She did not realize she was now her own mistress; she had not yet discovered the freedom with which that brief migration from Chamboro had endowed her.

She suddenly remembered that she was hungry. That, she felt, might serve as an excuse for venturing into the street. She opened her bedroom door and listened at the stairhead. The house seemed strangely quiet. She stepped back and closed the door, slipping quietly down the long and narrow stairways. Once she had gained the street she turned and made a study of the house front. It worried her that they should all be so much alike. She fixed on her mind every distinguishing mark—the broken grillwork over the basement window, the rusty balcony-iron, the brownstone sills patched with red-tinted plaster, the empty flower box in the second-story window. She next made note of the house's position in the street, of its number, of its distance from the corner.

Then, beelike, she moved instinctively toward the point of greatest light. She marked the drugstore on the corner, and methodically continued her observations until she found the name of the Avenue and its cross street printed on the neighboring lamppost. She paused for a moment to marvel at a midair train as it thundered by above her head, along a track on steel stilts. Then she went on again, toward the more alluring brighter lights. It was late, but curiosity submerged all other feelings. The theaters would soon be out. And it was something even to rub elbows with those who were returning from that kingdom of happiness. So she wandered on, amazed at the crowding motor cars, the restaurants, the countless nocturnal activities that surrounded her.

She found herself, suddenly, in a veritable valley of lights. They glowed and flared from walls, they wavered and ran and circled from building-tops, they blazed from shop fronts, they shone like jewels from the façades of lofty walls—lights of all color, red and white and green and blue, some of them milky and pearl-like and motionless, some of them restless and ruby-tinted, millions and millions of lights, it seemed, dazzling the eye, bewildering the brain, making the street as bright as day, filling it with a glory that seemed celestial, too effulgent for earthly devices.

Una stood staring up that long valley of lights, like a child face to face with its first vision of the sea. She stood staring at the lights of moving streetcars, at the drifting and shifting globes of motor cars, at the arches and squares, the spirals and circles and letters of many-colored fire winking and blinking from the very heavens themselves. Her rapt young face was fanned by the humid night air, heavy with its exotic odors, its spiced smell of dust and mildly acrid street waste. And thrill after thrill sped up and down her slender legs, her flat and boylike back, as she stood there watching it all. Never, in other years, did she stumble on it without a reluctant wave of admiration for its barbaric and feverishly competitive display. But never again would she know that swift and intoxicating tingle, that suffusing and all-engulfing thrill of rapture, that initial fine flow of girlish joy, as she stood for the first time face to face with Broadway, lying like a sparkling python across the steel-stubbled acres of a midnight Manhattan. She forgot her weariness, her homelessness. She saw only an alluring and luminous valley leading into the future.

Una, after the manner of vigorous youth, slept well that night. It was after nine when she wakened and stared about at the sulphur-colored walls. She was neither homesick nor lonely. She was conscious that she was

exceptionally hungry. She also remembered that as soon as she had breakfasted she would have to see about getting on the stage.

Not to eat breakfast under the same roof where she slept struck her as odd. But she did not waste thought over it. In one day, indeed, her whole universe had been turned topsy-turvy. She was now fortified against any shock, prepared for any surprise. Had she been told that this city without trees or yards or gardens, where trains cannonaded about in midair and cars crawled through the bowels of the earth, pumped claret through its water mains, she would have accepted it without question.

She wandered about the streets, contented and curious, until she came to an eating place with pyramids of apples and oranges in the window. Within, she found marble-topped tables and paper napkins. Yet her breakfast, for all her frugality, cost her twenty-five cents. Then she turned back toward Broadway, where she felt sure the theatrical district would be. She told herself it would be foolish to waste time.

Her experiences, that first warm morning in New York, were as ignominious as her efforts were unsuccessful. She was laughed at; she was joked with; she was smiled at and turned politely away; she was ignored; she was stared at and brushed aside. But nowhere was she taken seriously. Nowhere could she get an audience.

Her instincts were not inactive. She had a quick eye for form and color. She began to institute comparisons. She began to see that from the standpoint of dress alone she was impossible. One of the theatrical men had turned and spoken of her as "one of the upstate corn-huskers." She was only defeating her own ends. She had already fallen to studying the women who passed her on Broadway, their strange clothes, their pert hats, their wonderful coiffures, their heavily powdered and painted faces. They must be right, she told herself. She was wrong. And that afternoon, having plied the perplexed and suspicious-minded Mrs. Binner with many far-reaching and rather ridiculous questions, Una made her way to a Sixth Avenue department store.

Here, having once more adjusted herself to a new and complicated world, she studiously recalled the figures she had met on Broadway, and from a bargain-counter sale purchased a gray serge ready-made dress. To this she added a cheap tiptilted hat and an equally cheap pair of tan shoes. These she carried home in an immense parcel, quite ignorant of the fact that without extra cost they might have been safely delivered for her. It left her only two dollars and a half. But she told herself it was necessary. The one

thing she could not endure was the thought of being ridiculous. She would rather go hungry than be laughed at.

She still felt, as she dressed herself in those overconspicuous new clothes, that there was something foolish about them. The tiptilted hat was the only thing she liked. It made her look older; and there was a touch of "boldness" about it. Yet it satisfied something within her, some dormant inner sense which she could not describe. The transformation brought about by that change of apparel, indeed, amazed her. It seemed to equip her in a sort of armor. She felt on a more equal footing with those about her. It put her one step nearer the end she was working toward.

Then she sat down and thought. New York still lay a sealed book to her. She was now more puzzled than intimidated by its immensity. Even those things which she saw for the first time came to her with a sense of familiarity. Newspapers and magazines and moving pictures had already given her glimpses of city life, and each of these she had secretly treasured against the time when it might be of service to her. She even thought over her possibilities, point by point. She weighed one against the other. She bought newspapers and studied the list of the theaters, noting their locality and the names of the different plays. She had no one to help her, no one to give her a hint as to which was right or wrong. She made a list of the theaters whose names appealed to her. Then, deciding on her plan of action, she looked about to get her bearings. She wandered up through Madison Square, crossed Fifth Avenue, and entered Broadway, a Broadway that seemed noisy and dusty and sordid compared to the valley of light she had beheld the evening before. But she did not let this discovery dampen her ardor.

She found the theater that stood first on her list and made sure of the position of its stage entrance. She neither approached nor addressed the door man lounging beside that entrance. But she waited, covertly watching. She waited until the audience itself had poured out into Broadway, until the family-circle disgorged its crowds into the side street. Then she stepped closer to the stage entrance, alert and intent, watching each figure as it emerged from that narrow doorway. And each figure was mentally challenged, inspected, and adjudicated by those wide and anxious hazel eyes under the tilted hat brim. She appraised them all, one by one. Then she decided on one particular figure.

It was one even smaller than her own. It wore a tilted blue turban, a blue serge suit with a skirt that reached only an inch or two below the knees, a pair of tan lace shoes on very trim small feet. Its round, good-natured face

was smudged and smeared with rice powder until the retroussé nose looked like a cruller that had been amply sugared. The hair under the blue turban was a pale and almost lemon-tinted yellow. Yet there was something childlike and ingratiating about that white-coated face. Una felt that this would prove the most approachable figure. She felt, too, that it would be better to walk along beside her than to stop her.

The heavily penciled baby-blue eyes blinked a little at the solemn and rapt-faced girl who, apparently, had just fallen out of the moon.

Una did not speak for a few steps.

"You belong to the show," she began quietly, yet with a *vibrata* of emotion in her voice.

"Sure," was the young girl's answer. But the baby eyes narrowed and shifted. Everything about her suggested suspended judgment touched with suspicion.

"Then please don't mind what I'm going to ask you," pleaded Una, meeting the narrowed eyes with her quavering smile. "But I'm a stranger in New York. I just got here. I want to go on the stage; I've *got* to go on the stage!"

"Well?"

"I don't know how to begin, what to do first."

The smaller figure stopped dead. The two looked at each other for a silent moment or two.

"What's the bunk?" demanded the girl with the sugar-cruller nose.

"I want to know how to get on the stage," reiterated Una.

"On the stage! And you jus' hit this burg?"

"Yes," admitted Una, too resolute to be discountenanced by the mockery which she held in such aversion. The other girl gasped.

"You suttinly got your noive!"

But the smile faded from the pert young face. An answering solemnity crept into the baby eyes as they stared at the solemnly passionate face of the "yap" girl in the ill-fitting gray suit.

"What must I do first?" persisted Una.

"I s'pose you've studied elocution?" scoffingly asked the smaller girl.

"No," sorrowfully admitted the other.

"Then that's one thing in your favor," was the cheery answer. Then, after a pause: "Know any steps?"

She did not. She even wondered what "steps" meant.

"Just sing, eh?" suggested the other, eyeing the lines of the figure under the gray serge.

"I can't—can't sing much," Una compelled herself to confess. The other girl again came to a stop.

"Then what're you goin' to do wit' the stage?" she demanded. "Take tickets?"

"I want to act!" passionately protested the girl from Chamboro.

The smaller girl's lip curled.

"Then you don't want advice! What you want's a backer!"

"What's a backer?" demanded the unsophisticated Una.

"A guy who'll—but, hell, what's the good! You wouldn't be jerry to that!" Her blandly insulting gaze swept Una's figure again. "Got any decent clothes?"

Una looked down at her gray suit, not without approval.

"I said clothes!" remarked the small woman with the powdered face. Una did her best to fight back a rising tear or two.

It was more than she could endure. A wound to the heart, with her, was a trivial thing beside wounded vanity.

"Can't you help me?" she demanded, with the immediacy of hot and impatient youth.

"Say, baby, you'd better see Belasco. And if Dave don't fall you could slope back to the theater and talk it over wit' Miss Wimbleton. She's only a star, of course, but p'raps she'd like your style for an understudy!"

The girl with the powdered nose turned contemptuously about on her heel and walked away.

Una stood looking after her. It took her several seconds to digest her defeat. Then, taking a deep breath, she turned about and walked doggedly back toward the theater. There, facing the ogre of the stage entrance, she announced that she had been sent to see Miss Wimbleton.

"Dressing room Number One!" the doorkeeper announced, without so much as stirring from his chair. And Una stepped in through the narrow entrance.

It seemed a long time since she had been behind the scenes, a long time since she had sniffed that strange mixture of dust and grease paint and paint frames and gloomy mustiness. There was something awesome to her about that cavernous region, something that caught the breath, as the sight of a coffin might. Yet everything about her seemed endowed with sacredness. Sets and props, splashed canvases and braces, all seemed touched with a glory, a mystery, not of earth. She was stumbling along amid these wonders when a voice echoed out through the cavern of semi-darkness.

"Here you, laundress, I said Number One!"

It was the doorman, and Una felt that he was calling to her. A perspiring stagehand, in his shirt sleeves, said: "Here, kid, to the right," and a moment later Una was knocking on the door of Dressing Room Number One.

"Come in," cried a voice from the other side of the door.

And Una went it. Her nostrils were assailed by a new battery of odors—grease paint, overheated air, Turkish cigarette smoke, stale flowers on a ledge backed by a huge mirror. In front of this mirror was a woman, partly dressed. At the other side of the room was another woman, a maid, hanging garments on a row of hooks. Una's gaze riveted itself on the woman before the mirror. She was in the same room with a star of the theater.

"What does this kid want?"

The query came suddenly, angrily, from the woman at the mirror. She did not even turn about as she spoke. It was the maid who crossed the narrow room and faced the tingling Una.

"Ain't you the laundry girl?" asked this maid. Una looked past her, to the woman at the mirror.

"I want to see about going on the stage," she announced. She took a step or two toward the star. The star slammed down the lid of a japanned tin box. Then she turned on the maid, ignoring Una as though she were something not human.

"Emma, haven't I told you to keep those nuts out of my dressing room!" she cried, shrill and nervous, clinching her hands and drawing them up toward her shoulders.

The maid said, “Yes, ma’am,” and crossing to the door, swung Una bodily about.

“You ought t’ know better than come botherin’ Miss Wimbleton when she’s worried and worn out,” she admonished, holding the door in a manner which could not be misinterpreted.

“When can I see her?” asked the crushed but dogged girl.

“You can’t see her!” cried the maid, infected by a touch of her mistress’s hysteria. “And you goddammed nuts ’ve gotta leave us alone, or I’ll *kill* some o’ you!”

Una went out through the door as it closed none too gently behind her. She groped her way past the splashed canvases and the props and the paint frames and the sullen-eyed doorman. She had met with her second defeat.

Yet even as she brushed the tears from her eyes she found a forlorn sort of consolation in her still childish belief that suffering was in some way bound to ripen her into that final knowledge of life needed by every great actress. She had read how tragedy once haunted Sara Bernhardt and how Duse had suffered. And every pang she herself endured, Una felt, would eventually make her a greater artist.

She also harbored the conviction that a study of city faces, a contact with city poverty and city tragedies, would help her in her later footlight depiction of character. This prompted her, the next day when looking for a cheap place to eat, to push through a Sixth Avenue street crowd to inspect at close range a man who had been killed by a surface car. She wriggled and squirmed and shouldered her way through the close-packed bodies, determined to drink her cup of horror to the dregs. It was more than the idle curiosity of youth. It was to plumb tragedy and better her Art.

A stranger with iron-gray hair and satyric eyes looked down at her. Then he laughed a little.

“Push through this way, little wren,” he solemnly advised. “That’s it! Now those sweet young eyes will get a better view of the whole bloody mess!”

She flashed a quick look of anger up at him, conscious as she was that he was making fun of her. But the man merely laughed again.

“Interesting, isn’t it?” he observed as she stood gasping at the clotted blood and the sodden remains that a few minutes before must have been a living and breathing man.

She felt a trifle dizzy as she pushed her way out through the resentful street crowd. But she consoled herself with the thought that out of pain would come power. She nursed the feeling that a new weapon had been stored away in her slowly widening arsenal of knowledge.

VI

Una's repeated defeats left her dazed but not disheartened. For her idea of stage life was still essentially a romantic one. She had read in too many magazine stories how unknown girls had responded to an unexpected call and proved their skill in a stellar role and bloomed, almost overnight, into an idol of the public. And her time would come.

Yet she began to feel the need of reassembling her shattered thoughts and trimming her sails to some inescapable new adversity. It wasn't going to be as easy, after all, as she had expected. She even felt a little lonesome and rootless as she walked the streets in vaguely dejected aimlessness. She trod hard pavements and pushed through the midtown sea of strange faces until some sharper hunger of the body made her forget all hunger of the spirit.

So, after studying many eating-place placards, she ventured into a restaurant where she could get boiled mutton and a dash of mashed potatoes for fifteen cents, though she had to sit perched on a stool and eat it at a none too clean counter. But she added extra calories to her thin and acrid coffee by numerous secret cascades of sugar from a communal bowl embellished with many fingerprints.

She found, after this frugal meal, that the world was not so dark as she had imagined. The consciousness of her utter solitude became less oppressive to her as the recuperative power of youth began to assert itself. She was even able to rejoice in the new and unlimited freedom that life had presented her with. She gloried in the thought of being her own mistress, of directing her steps wherever she might fancy.

And her fancy, as the afternoon deepened into evening, took her far down the winding valley of Broadway, across Union Square, and east on Fourteenth Street which had not yet faded into cheap-John sordidness. There the lurid lights and lithographs of a moving-picture house were too much for her. She forsook the fresh and balmy night air for the fetid and companionable heat of the crowded hall.

She was unconscious of the narrow-faced youth who sat next to her until he leaned closer.

"Pretty punk, isn't it, sugar pie?" he whispered in the semi-darkness.

Una, startled, edged away from the narrow face.

"Not to me," she protested with all the dignity she could command.

But during the intermission her narrow-faced neighbor renewed his advances.

"How about hittin' Wop Nicchia's for a nut sundae?" he quietly suggested.

"No, thank you," she said with what should have been quarantining coldness. But she was young and alone and appealing to the eye. And a few minutes later, as she was losing herself in the western melodrama being enacted on the white sheet in front of her, she felt a hand come in contact with her own relaxed hand, as though by accident. She ignored the incident. A minute or two later she felt this hand deliberately close about her fingers. It caught and held them, odiously, like a cluster of tentacles.

She had to struggle to free herself from that appropriating clutch. A wave of indignation swept through her as she felt the hand again moving exploratively about in the darkness. It brought a tremble to her slender body. She even decided to scream out for help, if need be, to call on the people about her for protection.

But, while she still hesitated, the sudden end of the film and the return of the house lights made this unnecessary.

She struggled to her feet and made her escape from the theater. Her heart came up in her mouth as she saw her narrow-faced persecutor follow her to the street. She became desperate. A single passion, that of escape, possessed her. No farm fowl that ever glimpsed a hen-hawk ducked and scurried and fluttered more frenziedly than did this gray-clad figure through the crowds of Fourteenth Street.

She threw him off her track at last; she knew he was no longer following her. But his memory remained. It brought a new trouble into her life. It left a canker in the perfect rose of her freedom. She was compelled to remember that she was no longer alone in that great city, that she would always have to be guarded, that there were certain things she must learn to evade, and certain other things she must learn to endure.

But as she continued her more leisured way through the lighted and crowded streets she remembered that she had been in New York little more than forty-eight hours. Yet in that time much had happened—not outwardly, but inwardly, in a manner which she could not define. The lights were still mysterious and celestial in their multicolored brilliance, the very streets

were still alluring in their ever-shifting movements. But the smell of the street dust was already less exotic, less palpable. She was a little less a stranger to it all. She was now almost a part of it. And still again her youthful body thrilled with anticipatory passion as she stopped to peer up at the light-strewn valley where some day, she told herself, her own name might flaunt in colored electric globes.

By the time she had eaten her breakfast of wheat cakes and coffee the next morning Una had arrived at a number of new conclusions. One was that her money was almost gone and that she must find a way of earning more. Another was that accident had placed her in the wrong kind of house and that she must set about to find the right kind, the kind that held people who worked for the stage. She now acknowledged to herself that she would have to move more circuitously, that her earlier manner of open assault had been a mistake.

She sat on a bench in Madison Square that morning, studying the want advertisements in three penny newspapers. She went through them methodically, marking those that appealed to her, rejecting those that suggested menial labor. She was anxious not to lose her freedom; she wished to leave the road to her stage work open.

That the line between her and starvation was so thin did not greatly alarm her. Her one apprehension was that she might not unearth the right sort of theatrical rooming house for her purpose. So even before she found work or earned money to pay for it, she began looking for a new room. She interviewed landladies and climbed stairs, she made excuses and argued about prices, all the while keeping her eyes open for just the right place. But before this place could be found her money had dwindled away to a final dime. Then and then only did she revert to the idea of finding work.

She first tried addressing envelopes. But her hand was cramped and slow and an endless half-day of toil brought her only enough to buy a cheap dinner. Coloring photographs next appealed to her, but this too proved impossible. She merely sat in a row with eleven other girls, “artistically gifted,” as the advertisement said. Before each girl stood a basin of liquid color, each worker doing an allotted portion of the print and passing it hurriedly on to her neighbor. It was hopelessly monotonous, and a day’s work did not bring Una quite fifty cents.

In her next place she was affronted with an openness and promptness which caused her to make an equally prompt escape. During that quest of employment, in fact, she learned many new things about the seamier side of

city life. She came to know what advertisements were "traps" and "fakes." She acquired the trick of appraising a would-be employer, of determining almost at a glance whether he was reasonably honest or an amorous wolf awaiting a succulent lamb.

But she kept doggedly at the search, with the quiet fortitude of inexperience, the mild audacity of unimaginative youth. She finally earned a dollar and a half posing for a Twenty-Third Street "poster" artist. She found it very tiring and hard to "hold the pose." After the second hour, in fact, she felt almost faint, notwithstanding her resilient wiriness. At the third hour she had to give up. The artist, little more affluent, apparently, than herself, made tea for her; and with it they had bread and butter and apricot jam.

Una ate a great deal, for she was hungry. Before she went away her shabby-coated and paint-spattered friend gave her a list of uptown artists to whom she might apply for work.

Some of these artists declined to see her, others dismissed her. Several of them smiled at her, pityingly; one laughed outright, and still another offered her a dollar an hour to pose "for the figure." Another, who lifted her chin and called his wife to admire her profile, said he was sure he could use her after she had had a few months' experience.

Una learned a great deal during those active and eventful days. She lost her habit of fidgeting and blushing when spoken to; she became more confident and direct in her speech; she learned how to look strangers squarely in the eye. Without realizing it she was hour by hour accruing fresh knowledge, soaking it in at every pore, as a sponge soaks up moisture.

But the one thing she wanted to learn about was play-acting; from that issue her attention was never entirely distracted. When she discovered that in the "social room" of a west-side church she could participate, without cost, in the activities of a class in "declamation and choral reading," she promptly joined the motley ranks of would-be vocalists who twice a week received evening instruction from an autocratic Madame Matusow. But Madame Matusow, once of the theater, insinuated dramatics into her choral schooling and stressed ideas of her own. She anticipated Stanislavsky by proclaiming "Every gesture must end in an attitude" and "There is no such thing as mimic emotion." She divided her stage into what she called zones of feeling and talked about pear-shaped tones and the gull-wing gesture, the turkey-wing tremble of the vocal chords, the language of the head and the language of the torso.

It was all too much for Una. After three lessons she felt she was wasting her time. Acting, she decided, was not a matter of zones, and rules and gull-wing flutters, but a matter of feeling, of just feeling a part, feeling it until it hurt, and leaving the rest to nature.

She brooded on this, from time to time, as she resumed her rounds of the studios, since her wildest zone of emotion happened to be an anxiety as to where her bread and butter was to come from. And the one artist who could make use of her, she discovered, was a raggedy-smocked illustrator in the old Van Dyck Studios, who made a specialty of "rube types," as he expressed it. He offered her regular work, for three hours every Sunday morning, and an occasional sitting during the week later on, when he would have more time for experiments in what he termed a "new medium."

Una snapped up the offer, though the work proved hard. It was entirely camera work, anticipatory of the glamor-girl studies of a later era. It meant forever changing her hair-do and the ceaseless putting on and taking off of costumes, crinolines, gingham wrappers, pantaletted short skirts, although to strike the desired pose while the camera was snapped was only the work of a minute or two.

Una learned to dress and undress, with diminishing traces of self-consciousness, behind a Japanese panel-screen covered with gold storks, between a shelf full of dishes and a rusty gas range, her garments sometimes being tossed in to her over the screen top.

The artist, whose name ANDREW HEMPEL was painted on the studio door, explained to her how, by using a pantograph, he made enlarged drawings of his different photographic prints, "chicing" a background and securing enough snapshot poses on Sunday to carry him through each ensuing week.

"You can't call it art," he confessed with a boyishly grim smile. "But it pays the gas bills. And some day, by gad, I'm going to do the other sort of work!"

Una, whose conception of the artist was still a romantic one, was able to harvest something consolingly fraternal in that darkly expressed ambition. They were, in a way, both in the same boat. Yet it wounded her sensibilities a little to see the untidiness of Hempel's studio, the unkempt condition of his paint-stained work clothes and the slatterliness of his moccasin slippers. She had an innate love for order, an abhorrence for the unclean.

Hempel and his new model, however, soon reached a plane of easy free-masonry of effort, tempered by a politeness not customary in the offhanded relationships of studio life. He found Una, for all her rawness, very eager

and responsive, and capable of catching at the drama in the passage which he would read to her from the galley proofs of the story or article he chanced to be illustrating.

She, in turn, acknowledged to herself that she neither liked nor disliked him. Yet she flushed youthfully under his praise, one afternoon, when he chanced to catch her face in a certain light.

"Say, you've *got* something, kid! And little Andrew'd turn into a second Christy if he had that face around here to work on."

He sat back from his drawing board, with his head on one side, studying her hair and neck line in the strong sidelight.

It took some time to learn passivity under such enthusiasms, which eventually proved to be purely professional. Such things, she discovered, were merely a part of the day's work. Yet she experienced an odd flutter of the heart when Hempel, one Sunday, shared with her a basket of Jersey peaches expressed to him from his sister's Orange County farm. That, she knew, was not ordinarily in the day's work.

Una, in the meantime, made hurried side excursions into the Rialto neighborhood, always on the lookout for a two or three-dollar room in the right sort of house. Before the week was up she found a "back hall" in a Thirty-Eighth Street lodging place entirely given over to "the profession." The price, however, was three dollars and a half a week.

Una hesitated about paying so much. She stood undecided until she looked up and met the vision of a rustling and resplendent blonde, a blonde with actress written in every line of her perfumed apparel as she carried her Skye terrier up to the "first floor front." Una, like a lone Crusoe confronted by footprints in the sand, took the room and when her week was up promptly and dispassionately left Mrs. Binner's roof.

Her new room was not so clean as the old one, nor did its back window give her a glimpse of anything but the bricks and fire escapes of a Tenderloin apartment hotel. The entire house, indeed, was strangely different from the sedate and cramping atmosphere of the Binner abode. The hallways forever smelt of tobacco smoke shot through with the passing odors of toilet waters and perfumes. Pianos were being forever pounded below-stairs; "sketches" and "acts" were forever being rehearsed in the large "front parlor," frugally hired out for this particular purpose. A xylophone player, Una found, had the habit of making midnight melodious, with his instrument balanced on the sill of an open window. There was always singing and noise, dogs barking in the hallways, late beer parties by night, quarreling couples behind doors,

trunks thumping against banisters, women in half-dress calling to one another from story to story, vaudeville artists monotonously practicing their "turns," out-of-date tragedians telling in abdominal tones of past triumphs and present necessities.

But Una did not complain. She liked it. She knew she was at last in the right atmosphere, in the right position, among people from whom she could learn something. She liked the free and easy air of it all, the light-heartedness, the careless and continual stir and movement, the thought of being at the heart of things, of being in the midst of workers who counted in the world, who were known to everybody, whose pictures were in the Sunday papers, whose names were on wall posters and theater programs. It did not mark a great advance, but Una felt that this new environment would not be barren of opportunities. And she did not intend to neglect them.

These chances did not come quite as promptly as Una had expected. That noisy and ever-bustling house seemed intent on its own affairs—affairs in which the newcomer in the lonely hall room had no share. It came home to her, for the first time, that she had made still another mistake. Instead of moving into a mere lodging house, where every room walled in its own secluded lives, she should have gone to a theatrical boardinghouse, where mealtime brought everyone together at a common table.

But it would be some time, she saw, before she could afford a second migration. Her tacit fib to her new landlady, who accepted her as a "broiler" with a year or two of stage experience behind a well-sustained "baby" air, cut her off from that fountainhead of theatrical wisdom. Una, in fact, was even driven to interrogating the mulatto housemaid who attended to her room. But that sullen and overworked slattern had little time for the exchange of small-talk and little consideration for a lodger from whom no tip could be extracted.

The girl from Chamboro was left very much alone. She was stared at as she passed in and out of the house; she was inspected by the ladies in dishabille who fluttered from one room to another. But otherwise she was ignored. No one accepted her as a "mixer." She was in a class by herself, an outlander, an anomaly. And she was beginning to learn how great is the loneliness of a great city, when Fate intervened in the form of nothing more pretentious than a six-week-old Irish water spaniel.

This shaggy-haired and ungainly pup invaded Una's room one morning as she was dressing, peered about the room with its head on one side, and promptly and playfully seized one of the shoes standing beside the narrow

bed. This shoe the pup made off with, scampering the full length of the hall until it came to the front room, the room from which Una continually heard the sound of coughing. Into this room it disappeared, leaving the half-dressed girl in doubt as to what to do.

She was still hesitating on a line of procedure, as she hurriedly dressed, when she heard the click and trail of loosely slippered feet on the bare hall floor. These feet stopped outside her door. There was the sound of a cough, followed by a knock and a thin and throaty voice saying, "Hello, there!"

The half-open door swung wide before Una could reach it. Before her she saw a man in a dressing gown, holding her shoe in his hand. He was still looking down at it, half humorously, half ironically, with one upraised eyebrow which seemed to say: There's what you'd call an honest shoe, an unsophisticated shoe, a shoe not fashioned for promenading the paths of luxury!

But Una, as she stared at him, gave little thought to this expression. It was his appearance in general that held her attention, the entire gaunt and uncouth figure, unlike any figure she had ever seen before. This lean figure was attired in a worn and ragged dressing gown, held in at the waist by a thin leather belt. On his feet were a pair of tattered matting slippers through which his stockinged toes protruded. He was the leanest, the most emaciated-looking man that she had ever seen. His neck was long and thin, with a protuberant Adam's apple. About this neck the yellow skin hung loose, like a turkey's. The skin on the gaunt face had drawn up into a thousand little wrinkles, ludicrously, like an ill-kept winter apple. So fallen away did this face seem, so reduced to its framework of bone loosely covered with parchment, that the ears stood out, prominent and waxy, like the ears of a white mouse. The eyes, too, looked unnaturally large in their withered sockets. The top of the head, as bare and polished as a billiard ball, showed each small vein and each valley and contour of the undulating skull. The yellow hands which still so humorously held Una's shoe up for inspection were as bare of all rounding and softening flesh as the talons of a bird.

Yet there was something mild and gentle, something ingratiatingly quizzical, about the gaunt figure as a whole.

"Say, did my purp run off with this shoe o' yours?" he said, with a hitch at his leather belt as he blinked in about the narrow room.

"Yes, sir," said Una. She found it impossible to feel any resentment toward him, even while she knew that somewhere under that yellow skin of

his some part of him was laughing at her and her plain-looking little square-toed shoe. For the first time he turned and looked her in the face. She seemed to surprise him, even as much as her shoe must have done when he first took it from his spaniel's mouth.

"Say, you're not in the show business, are you?" he demanded, looking down at the shoe which he still held in his hand.

"Not yet; but I'm going to be," was Una's answer.

"You're going to be?" he echoed. His incredulity was swallowed up in a fit of coughing. His dry and owl-like face cracked into a smile again, when he had recovered his breath. He leaned against the door post, studying her. He seemed so unlike other people that she could afford to smile back at him.

"Signed up yet?" he asked. Then, noticing her puzzled look, he added: "Got anything to do yet, I mean."

"I haven't been able to—yet," explained Una. He wagged his head up and down, his face becoming suddenly serious.

"It's hard, at first," he admitted. He was turning the shoe over in his gaunt hands, slowly and thoughtfully. "What line do you intend to follow?"

"Anything," exclaimed Una, "so long as I can get a start, so long as I can get on the stage!"

He fell to nodding his head again, as though he fully understood.

"Sing a little?" he casually inquired.

Una, as he fell to coughing again, said, "No."

"Recite?"

Una shook her head.

"Dance?"

Again Una shook her head.

"Friends here?" was his next inquiry.

And still again Una shook her head. His lean face seemed to cloud with perplexity. Then it was suddenly swept by the quick and quizzical smile. The problems of the stage fell away from him, apparently, at a shift of the upraised eyebrow. "Say, drop in and see those dogs o' mine sometime. They're wonders!"

He put the shoe down on a chair, turned away, and stopped in the doorway.

"If that purp o' mine carries off anything, you come right after it. Maybe I could give you a pointer or two about this stage game."

"That's very good of you," said Una, following him to the door.

He stood looking down at her, pensively, abstractedly.

"Oh, I've been through the mill, all right, all right!" he quietly remarked. Una hesitated.

"When can I ask you about the stage?" she finally inquired.

"Any old time," he said with blithe solemnity, shuffling away along the bare wall, coughing as he went. "Any old time," he repeated, as though to himself.

VII

Una lost no time in renewing her friendship with the man with the cough. The thin yet cheery "Come in" that piped out in answer to her timid little knock that same afternoon seemed to translate the visit into something casual.

She found herself in a much larger room than she had expected. Its walls were lined with photographs, pictures of theatrical people in costume and street dress, many of them odd and old-fashioned, many of them slashed across with heavy-inked inscriptions. Beside these pictures were framed theatrical programs yellow with age. On an improvised mantel stood a silver memorial cup, a pair of crossed rapiers, a plate of apples, and a row of empty milk bottles. About the floor scampered Tim, the Irish spaniel, and two older and more agile fox terriers. The place had a look of settled disorder, but its very untidiness, suggestive as it was of something homelike and permanent, appealed to the girl from the bald little room at the back.

"I guess you never heard o' me," piped the skeleton in the well-worn dressing gown as he motioned Una into one of his armchairs. "I'm Jim Sayles, of the Sayles Team. But I've been laid off this season with a little throat trouble, touch of bronchitis. Now, what am I going to call you?"

Una, playing with the terrier pup, told him her name. She was afraid, she added, that it would not make a good stage name.

Jim Sayles of the Sayles Team agreed with her in this. He accepted her, in fact, with the utmost gravity.

"How old are you?" was the next question he piped out at her.

Una, with a flush, told him that she was almost eighteen. He put the bottle of creosotic-smelling syrup of which he had been taking a spoonful back on the littered mantel and stood blinking down at her out of his wistful and owl-like eyes.

"Eighteen! It's a wonderful age, eighteen!" he said, as though to himself.

"I wish I was older," confessed Una.

"You'll get over that," he said with his withered smile. "And now tell me about the stage, and your plans."

She had very little to tell him. But she found it easy to be candid and open with him. If she rambled on, a little inconsequentially, he accepted her ramblings with the utmost solemnity.

"It's pretty late to pick up anything for this season," he told her. "But it all depends what you're after. There's always new road companies going out, or a stopgap being thrown in, or a bunch o' supers wanted for some big production. Ever supe?"

Una did not understand him. He explained that a "super" was a "walk-on," an "extra person," with no lines to speak, who merely walked on or became one of the mob, and was paid for these sendees at the rate of at least fifty cents a performance. "Sometimes, if you're in luck, it's even a dollar."

"I wouldn't like that," declared Una.

Sayles turned away until his smile had been mastered.

"No, they usually don't. But the poor devils have to do it whether they like it or not. A lot of us don't like vaudeville. But we make our money that way. Now, if you'd only keep from growing and filling out you'd make a good 'flapper' type. That's a young girl for chorus work, a 'broiler' they used to call 'em. They can't get 'em too young-looking, nowadays. There's nothing a tired bald-head likes more 'n looking at youth!"

Una asked if she would have to sing or dance, as a "flapper." Sayles slowly wagged his head up and down as she confessed that she had no voice and no knowledge of dancing.

"You want to *act*, of course," he said in his mild and plaintive voice. "But acting's the last thing you can get into, on the stage. Take it from me, the very last."

He stood tapping his bald head with his lean forefinger, as though perplexed by an all but hopeless situation. He looked down at his two fox terriers, absently, and then as absently at the girl with the pup in her lap. She seemed to give an air of warmth, of vitality, to that worn and faded room. She seemed to bring back, as she sat with her soft and wide-set hazel eyes fixed on his, something he had outlived and lost. He knew, as he looked down at the warm red lips, slightly parted with expectant eagerness, that she was the miracle of youth, the miracle that is commonplace until it has been passed and left behind.

He walked to the window and back, stopped for one of his coughing fits, tapped his skull again, and came and stroked the pup in Una's lap.

"Now, we've going to see what we can do," he said, with a forced lightness of tone. "You say you haven't got a voice. But what do we know about that until we've had it tried out? You can't dance, of course. But if there's any stage steps Jim Sayles can't put you onto, I wish somebody'd mention 'em!"

He sat down at his crowded little table and began to write on a sheet of paper.

"I'm going to give you a list of agencies, the best agencies. You can go to the addresses I'm writing here and see if they can do anything for you. Then you come and let me know how it turns out."

He went on writing, gravely, with the veiled face of a doctor making out a prescription which he knows will prove bitter to the taste.

"After you've tried this list, I'll give you another. And then perhaps another. But you'll naturally want to shoot at the highest target first."

His wary eye detected the look of concern that crept into the girl's face at the thought of so protracted a campaign.

"Oh, it ain't easy," he acknowledged, "as quite an army of young folks found out before you. The thing is to keep your chin up and your shoulders back." He laughed, for some reason, and then grew abruptly sober. "Courage, that's the thing." Then, after a brief coughing spell, he solemnly misquoted: "The cow-ward dies a thousand deaths, the brave man dies but once!"

Una, as she took the precious list from his hand, tried to thank him. Her gratitude, however, only seemed to embarrass him. He waved it aside with his throaty cackle of a laugh.

"Shucks," he protested, "this ain't costing me anything. In fact, after you've satisfied yourself about those agencies, if you've got the time, I could give you an hour or so every day and show you how to work out a few steps."

"Steps?" questioned Una.

"Stage dancing," amended Sayles. "It's always powder in your horn when you're gunning for work. And if you say so I'll be rubbering around and seeing if I can't dig out a music man who'll try out your voice."

He turned away and stooped to pat his pup, as though to escape the almost tearful look of gratitude on the girl's face.

"That's asking too much of you," she quavered.

"Don't worry about me, kid. I've been up against it myself. And I don't waste time or rhino on down-and-outers. I'm as hardboiled as they come." He laughed again, without mirth. "And if you want to find out how tight Jim Sayles can hang on to a loose dime just ask anyone around this abode of stage mavericks."

Una, standing before him, hesitated a moment.

"I've been wondering," she ventured, "if you could help me to—to meet some of the other people in this house. I mean the women, of course, the stage women."

"Why?" barked Sayles.

"I thought it—it might help," was the other's vague rejoinder.

Sayles looked for a moment into the virginal amber eyes.

"Help nothing!" he said with altogether unlooked-for intensity. "They're all bitches."

He saw, when he turned back to her, that he had shocked the newcomer to the city.

"I guess we don't need to go into that," he said with a shrug, after crossing to the window. "But you'll learn, kid, you'll learn." And still again he shrugged. "This old stage of ours ain't exactly fairyland." He followed her to the open door, through which came the sound of a soprano and contralto voice singing in alcoholic unison. "Take it from me, girlie, you won't get much good out of this bunch. You don't believe it, of course. But as I said before, you'll learn, kiddo, you'll learn."

And again the owl-like lean head fell to wagging. But he stopped her and drew closer the door before she passed out.

"You got anything to keep the pot boiling, so to speak?" he inquired with feigned casualness.

Una explained that she had an engagement for photograph posing and the promise of a better one in a few days' time.

"Good," said her adviser. "For we've sure got to keep the old pot going in some way." He nodded toward the paper she was tucking away in her worn little pocketbook. "Don't forget to let me know how things turn out."

“I will,” Una said with her warm and vivid smile of gratitude. And Jim Sayles, with his old dressing gown pulled close about his skeletonlike waist, stood at his door watching her until she vanished inside her own small room.

VIII

Una was disquieted but not dismayed by the discovery that she stood ill-equipped for her assault on Broadway. She even decided, with the blind vigor of youth, to better herself for that enterprise. Remembering how she had once seen a Chamboro teacher of expression give a reading from Shakespeare in Melodeon Hall, she busied herself with secret and sedulous studyings of *The Merchant of Venice*. While waiting for Hempel to develop his plates or patch together some required costume she memorized the Trial Scene and worked out what she considered appropriate gestures for Portia in her impassioned appeal for that higher justice which is not always in the written word.

It was not until she had perfected her gesticulating rendition of this Shakespearean sequence that she armed herself with Jim Sayles' list of agencies and began her rounds of the designated offices.

Nearly all of these offices, she discovered, lay along Broadway, between Herald Square on the south and what was then called Longacre Square on the north. She decided to be businesslike about it and make her approach a geographical one, working up one side of that still mysterious street and then down the other.

But her first office was not impressive and her first experience was not encouraging. She found herself in a small room where two large men, unmistakably Hebraic, sat indolently on two oak desks. They inspected her indifferently, through a haze of cigarette smoke. Then the swarthier man, annoyed by the prolonging silence, asked what was on her mind.

Una explained that she was looking for stage work.

The swarthy man, after languidly producing a gold-bladed toothpick, asked her what she could do.

If Una hesitated for a moment, it was only for a moment. She told them, with self-fortifying dignity, that she could do the Trial Scene from *The Merchant of Venice*.

"O Gawd!" said the more pallid of the two men as he slid from the desk and went to the water cooler in the corner.

But his duskier partner brushed the ashes from his protuberant vest front and waved his toothpick with a gesture of abandon.

"All right, babe. Pull your stuff. Stand back by the rail and give us that Trial Scene."

Una put her soul into it. But she knew something was wrong even before the man by the water cooler called out: "Say, Mose, isn't there something burning around here?"

Mose's answer as he rounded his desk and lapsed into his swivel chair was Greek to the moist-browed girl. He merely said, *sotto voce*, "Straight from the smokehouse!"

Then he held up an arresting fat hand.

"All right, kid. Cut it. Come back in ten years and maybe we'll talk to you. That's all. We're busy."

Una, during the next hour, awakened to the fact that instead of being a lone and eager young woman heroically intent on stage work she was merely a small and unimportant individual in a vast and restless army seeking the same ends. She began to see, to her surprise, that she was only an atom in a constant flood that eddied up stairways and boiled up elevator shafts and swung into the backwaters of agency waiting rooms. She sat on anteroom benches and saw valorously rouged ladies and outwardly dapper youths and sad-eyed old Thespians and faded *grandes dames* in faded finery and hollow-cheeked dancers maintaining a pretence of prosperity and proud mothers with prodigy children, all intent on the one end of capturing a part. And her ear caught the continuous sound of curtly ominous words, "All set," "Nothing today," "No ingénues," "Not the type," with the occasional less acid note of "Leave your name and number" or a passing inquiry of derelict to derelict, "Did you sign, dearie?"

From this welter of "Dearies" and "Darlings," interspersed with blithely tenuous excuses why different crusaders in the bright cause of job hunting were "at liberty," Una tried to fabricate a shadowy belief that Thespians were a companionable and friendly army of fellow workers who would die before doublecrossing a rival or chiseling in before a sister competitor. She was, in time, to learn differently, just as she was to learn that the lush endearments of stage land stood as thin and shallow as its painted flats.

After eating chow mein in an upstairs Chinese restaurant where she renewed both body and mind for thirty cents, she resumed her rounds of the agencies. There was, in that era, no fraternal Equity both to smooth and

complicate her path. And from most of the offices she was dismissed with the mere form of having her name and address recorded. In others she found her words falling on preoccupied ears, once she confessed to having no "experience." One agent, looking her over, turned her about like a tailor's dummy and shook his head with the curt verdict, "Too thin, kitten!" Another, swinging about in his chair, pulled her skirt tightly to one side, passed a critical eye down the line of her leg, and swung back to his desk.

"Better feed up, little one," was all he said as he resumed his labors of checking a list of names at the head of which Una could see written "The Morning-Glory Girls."

It was the last agent on Una's list who gave her any shred of hope. He sat with his coat off, side by side with a man as rotund and ruddy as King Cole. They listened to her through a haze of cigar smoke. Then the shirt-sleeved man put his feet up on a chair and turned to his listless companion.

"Abe, ain't this girl about what you want for that page boy in *The Green Parrott*?"

The man called Abe solemnly regarded the tingling and rapt-eyed girl.

"Sing?" he succinctly demanded.

Una, weary and discouraged, was touched by the sudden audacity of desperation.

"A little," she murmured.

The fat man turned in his chair.

"Ned!" he called into the room beyond. "Ned! Try this girl's voice!"

And Una, motioned into the next room by a wave of the fat hand, found herself facing a boyish-looking Jew with a cigarette between his lips.

This youth crossed to a piano, listlessly threw up the lid, and struck a note.

"Run the scale!" he commanded.

Una, remembering her school days and her youthful excursions into the Tonic-Sol-Fa System, steadied herself for the ordeal. It was only with the second effort, however, that she could emit an audible note.

"*Do—re—mi—fa—sol*."

She was interrupted by the lid of the piano dropping with a thump. The young man whose youth had impressed her as a possible bond of

companionship, whose boyishness had given her the one touch of confidence she needed, went back to his desk without even looking up at her.

"Nothing doing!" he called out into the next room.

Una, standing perplexed, was waved away by the smoking cigarette. Through the open door she could see the two men still in deep yet seemingly listless talk.

The youth at the desk continued to ignore her. There was nothing for her to do but to move on. She paused before the two talking men, still hoping that she had misunderstood, still praying for another chance.

"Nothin' doin'!" reiterated the fat man, with a quick and curt head-movement toward the outer door, as he resumed his talk with the shirt-sleeved agent. Una made her way out into the smoke-filled hallway and down into the street with the same sense of obliteration, with the same wave of blind and impotent revolt, that had marked her dismissal from Dressing Room Number One at the hands of Miss Wimbleton's maid.

Broadway had lost a little of its glamor. As she brushed elbows with that ever-moving stream of office-haunting actresses and chorus girls adorned with their factitious finery, pink-lipped with their artificial youth, the crestfallen girl began to see what odds she had to struggle against. She groped toward a realization of her handicap. She did not give up; she did not accept the situation as hopeless. But she had lost an ideal or two. And to lose an ideal is sometimes as painful as to lose a tooth.

She was cheered by the thought of having Jim Sayles to talk it over with. She thanked her lucky stars for him and his wizened and withered old face. She even became impatient to hear his blithe and piping voice. But as she ate a frugal fifteen-cent meal that night she scanned the advertisements of an evening paper for music teachers' announcements.

From the list, when she had found it, she selected three names. The first was that of Signor Muselli, a coloratura vocalist, "an artist of the *bel-canto* method," with a studio on Forty-Seventh Street. There was something alluring to her in the mere foreignness of the name and phrases that figured in that advertisement. And before she went home that night she called at the Forty-Seventh Street address and had the good luck to find Professor Muselli in his studio.

This studio proved to be the back parlor of a shabby and exotic-odored boardinghouse forested with four artificial palms in green-painted tubs. The

professor himself was a man of about forty, small and dark, with an oily skin and purplish shadows under his somewhat protuberant eyes. He received his visitor with great gallantry, covertly studied her face, and finally agreed to give her voice-culture lessons on credit, payment to be made when she had succeeded in securing a theatrical engagement. He then tried her voice, offhandedly, almost gaily, asking her to sing with him, humorously scolding her for being nervous, smilingly prompting her to begin again.

When it was over he meditatively stroked his mustache, telling her that her voice was soprano, a soprano that was light but true. There was as yet no verve, no spirit; training alone would bring that out. After a number of somewhat pointed questions Una took her departure, with the promise of four lessons a week.

She saw a point gained, an advance achieved; but she was not altogether happy. Some inner voice of instinct was filling her with indeterminate uneasiness. From the first moment she had looked into Professor Muselli's somewhat protuberant eyes, in that slovenly and crimson-draped studio, some inarticulate fear of that swarthy little man awakened in her. She tried to tell herself that she was tired and finicky. She warned herself that she could not have too many scruples; from now on she would have to take the world as it came. But that night, when recounting to Jim Sayles her adventures of the afternoon, she made no mention of Professor Muselli. Her history of repeated failure, as she sat with the pup in her lap and a freshly made cup of cocoa in her hand, neither startled nor saddened the chuckling skeleton in the faded dressing gown. He merely wagged his head at each record of calamity.

"It's what they all have to go through," he chirped. "You've been to the best. And——"

"The best?" interrupted Una.

"Sure, the flower of the flock. And you've still got the second-raters." A caustic smile hardened his lips. "And God knows what you'll have to face among that riffraff!"

"I don't mind," protested the weary girl, "if it only leads to something."

The man in the draggled dressing gown sat blinking at her for a meditative moment or two.

"So they didn't break you, eh?" he croaked. "I was afraid they might—afraid they might."

"I'm going to get on the stage," the girl declared.

Her words were accompanied by a movement of the body which, though not an actual gesture, was touched with actual passion.

Sayles tried not to look too distressed at an outburst so dangerously remote from reason.

"That sounds pretty brave," he finally acknowledged. Then he wagged his head. "But, being an old-timer, I can't exactly decide whether it's bravery or just dumb-cluck blindness."

"Those other women have got on," argued Una.

"At considerable cost, kitten. *And* after considerable work. That's what gives me the feeling you might do worse than just stand by and wait for a while."

"But I've waited so long," demurred the girl. "And there's so much to learn."

"You said a mouthful there," agreed the old-timer. "You've got to get that voice of yours rounded out. And teach those legs and hands how to behave. And get yourself ready for the chance when it comes."

"Is my voice so bad?" asked Una, bracing herself for his verdict, which she knew would be honest.

"No, it's not. It's got a quality that looks mighty good to me. But it's got to be placed. It's got to be pulled down out of your head and rattled around in that still growing little bosom of yours. It's your instrument, remember. And how you handle those legs may be only second fiddle. But that's an item where I can sure help you out."

So on the following day Jim Sayles began teaching Una her first dance steps. These acrobatic feats he accomplished with a nimbleness that at first tended to take her breath away. That hollow-cheeked and cavernous-eyed figure, in fact, more than once reminded Una of a model of Death in some uncouth revelry. There was something almost ghoulish in such unlooked-for agility in so tattered and attenuated a figure.

She could see, too, that it tired him at times. But the exercise, he claimed, was good for his touch of grippe. It made him forget his troubles. It took him back to old times.

"And once I get this attack out of my system," he valiantly proclaimed, "I'm sure going to bust out in a new sketch."

Una, in his coughing spells, sometimes wondered if there was danger in contact with what was obviously a consumptive. But that passing fear lapsed into insignificance beside the larger fear that she might not come up to his expectations.

For she was, she found, none too graceful at these perplexing new stage steps. Her teacher, however, proved both patient and painstaking.

"You just keep pegging away," he told her again and still again as he stopped her in the middle of the cleared floor, held up the skirt of his dressing gown, struck his pose, and demonstrated the intricacies of some new evolution.

Then Una repeated the steps, determined to master them.

"Wait," he interrupted. "Wipe that frown from your face. Some wise guy once said it was the first law of art to erase the footsteps of art. That means, kiddo, you must cover up the know-how."

"But to me," complained Una, "it's such hard work."

"Of course it's hard," said her bony old tutor. "But you've got to make it look easy. No matter how it hurts, you must wear a smile. Show six teeth. Six teeth, remember. That's a rule of this work. And it's something that holds good with more than stage hoofing."

As he worked with her he repeatedly took time out to explain perplexing conditions and customs of stage life, the meaning of professional phrases, the things a manager looked for in a beginner, the tricks of the trade that could fool an audience, from an "ice-breaker" entrance to a proscenium-bump exit when you could get away with it.

As these lessons were repeated, day by day, Una did not overlook her hours for posing. She worked hard, adding another artist or two to her list, tramping from one side of the city to the other in her search for engagements. Riding was a luxury beyond her; every penny was counted and guarded with jealous care. For above all things, even beyond the need of knowledge, she felt the need of clothes. Without new raiment, she knew, she could never be on an equal footing with those other seekers for stage work, those gaily-appareled ladies in suspiciously frayed "stock wardrobes" and light suede slippers with run-over heels, smiling and self-assured in a finery which only a second glance revealed as slightly soiled and patched.

During those so-called dancing lessons, too, Jim Sayles kept testing her speaking voice, insisting on the necessity of "throwing it out," of "getting it over," of "putting the punch into it." He threw up his bony hands in horror at

her "burred" *r's*, teaching her how to trill them, making her hide them away as though they were the earmarks of an ignoble birth.

Una, compliant yet bewildered, repeated his test sentences, over and over, louder and louder, until his head-wag of approval showed that she was groping toward what he wanted. He also fell into the habit of handing her a single ticket for some theater or other, explaining that these kept raining in on him when he had no means of using them. Una, as she sat in rapt and solitary delight before different Broadway productions, saw nothing suspicious in the fact that her cards of admission were regularly printed tickets and not scribbled passes such as are extended to "the profession." Her mind was too centered on the spectacle before her, on the steps and movements of the chorus women, on the bearing and speech of the actresses, on the hundred and one things which, for the first time, she was studying from a technical standpoint.

Yet busy as those days were, she was not ignorant of what Sayles was doing for her. He got pleasure out of it, she knew. She was not unconscious of the fact that he liked her, that he enjoyed the lessons and the visits and the talks. But she could not quite understand what she meant to his meager and lonely existence.

"What makes you do all this for me?" she asked one evening, at the end of one of their lessons.

The old actor was stirring cocoa on a "hot plate." He stopped stirring and lowered the gas under the steaming milk.

"I like your grit," he announced with a judicial but not quite genuine abstraction. "And I think you're going to make good, somehow or other!" He sat down on a chair arm and explained to her that about all the stars he ever bumped into were stars not because of their great acting, but because they had made up their minds to succeed and got to know men and women and how to manage them, and made everything bend toward their one object in life.

"But why do you do all this for *me*?" repeated Una, letting her eyes meet those of her new-found friend. Her smile was all the more ravishing for being touched with girlish pensiveness. Yet her color was still high from the exercise of her dancing lesson.

"I guess it's because I envy you," was Jim Sayles' answer. "Because you haven't eaten your pie, and I have. You're young. You've got all your life in front of you. All mine's behind me. You've got something that's better than money and success and full-time and Broadway hits. You make me think of

rose buds on a June morning, back home. All I've got is a little money and a pair of burnt-out lungs and those three dogs."

He cackled one of his ironical and deprecatory laughs as she stared at him, round-eyed and wondering.

"Oh, you don't understand it, my dear. You don't know what I'm driving at. And you won't either, until about ten or fifteen years' time!"

He poured her a cup of cocoa, passed her a carton of biscuits, and sat thoughtful and silent until she was ready to go.

He stopped her at the door.

"I think you ought to can those clothes o' yours," he said a little uneasily. "Ought to get something niftier, something that'll suit you better. I've—I've been wondering if you'd like to borrow a couple of ten spots until you get started!"

Una, in the twilight of the ill-lighted hall, turned pink and red. Her voice even shook a little as she answered him.

"I would never take money from you!" she said.

"You *wouldn't*?" cried the startled Jim Sayles. He stood staring after her, for even old age was presenting him with a unique experience.

A voice, cutting and clear, suddenly rose out of the darkness below-stairs.

"Pipe that rube flapper stringin' old Jim Sayles!"

It was a woman's voice, shrill and unmodulated. Another woman's voice, a slow and contemptuous contralto, answered it.

"There's certain parties in this house 'd zoo an unweaned infant!"

"When he might better be gettin' ready for the grave!" were the words that rose up through the momentary stillness.

Una walked into her room and closed the door. But even through that closed door she could hear the answering voice of Jim Sayles as he leaned over the banister and addressed the darkness below him.

"If you two old washed-out has-beens got any dirt to dish, come up and dish it to this certain party who'll show you where you belong!"

And he flung down at his enemies a broadside of vituperation, shrill with oaths, rhapsodic with rage, ending only with a fit of coughing which drove him back to his room and left him inarticulate.

IX

Jim Sayles had advised Una to postpone her canvassing of the minor theatrical agencies. She failed to comprehend his motive for this, until, taking things in her own impatient hands, she began her visits to those offices where casts were secured for cheap "road" companies, popular-priced romantic dramas, burlesque "shows," sketches and acts.

Her experiences were both disheartening and humiliating. No one seemed to want her for legitimate dramatic work. She began to feel, in fact, that such a thing as legitimate dramatic work no longer existed. She was sent to visit a stage contortionist; she interviewed a mirror-illusionist; she coldly declined to become the stage assistant of a glass-blower because she would have to wear "tights." There was one tragic offer, it is true, of a leading part in a new production for "the road," only it was stipulated that she must supply her own costumes and advance two hundred and fifty dollars toward financing the company. For five hundred dollars she would be "featured."

The bitterness of this was obliterated, one day later, by events of a more moving nature. A lean-faced agent with a crooked smile and an eye like a hawk's, after listening to her automatically reiterated formula, shot a question or two at her, sized her up with his acquiline gaze, and asked how she would like an engagement for a year in Europe.

Una, with her heart palpitating, asked for particulars. If she was stirred, she did not show it. She had learned, by this time, to drape the veil of discretion over her true emotions.

"With Finley," answered the agent.

Una inquired as to who Finley was.

The agent looked at her with wonder touched by contempt.

"Where you been buried this last ten years, anyway?" he mockingly demanded. "There's only one Finley, the Great Finley, the tramp juggler!"

"What does he do?" asked Una.

"He's got a new juggling act, but he's got to have a helper for it. It's a cinch, for it's all pantomime, and he can play it anywhere on the map. Not a

word to speak. He's booked up for a solid year in Europe—good for a month in London, another month in Paris, another in Vienna, Berlin, Budapest!"

These magic words swam before Una's vision, dizzily. A year of travel, of experience in the capitals of Europe, of seeing what was best in all the world!

"What would I have to do?" she soberly inquired.

"Work his accessories, in the wings—his props and things. Then at the finalé of the sketch you come in wearing a Paquin gown, swell hat and all that, and he does the balancing act with you on his three trick chairs. You're light. He's got to have a light woman. And what's more, you're a good looker—at least you will be, when you get rigged out proper. And Finley won't have anything but a good looker!"

"Why?" Una asked.

The man with the crooked smile stared at the girl. Then he threw away his cigar stub.

"Hell, who wants a year's travel wit' a lemon!" was his oratorical yet ambiguous demand.

"When can I see Mr. Finley?" asked the girl.

"I'll phone and have him over here from his hotel in fifteen minutes." He caught up the receiver and asked for his number. As he sat there waiting he turned to the girl between his desk and the window. "And it's worth remembering that when Finley travels, he travels with that Mercedes car o' his!"

An endless half-hour dragged itself away before the Great Finley made his appearance in the office. He was a slight and mild-eyed man of about thirty, with an audible and asthmatic manner of breathing. In his scarf pin he wore a diamond as big as a wren's egg. From a ring on his little finger flashed another stone of equally prodigious dimensions. Una saw little that was intimidating about him.

"I've got just the right woman for you, Dan," was the agent's salutation.

The Great Finley was slow to participate in the other's enthusiasm. He sat down and studied the silent and waiting girl opposite him.

"This her?" he said, putting his hat on the desk.

"Yep," was the agent's answer, with an undulatory flourish of the hand, in abbreviated symbolism of an introduction. Finley, still studying the girl

with his mild-eyed and meditative directness, nodded his head. The girl, watching the man on whom so much depended, nodded back, a deeper color tinging her cheek as she did so.

"You're willing to take this trip?" Finley at last asked her, as though something about her still puzzled him.

"Yes," Una answered.

"It's a full year on the continent."

"I know," she said.

Finley smiled a slow and sheepish smile of satisfaction. Then he rubbed his chin.

"Er—think you'll get along with me?"

"I think so."

He was silent for another moment or two of deep thought. Then he nodded his head, half to the agent, half to Una.

"It's sixty a week and all expenses paid," he announced. "Is that satisfactory?"

"Yes," Una murmured. It was the agent who spoke next.

"You'd better advance her something, Dan, to get togged out on!"

"How much would you like?" the Great Finley calmly inquired.

Una looked at the floor, considering the question.

"Would a hundred dollars be too much?" she hesitated. Her color deepened again as she asked it. She was annoyed at the thought of her own timidity.

"A hundred dollars down when contracts are signed," agreed the Great Finley.

Una stood up. She felt the need of getting away, before something should happen, before some untimely word or act on her part should snap the charm and end it all. It seemed too good to be true.

"Can I give you a lift in my car?" the Great Finley was companionably inquiring.

Una said that she had an engagement. She was quaveringly afraid of offending him. She began to wonder just what the new relationship implied.

"How about dinner tonight?"

"Not tonight, please!" she almost pleaded, terrified by the look of puzzled resentment that crossed his face. She could see the two men exchange glances. She could not understand the unspoken message that passed between them, but she knew that some message had been given and received. It was the agent who spoke next, with his large and perfunctory smile.

"Well have everything fixed up by this time tomorrow, contract drawn, check ready—everything settled!"

Something about that asymmetrical face and its largely condoning smile held Una's attention. Somewhere, beyond the radius of actual thought, a vague and far-off apprehension, as small and remote as a tunnel-end, wakened and vanished and wakened again before the girl's bewildered eyes. She watched the stage juggler as he turned to answer the hail of a fussy and red-faced man passing in the hallway outside. She looked after him as he stepped out and began talking to this red-faced man. Her trouble had grown like a cloud on a threatening skyline.

She turned back to the agent at the desk.

"Will Mr. Finley's wife travel with him on this trip through Europe?" she asked.

The agent swung about in his swivel and looked at her.

"His wife?" he gasped. "Why in hell's he payin' you sixty dollars a week if he's takin' a wife along with him?"

Una leaned with one hand on the desk edge. The feeling that swept over her was strangely like that which had once possessed her on a lake excursion steamer. It was mental misery so keen, so overmastering, that it translated itself into physical distress. The glimmer of the tunnel-end exploded into sudden open light. It was all over, after all. The charm was snapped. It had been too good to be true.

She controlled herself much better than she imagined possible. She even explained, quite calmly although a little weakly, that she would be back the next day, that her time was up and her other engagement must not be broken. But she made her way out of that office with much the same blind precipitancy that had marked her escape from the gently rocking excursion steamer.

In her hall room that night, she wrote a brief letter to the agent, telling him that she would be unable to accept the engagement with the Great Finley. She went to a corner drugstore, verified the agent's address in the directory there, bought a stamp, and dropped her letter in a mailbox. When, a half-hour later, she went to Jim Sayles' room for her lesson, that wizened invalid turned her face to the light, looked her over, and told her to sit down.

"No pirouetting this night!" he announced, as he poured out a glass of stout and put it in her hand. "You drink that porter and get to bed for nine hours!"

X

The girl from Chamboro saw, to her dismay, that the season was advancing. The ever-garrulous groups of actor-folk crowding the noonday corners of Longacre Square, the announced openings and the new names above foyer canopies, the busier Rialto self-serve eating places that were just coming into vogue, the happier clusterings about stage doors and call boards, told Una that time was going on and she was still "at liberty."

If this occasionally clouded her spirit it was Andrew Hempel who brought a tinge of color to her gray skies. He told her that he was taking a cheaper studio in East Twenty-Third Street, that he was giving up his more commercial method of work and was going to see what he could do with "real art," as he called it.

"Once I get going," he told her, "I'm going to need a model for steadier work. And that means you."

"How steady?" asked Una, preferring that the barrier of the commercial should not go down between them.

"I could use you two hours a day, right along," he said with a protective bruskness that failed to mask some warmer light in his eye. "And if things come my way I could use about all the time you could give me." Then, noticing the barricaded look that crept into the hazel eye that held no responsive warmth, he added: "That is, of course, unless you've grown tired of this posing business."

Una was quick to deny any such ennui. She even told him that she liked being with him. Then, disturbed by the faint look of hunger she saw creep into his face, she regretted that confession. She wanted to be honest with the world, and with herself. For she saw that this new arrangement with Hempel carried a promise of solving her most pressing problem, that with an assured income of at least fourteen dollars a week she would no longer have to worry. And with certain possible frugalities she would soon be able to save enough to get the clothes she needed, and needed so urgently. She remembered how Jim Sayles had made her take off the earrings she had gone without two meals to buy, the earrings of blue glass that were supposed to look like turquoise and were designed as a shortcut to a sadly needed appearance of sophistication.

"That junk doesn't go with your type, kiddo," he had proclaimed. "It only hardens your face. And hardness ain't your trade value yet."

She had no wish to be actually hard. But she suspected that Hempel, in his rough friendliness, was thinking more of her than of himself. She stood grateful enough to him for his help, yet she was unable to show any great enthusiasm for the newer order of things. It was all something aside from the main issue. It was temporarily staving off defeat. But it was not directly helping her to reach the one end she insisted on reaching.

She was even a little disappointed in Hempel's new studio, with its faded walls and worn floor. It was merely a dingy back room at the top of a dingy building given over to dingy-looking artists and idlers and music students who did their own cooking and dried their own underwear on the back fire escapes. She scarcely realized, however, that its lower rent made possible the pay for her two or three hours' sitting every morning.

But by the time they rested for luncheon, when Hempel would make an opulent cheese omelette on his gas-stove, Una would forget her tiredness and regain her spirits. One day the busy artist even somewhat timorously showed her the empty studio next to his own, suggesting that it would be a cheap and comfortable way for her to live, "until other things turned up."

Una eyed that homelike little room, with its bed alcove and its diminutive fireplace, a trifle hungrily. But she realized it would be a digression, a step aside from the line of progress which she had laid out for herself. She knew she would be safe enough there, side by side with Hempel, but she also suspected that it would lead to a dangerous condition of contentment. And contentment was a luxury which she could not afford.

It was not hard for her to be friendly with Hempel. Already she had tacitly sorted men into two classes. She found that in certain men her youth and inexperience placed her before them as their natural prey. Yet in other men she found that this same youth and inexperience awakened a feeling that was directly opposed to the predaceous, a protective and sheltering instinct which in some way seemed to be its own reward. She could not quite understand it all. But she grew to see that there were certain men before whom it was not well to appear too self-reliant, too independent in her own strength. These protective friends, she found, liked her best in her weaker moments, and those weaker moments were made more obvious by that appearance of wistful lassitude which she had once struggled to overcome.

If Sayles and Hempel were of the class she could face with confidence Signor Muselli was of that other class which some intuitional sixth sense warned her of as being dangerous. There was something overconfidential and yet circuitous in his manner, as though he were always on the lookout to establish some secret between his pupil and himself, some communion of illicit knowledge which would provide them with at least one narrow plank of intimacy. Sometimes, in his demonstrations of correct breathing, his hand remained longer on her shoulder than it ought to have done. But she endured it, submissively, fearful that some rupture might put a summary end to her lessons. She ignored a hundred touches which she knew to be neither accidental nor necessary. And something in her very coldness, in her calm and unparticipating eyes, warned the disconsolate Signor Muselli that he would have to proceed with caution.

It was not until the fourth lesson that the Signor changed his tactics. He confronted her with the charge that she was not dramatic, that she had no fire, no life, no passion. She must learn to be dramatic, from the first. She must understand, here (and the Signor smote his chest), the meaning of longing, of sorrow, of love.

He told her they would go through the duet of Mimi and Rudolf in the first act of *La Boheme*. Una stood watching him as he moved about the furniture to block out an imaginary stage.

"But isn't it better for me to keep on with my exercises for a few weeks?" suggested the somewhat perturbed student.

Her teacher scoffed at the idea of further exercises. Did she not intend to be an actress, and not a poll parrot? Then she must learn to act! And she would understand, when the music touched her soul!

Una stood amazed, as the fat and unctuous throat rolled out that beautiful aria which even his corrupt and flashy method could not contaminate. She stood, like a dress maker's mannikin, before his dramatic approaches and withdrawals. She submitted without movement or protest to his gestures and touches of simulated passion, wondering just what this amorous outburst, in a tongue which she could not understand, was to teach her.

She paled a little as the declamatory fat hand was placed on her head and the heavy-breathing lips hesitated so close above her own. She saw that it was all obnoxious, that it was humiliating, but she tried to console herself with the thought that others had had to go through the same mill, that it was, in some way, all for her ultimate good.

She had no actual comprehension of the situation until the declamatory fat arms closed about her body. Even then she did not struggle until the pretence of sustaining the operatic role came to an end and the panting red lips were pressed against her own.

She was slight and frail, and, in a way, quite taken off her guard. But as her gross-armed captor held her there she exploded into sudden and feline fury. She could not free herself, but as she writhed and struggled and fought with him she began to sob and cry as a child might. These cries grew in tensity, until he was forced to cover her mouth with his hand. This gave her one arm free, and with her liberated fingers she began to tear at his face.

Her attack both sobered and angered him. He twisted her arm in behind her back, vindictively, dragging her deeper into the room, away from the window which she was trying to reach. She caught at one of the tubbed palms, for anchorage, and it went over with a crash. She caught at the piano cover, then at a music stand, overturning it full length on the floor. She continued to sob, as she fought with boylike ferocity, twisting and turning to keep the suffocating fat hand from covering her mouth.

Muselli released her, suddenly, for the hall door had opened and a woman in curl papers had advanced into the room. What this portly intruder called out was incomprehensible to the panting girl, for, like the man's quick retort, it was in Italian. What took place between that portly couple, in the midst of their overturned furniture, Una never knew. She remembered only that she was free.

She did not run; she was too weak and out of breath for that. But she made her escape from the room while the volley of parleying voices was at its highest. She groped her way down the house steps and into the street, choking back the sobs that still shook her body.

It was the next day, as Hempel was posing her for the heroine of an ante-bellum magazine story, that he came to a sudden stop in front of her. He stood studying her, with a mouthful of pins, for her roughly improvised costume had proved too big for her.

"How'd you get all those bruises?" he asked a little thickly, as his eyes rested on the girl's bare arms and throat.

A slow flush crept over Una's face. She did not even answer him.

He took the pins from his mouth, sat down in front of his drawing board, and repeated the question.

"I'd rather not tell you," was all she said.

He sat up and folded his arms.

"But I want to know," he retorted. "And I'm going to." She shook her head.

"Who did it?" demanded the young man at the drawing board.

"It was an accident," was all the girl would say.

"I guess I know the kind of accident it was!" He looked up at her with a sudden flash of anger. "Did it come without your knowing it?"

"Yes," admitted the unhappy girl.

"Where?" demanded Hempel.

"I can't tell you!"

"Are you ashamed to?"

"No!"

"Have you any personal reason for not telling me?"

"No!"

Once more he folded his arms.

"Then this picture won't go on until you do!"

Una hesitated.

"Why should you want to know?"

He took up his pencil.

"I know already. I only wanted particulars; I only wanted to understand."

Una told him, as fully as she could, the story of her association with Signor Muselli. He seemed to be working at his drawing board all the time she was talking. He even suggested a slight change in her pose.

Suddenly he threw down his pencil, looked at his watch, and stood up.

"It won't do," he said. Then he turned to her. "Will you mind waiting here until I get the right sort of gown for you to put on?"

"No," said Una, a little disturbed at the thought that she was not giving satisfaction.

Hempel was pulling on his street coat and hat.

“In twenty minutes you might put on those four lamb chops,” he suggested, from the open door. She was surprised by a hitherto unnoticed bruskness in his manner. “I’ll need you this afternoon if I lose an hour now!”

He was gone before she could answer him. It was an hour and a quarter later by the nickel alarm clock on the bookshelf when he returned. His right hand was wrapped up in a wet handkerchief. One side of his face was plainly swollen. The starch was entirely wilted from his collar. But in some way, out of his apparently impassive face, shone a serene and deep-seated satisfaction with the world.

“Where is the costume?” Una asked, as he tossed off his hat and coat.

He laughed a little, as he stood at the water tap letting a stream trickle over the wet handkerchief.

“I didn’t go for any costume,” he said.

One of Una’s far-off glimmers wavered before her vision.

“Where did you go?” she demanded.

“I went up to give that Dago music-slinger what was coming to him,” said the quiet-toned Hempel, as he knotted the wet handkerchief about his swollen knuckles. “And I guess he got it!”

XI

"Getting to know this old burg a little better?" Jim Sayles inquired one evening after passing on to Una a *Trelawney of the Wells* ticket he had no use for.

"I don't get lost any more," she admitted with a laugh. "But I don't think I'll ever know New York. It's so big and busy and wrapped up in its own work. And the people who are friendliest to a girl, as a rule, are the people it's better not to know."

Sayles' head-wag showed he saw what she meant.

"There's always a wolf pack waiting for the push-overs," he announced, after leaning across the banister and listening to the sound of a xylophone from far below him. "And I'm glad to see a bunch of our giddier sisters have drifted away from this abode of stage mavericks."

Una acknowledged that she had noticed new faces and new voices about the halls and open doorways. It tended to give her the impression that the tribe of actors were as migratory as the birds of the air.

"They come and go," said Sayles. "They come and go. And there are two or three new arrivals down there it might pay you to get in touch with, decent workers who wouldn't be pinching your *derrière* before they talked to you for ten minutes."

He made it a point, in fact, to pilot Una into the presence of a restricted list of these quieter-minded "professionals." And Una did her best to be friendly with them. Yet as she came to know them better she saw that they lived in a little world of their own, with a viewpoint of their own, with a language that was not altogether the language of other people. They even had odd little superstitions of their own, like not daring to pass one another on a stairway, and never hanging a garment on a door knob or placing a hat on a bed, and not caring to leave a lodging house or a dressing room for good without first inscribing their name, with soap, on a mirror.

The girl from Chamboro told herself that it was her duty now to be one of them, to attain their point of view, to understand both their outlook and their *patois*. She tried to like them all, from Hulbert Grimshaw the sepulchral tragedian who stalked instead of walking and had lately

abandoned the "legitimate" for the more lucrative field of the cinema, down to Midgey Manners, a soubrette with a son in a Connecticut boarding school. She steeled herself to visit the room of "the Two Fairfields," who forever quarreled over cards and lamented the decline of the "dollar houses." She sipped at her first glass of bottled beer in the ample presence of Voletta Volette, who had prospered as a "show girl" with Weber and Fields until her widening girth divorced her from Broadway audiences that were slowly but surely drifting away from an earlier fondness for fleshiness in tighted beauty.

Una was also glad of the chance to sit in the same room with Juliette Glyndon, a faded blonde who had flourished in road companies of *Shore Acres* and *Sag Harbor* and spoke in derogatory chest tones of all Broadway productions that post-dated her decline. The quietly listening younger girl realized that Juliette, for all her bleached ringlets, belonged to the past, just as did the vituperative and scandal-mongering Dorette Gerrard, who for fifteen years had carried a spear in audacious musical comedies from *The Singing Octoroons* to *The Yeomen Of The Guard*. She brightened her darkened days with Holland gin and stage anecdotes of a Rabelaisian flavor while repeatedly announcing to Una that the newer short cut to stage success was the ability to be a good bed fellow.

There were other lodgers who came and went, their migrations duly announced by the thumping of battered Taylor trunks against the stair treads and the sound of strange voices from behind bedroom doors. To Una they seemed like sailors harboring for a night or two in some narrow port, coming redolent with the spices of something foreign and romantic, departing again into the entrancing mystery of "the road." There was something captivating in their very light-heartedness, something picturesque in their very irresponsibility, something blithe in even their most dolorous moments.

Una sat wide-eyed and attentive through one of their beer suppers. It was all new to her, from the stringy welsh rabbit to the bitter lager and the flood of ragtime that came from a continuously pounded piano. She was too preoccupied to be uncomfortable, too subjugated by the novelty of the atmosphere to resent its bibulous noisiness, its occasional story with a double meaning. She proved, in fact, an unexpectedly stimulating audience for those about her. They luxuriated in her freshness. They played up to her staring-eyed expectancy. They gloried in her lack of sophistication. Her sheer youth leavened the sodden lump of their ennui.

When one of the older and less boisterous men sat down beside her and talked of stage life, half humorously pointing out its hardships and its

disappointments, he was suddenly interrupted by the scoffing voice of Juliette Glyndon.

"Aw, what's the use of filling that girl up with grouch-talk! She doesn't know what you're driving at! What good's a song and dance of that kind going to do a kid? She's got to get out and learn for herself! She's got to chew her own pill up, and swallow it—and then I guess she'll know whether it's bitter or not!"

It was the pert and glib-tongued Dorette Gerrard who proved the most approachable to Una, although, ironically enough, the latter could not rid herself of a secret antipathy for the older actress so woefully wise in the ways of the world. It was plain that this older woman patronized the newcomer, that her admonitions as to correct dressing were sometimes both cutting and cruel, that before others she was apt to be flippantly contemptuous toward her younger friend. But Una, who under her hot pertinacity had a mild and dogged patience, found it easy enough to hide away her real feelings. There was even a touch of dignity in her reticence which rather piqued the loquacious Miss Gerrard.

"Dearie, you certainly got to get a bunch o' clothes," she was once prompted to declare, after viewing Una's figure with the sorrowful dissatisfaction of an artist confronted by imperfection. "What's the good o' being young and good-looking without letting them know it!"

"I wish I wasn't young," protested the embittered girl.

"Well, you won't look that way long unless you can those upstate corsets, my dear, believe me!" The older woman turned to adjust her picture hat before the tiny mockery of a mirror. She was altogether unconscious of Una's barbed stare of anger. "You don't do yourself justice, dearie. There's men in Wall Street who'd give you the time of your life, if you'd only dress the part. D'you like motoring?"

"No!" retorted Una.

The woman at the mirror patted her side hair. "Then there's no use trying to get you to run out to Manhattan Beach this afternoon, I s'pose!"

"None whatever!"

The woman at the mirror laughed.

"I guess you'll be a better mixer when you've had a year or two of tank towns. Me for the Oriental and sea air with a planked steak on the side!"

Talk such as this always depressed Una. It served to remind her how narrow her interests and how restricted her experiences. It made her conscious of a vast and complicated machinery in feverish motion close about her. She seemed to be fretting along in a narrow groove while at her elbows revolved and roared the great wheels of a life which she could not comprehend. It prompted her, when the chance arose, to question Hempel about different New York restaurants, where they were, what they were like, why they should be so dear.

Hempel, aroused by these interrogations, suggested that they explore some of these places together. And this they eventually did, in their frugal manner, beginning with Italian table d'hôtes where the *salame* was as entrancing to the Chamboro girl as the Neapolitan quartet. It shocked her a little to see so much wine drunk. It depressed her a little to see so many well-dressed women—though she caught the trick of studying their costumes and making a mental note of what was effective and what was to be avoided. She was disturbed, too, by what seemed occasional bursts of extravagance on Hempel's part, such as invading the Broadway restaurants where orchestras played, or hiring a taxicab to swing homeward through the warm and mellow night air of autumn—though Hempel himself protested that he was having such good returns from his new line of work he could easily afford a little fun.

He was never boisterous and never awkward. He could wander calmly into the gayest places and sit unperturbed by the largest mirrors or the loudest orchestras. He understood the French words on the menu cards and could order a dinner without any outward sign of mental confusion. He was watchful of her wants, and took a quiet joy in pleasing her.

Yet under all her happiness was a persistent feeling of unrest, of disquiet. An indeterminate sense of guilt kept troubling her. She felt that she was accepting things which she could never repay, that she could not prove equal to what Hempel expected of her, that she was sailing, at times, under false colors.

This vague sense of guilt was always more assertive when her thoughts went back to Jim Sayles, so much alone in his shabby top-floor room, so whimsically grateful for her occasional visits. Although his cough had grown worse during the last week or two, he blithely announced that he was "pulling strings" for Una, that he still had a friend or two in the "profession" and that there might be something doing in a few days.

Una tried to be impartial. She was fond of Sayles, and she was fond of Hempel, but in quite different ways. She felt more at ease with the old actor, the danger of their relationship becoming tangled with personal issues being more remote. Yet she knew that she would never lose her head over Hempel. She was not, she kept telling herself, selfish and hard. But she had the future to think of. She didn't want to be like her father who, with all his cleverness, never gave a thought to when rent day was coming around. It was all that early penury, she supposed, that endowed her with such a stubborn hunger for security. And the only security she could foresee, in that brave new world of hers, seemed the security which money could bring.

Yet her primary hunger went beyond a meager account in a department-store savings bank. She liked to see that grow, dollar by dollar. But there was a wider issue at stake. She was under the spell of one great obsession, and in a small lifetime there was not room for two great passions. For love with her, she still felt, would always have to be a great passion, something as deep and troubled as the loves she saw depicted on the stage.

So, much as it disturbed her, she experienced a thrill of delight, a delight she had never met at the hands of Hempel with all his quiet thoughtfulness, when the sunken-cheeked old vaudevillian called her to her hall-room door and told her he'd eat his hat if he didn't believe they were going to give her a small part in *The Wine of Life* company.

"You never can tell with those guys," he said in a modifying afterword, "until you get 'em nailed down! But it looks good to me, girlie, it looks good to me!"

And he called out the three romping dogs and trailed back to his own room, where Una could hear him coughing as he set about making his evening cup of cocoa.

It was the next night that Una and Hempel ate dinner at the Café Boulevarde, a night doubly eventful because Una had there taken her first taste of wine, a thimbleful of syrupy Tokay. A mild rain began to fall as they left the noisy and crowded restaurant. Hempel insisted on taking a taxicab, but instead of hurrying homeward they went on up Fifth Avenue, where the pooled asphalt seemed spangled with little lakes of quicksilver and the undulating electric globes looked milk-white through the misted cab windows. Una gloried in that sensation of speeding up an almost deserted avenue. The rain seemed to cut them off from the rest of the world. By the time they had swung into Central Park, they were as alone and self-immured as a mariner on a mid-Atlantic sea lane.

"Una," said Hempel, after several minutes of unbroken silence.

"Yes?" she answered, a little abstractedly.

"Do you mind me calling you Una?" her companion asked, as though her abstraction were a brake on a mood of quickened emotion.

"No," answered the girl. "I like it."

He sat silent, staring out through the misted windows.

"Will you marry me?" he finally said. He spoke very quietly, without looking at her, without touching her, without so much as taking her hand.

She turned and looked at him, neither startled nor moved. She merely felt disappointed with herself at the thought that she could face a situation so momentous with a quietness that seemed so commonplace.

"Won't you marry me?" Hempel once more asked her, this time letting his gaze meet hers. They sat looking at each other for several seconds.

She shook her head, slowly, from side to side.

"It's too soon," she said inadequately, realizing that the words were foolish even as she uttered them. She was, in fact, thinking of the promised part in *The Wine of Life* company.

"But I could get that other room next to mine," explained Hempel. "You've no idea how comfortable we could make those two rooms. Then we could save money, housekeeping that way, and if my orders keep up we could have next winter in Munich. I've always wanted a winter in Munich."

He waited, as though he accepted her silence as the result of some inward agitation.

"Why can't we go on being just good friends?" she asked, torn between the fear of wounding him and the need of temporizing.

"I thought you knew why," he said, a little brokenly.

Una, for all her youth, felt very mature and womanly. A new mode of life was opening itself up before her. Because of her a man had been stirred and moved. Within her lay the power of dispensing happiness or suffering.

"I don't see how I can get along without you," the quiet-voiced man at her side was saying. He took the hand she placed on his knee. "And I've been trying to tell myself you might feel that way yourself."

She felt the need of climax to the moment. She suspected that she was proving too small for a situation large with possibilities. She almost hated

herself for that absence of emotion, for that mere power of equivocating at a time when there would have been a glory in surrender, a grandeur in tumult.

"Then let me think it over," she pleaded, in a voice thin with an unhappiness which the man at her side was unable to comprehend. "Please let me think it over for a month or two!"

For several minutes Hempel sat in moody silence.

"Why can't you say yes?" he finally demanded.

Una groped mentally about for some adequate reason. It was there, she knew, but she could not articulate it. She did not care for him enough. There was no propulsion of passion in her attachment to him, no blinding call to obliterate an earlier and more enduring call. Such things, she felt, should justify themselves. If she wanted him enough, that want would overpower her, make her forget other aims and other issues. And human life, she still saw, could hold only one great passion. She had her name to make.

"I don't know why," was all she said. "But I can't!"

XII

There once were two approved ways of heating a New York hall room. One was to lock the door, secretly light the gas, and enjoy moderated if somewhat devitalized air, always overshadowed, of course, by the possible advent of the landlady. The alternative was to eschew secrecy, leave the door wide open, and so permit both the accumulated heat and the accumulated odors to seep gently into a narrow chamber dignified with neither ventilator nor steam coils.

Una, as the advancing autumn made itself felt, tried each method and found each unsatisfactory. She had the craving of wholesome youth for fresh air and the dislike of dawning womanhood for violated privacies. So she ingeniously solved the problem by stringing a three-foot burlap curtain across the door frame. This abbreviated portiere, swaying a foot above the floor level, served to give her secrecy without confinement.

Under that swaying curtain, many a day, the interrogative Tim would insinuate a hairy nose, making the hall echo with his yelps of joy when he found Una at home. Behind it, during her idle moments, the girl was an auditor of those intermingling and fragmentary dramas which rose, like the house odors, from the floors below.

It was while being assailed by those sounds and scents, at the end of a momentous day, that Una sat digesting her unexpected good luck as Jim Sayles' pup, on her lap, digested the last of his milk biscuits. As she sat there Dorette Gerrard ducked unceremoniously in under the burlap curtain. In the younger girl's eyes, as she fed the pup, lurked a meditative and far-visioned look, for things of vast moment had occurred. Sayles had that day triumphantly announced that Una was to have a part in *The Wine of Life* company, a part with speaking lines at a salary of twenty-five dollars a week.

The last few weeks had imposed on Una a touch of skepticism. She kept telling herself not to believe too weakly in the promises of the moment. Yet even as she questioned if it were not too good to be true, the prerogative of youth reasserted herself, and as she sat there with the munching dog on her lap a deep and ineffaceable sense of peace took possession of her.

For the first time in her life, as she looked up at Dorette Gerrard, she attained to a feeling of equality with that gaudily dressed figure that once

flashed through *The Longacre Girls*. In a short time she, too, would be hurrying off to a dressing room and putting beautiful clothes on her body and making her name known to the theatergoers of Broadway.

"There's a quiet bunch going over to Churchill's after the show tonight," announced Dorette. "And I told Freddy to count you in."

Una, still in her abstraction, fixed her eyes on the woman with the penciled eyebrows and the coral lip rouge on her mouth. She had been wondering why it was that men alone seemed willing to give her assistance. She could not help remembering the different hints that Dorette herself had so deliberately ignored.

"I can't go," she said, quite calmly, letting the pup lick a fragment of biscuit from her palm.

"Aw, I can fix you up with one o' my hats," protested the older woman, becoming slowly conscious of the calmly resentful glance which Una leveled at her.

"I don't care to go, thank you," was the younger girl's answer.

Dorette put her hands on her tightly corseted hips, with the ghost of a shrug.

"Well, dearie, you'll sure miss one peach of a time," she announced, as she stood staring about the room.

There was scorn in the glance. But so completely was it ignored by the owner of the room that her visitor was compelled to string another Parthian bow.

"Who owns the pup?" asked the woman in the street dress, with a casualness that was merely assumed.

"Jim Sayles," answered Una, lifting the shaggy face up to her own. For the second time Dorette essayed the ghost of a shoulder shrug.

"You ought to tie a tin can to that old skinflint!" the older woman suddenly declared.

"Why do you say that?" asked Una. Her voice was quiet, but the words were uttered only with an effort.

"Take it from me, dearie, you won't gain much by tying up with that old tightwad!"

Una stood up. The hand that had been flattening the fur on Tim's neck began to shake a little. It was the first time in her life she had experienced anger that was both reckless and uncontrolled. It was the first time that her young body found the tangled wires of its nervous system not completely under the domination of its central office.

"Jim Sayles is a friend of mine—the best friend I've got!" she cried out, and her anger was a surprise even to herself. "And when you or anyone else says he's a skinflint they say what isn't true!"

Dorette had the satisfaction of seeing that her arrow had sunk deep. She could even afford to smile a little.

"But aren't you jerry to that con o' his?" she mildly inquired. "Of course, if you can stand for his dirt and his dogs and all that, it's nobody's business. But honest, dearie, it ain't right to be trailing in there with all them germs hanging around. It ain't fair to yourself. And it ain't fair to your friends!"

Una's answering voice was a rather shrill soprano.

"If Jim Sayles happens to be sick, that isn't going to keep me away from him. He's the only man or woman in this house who's really helped me. And I'm going to stick to him as long as he'll let me!"

"Well, take it from me, that won't be long!"

"Who'll stop me?" demanded the angry girl.

Dorette did not answer. "Ain't she the pepper-pot!" she murmured to herself.

"Who'll stop me?" shrilled the girl.

The older woman, as she faced her, started to laugh. Then the smile withered from her face.

Una, following her gaze, saw that the burlap curtain had been thrown aside. In the doorway stood the gaunt and skeletonlike figure of Jim Sayles, directing a bony and accusatory finger at the startled woman before him.

"Yes, who'll stop her?" he piped, in a cracked and wheezing challenge. "*You* won't! And none o' that beer-soaked gang down there won't! And no chorus hen who ever worked a sucker for a free supper won't! And if you're so goddammed afraid o' germs you keep down there on the floor where you belong, and don't climb up here trying to corrupt the mind of a girl who's got more good in her toenail than you've got in your whole fat carcass!"

"What're you cackling about, anyway?" disdainfully inquired the harangued woman. She remained outwardly calm, but even under its paint her face lost much of its color.

"I'm cackling about you she-cats who don't know a decent girl when you see her!" piped Jim Sayles. "And if I can help her make good without paying what a lot o' you song-and-dance skates pay for it, I'm going to do it!"

"I guess you better cut out that Salvation Army tripe," said the woman with her hands on her hips.

The gaunt man advanced on her, his clawlike hand shaking, his withered and deep-hollowed face contorted with an anger which his thin and throaty pipe made doubly ludicrous.

"Oh, I know you, Dorette Gerrard! Dorette Gerrard! I know you, Annie O'Rourke, and I knew your father before you! I know where you came from, and where you've got, and just what it cost you to get there! I know what you are, you—you——"

As he spat out the word at her he choked and coughed and caught at the burlap curtain for support, his bony frame shaken with a paroxysm of gasps.

"It's no wonder you choke on them lies, you lewd-minded old baby-snatcher!" cried the outraged woman. "I got better business than arguing about my position with a broken-winded old has-been. I got a theater to get to, and honest work to do. And if you're going to run an infant class up here, you'll run it without my company!"

"Wait!" commanded Jim Sayles, rising to a height that was almost majestical. Then his hand went slowly down and a look of pained wonder crept into his eyes. He leaned back, spluttering, lifting the corner of his dressing robe to his mouth. It came away covered with red.

The sight of the blood, of so much blood, caused the older woman to scream. She ran past the drooping figure and continued to scream at the stairhead.

Una could hear answering voices, and the sound of steps on the stairway. She could see Jim Sayles vainly struggling to regain his feet as a fat man caught him under the armpits and half lifted and half dragged him out into the hall. There, for all the commotion, a moment of indecision reigned. Una heard someone say, "It's old Sayles! He's had a hemorrhage!" And another voice answered, "Don't let him stand up!" A shriller voice, below-stairs, was crying out to someone at the hall telephone still deeper down in the

darkness, “No, don’t ask for Bellevue! It’s Police Headquarters you want! Tell ’em to send an ambulance!”

It was a full half-hour before Jim Sayles was taken away.

Una watched for him, white-faced, at the head of the stairs. The canvas stretcher and its attendants gave her a tightening of the heart; they suggested the unknown horrors of a hospital ward; they reminded her of sickness and suffering and death. And it was something she had not been called on to face since the far-off day when her father’s mangled body had been brought back to his Chamboro home.

Una, struggling to be calm, caught Jim Sayles’ eye as they lifted him about the corner of the stairhead. His colorless lips widened into the ghost of a smile. He motioned to her with his lean hand.

“What is it?” she asked, with a lump in her throat, as she leaned over the stretcher. The druggy smell of medicine rose to her nostrils. He was very weak. But he seemed anxious to tell her something.

“You stick to it,” he said in his throaty whisper. “Go down to that office and cinch that job. You stick to it. Show ’em—show ’em what you’re made of!”

She could feel the clawlike hand close on her fingers as the man at the stretcher-head, maneuvering his burden up about the stair banister, motioned for her to step aside. She saw, for the second time, the bloodless lips widen in their stubborn blithe effort at a smile.

“Don’t forget what I told you, girlie. Keep that chin up and show six teeth.”

The wheezing voice diminished as the stretcher descended the stairs. But to the stooping girl came up the forlornly valorous words “The cow-ward dies a thousand deaths; the brave man dies but once.”

The words were to remain long in her memory. But along with them, oddly enough, was another memory of how he was eating ice as they carried him down through the shadowy hallways.

XIII

It was ten o'clock the next morning when Una stepped into a dingy office at the end of a dingy upper corridor in a dingy Broadway block.

She found herself in a room with faded framed celebrities smiling down at her from faded wall-papered partitions, actors and actresses in the strange costumes of other days, some buoyant and smiling, some dreamily self-satisfied with the consciousness of their own beauty and their own power. Una, as her gaze fell on these idols of other days, felt a chill strike into her heart. There was something suddenly pathetic and tragic about them, with their audacious eyes and their smiles of contentment, with their competitive attitudinizing and their eager faces on which Time had placed an ironic and ever-yellowing hand.

Directly before her the girl saw a large-framed man leaning over a desk, intently studying the color chart of a scene painter's "dummy." He was in his shirt sleeves; on the back of his head was a tilted "stiff-dice." He did not look up until Una's timorously murmured "Good morning!" caught his ear.

He turned his face sideways, with a storklike motion, without moving his body. And as he did so Una found herself staring into the face of Bob Steger.

Neither of them spoke for several seconds. Then the man sat upright, straightened his hat, and laughed an uneasy and embarrassed laugh. Yet behind each silent face the machinery of consciousness was accelerated into sudden feverish activity, forewarning, adjusting, rejecting and registering.

"You're a nice one!" Steger called out, with mock indignation, striving to hide his embarrassment under a heavy and not quite convincing facetiousness. She had often thought of this possible meeting. She had dreaded it, wondering what she would say or do even while she was able to dramatize the moment into one of righteous and voluble indignation on her part. And now that the moment was at hand, if she proved the least ill at ease of the two, she found herself without words, without the resentment which she felt ought to possess her.

"You're a nice one!" repeated the jocular Steger, standing up and then sitting down again, yet still staring at her.

"Why?" she asked, still astonished at her calmness, still inwardly annoyed that she could make no greater show of anger, that she could not fling out at him, in one impassioned torrent, the abuse he merited, the denunciation all such perfidy elicited from betrayed womanhood when the betrayed one writhed and orated behind footlights. But the real world, she remembered, was not like the world of the stage.

"Why?" repeated the somewhat bewildered man in the chair. Then he laughed. "Why, for up and beating it that way with my fifteen dollars!"

"It was *ten* dollars, and it will be paid back to you," she said, quietly enough, and yet with a shake in her voice. She was still remembering how much depended on her getting this part. And everything might depend on Steger himself. If she angered him, humiliated him, he would naturally work against her.

"Oh, it ain't the money," acknowledged Steger, with his sheepish and one-sided grin. "It's gettin' thrown down the way you threw me!"

He looked at her, as though he might find registered on her face or body some evidence of what she had avoided or experienced since last they met. He found nothing to satisfy his curiosity. Her continued calm still puzzled him.

"Why'd you do it?" he demanded.

The lucid and tranquil hazel eyes met his gaze.

"You know why I did it," answered the girl, with an accusatory calmness which made him fidget in his chair.

"No, I don't!" protested Steger.

"You want me to tell you?" cried the girl, her voice rising a little on each word. After all, there was going to be a scene. She was going to spoil everything, in spite of herself.

"You got nothin' to tell," retorted Steger, combatively, with an answering show of anger. "I said I'd give you a start in New York, and I backed it up with good money!" He emitted a snort of self-pity. "I never tried to help a girl in my life without gettin' blamed for it!"

There was something so ludicrous in his pose of martyrdom that the listening girl could have laughed at it. She felt, in some way, a victor over him. She was fortified with a power which he did not seem to possess. And it was all very old and far-off, now; it seemed something vague and prenatal, that journey from Chamboro to New York, that adventure with the claret-

faced cabman who had thrown her rattan suitcase back into his carriage. Her eyes traveled from the perturbed man to the color chart on the desk beside him.

"I don't blame you for it," she found herself saying. "I don't, in fact, quite know what you mean!"

It was not entirely the truth. Yet she was consoled by the look of mixed relief and bewilderment that crept into Steger's face.

"Of course you don't!" he equivocated.

"But I didn't come here to talk about that," Una told him, still looking at the desk.

This puzzled him more than ever.

"What'd you come for?" he suddenly demanded.

"Jim Sayles said this office had promised me a part—a part in *The Wine of Life* production."

Steger, staring at her, framed his thick lips for a whistle, but no sound came from them.

"So it's *you* old Sayles's been cadgin' for?"

Una resented the tone of that exclamation.

"Mr. Sayles told me to come here to see about my part," she announced, still meeting the wondering gaze of the man at the desk.

"Gee, but you've got to be the wise kid!" he finally ejaculated.

"A little wiser than when I let someone else pick out my boardinghouse," Una answered.

Steger, feeling the crackle of thin ice, veered about to the matter of the part.

"So you're the kid they've picked for that part!" he repeated, ruminatively. "And that one-lunged old liar made us think he'd an eighteen-year-old Clara Morris up his sleeve!"

He stole a look at the girl in front of him.

"You've sure got a good friend in old Jim Sayles. He blamed near badgered the life out o' Weinert about you!"

Una did not have the heart to say that he was ill, that he might be dying, at that very moment. She was startled by Steger's sudden thump on the desk

top.

"By gad, I believe you'll make good, too. You've got it in you. You'll sure get your strangle hold, some day. And, gee, it's queer, too, me here gettin' this company together and you bobbin' up for that ingénue part!"

Una's calm contempt for the figure at the desk was fading like a snowman in a February sun. As she sat down on the chair toward which he gruffly motioned her, she was able to inquire, in a matter-of-fact tone, about the company and her part.

"Don't you worry about that part," he said, leaning companionably out over his chair arm towards her. "It's a winner!"

"Could I see it?"

"Sure," he responded, rummaging through a pile of oblong pages fastened together under blue covering-sheets. He stopped in his search and looked up. "You know, this *Wine O' Life* company isn't mine. I'm only acting here for Weinert and Covington—Miss Covington's the star of the thing. But I'm goin' to show you that I'm a friend o' yours. And if this show makes good, you'll be back on Broadway in six weeks' time!"

"Is there any danger of its not making good?" asked the inexperienced Una.

Steger pondered.

"It looks good to me," he finally announced. "And you've got a great little part here!" He flourished the blue-covered pages before her. "You're talked about all through the first act. You get a daisy little scene in the second, and in the third you share the curtain with the star—unless Covington gets on her ear and starts to cut stuff."

Una sat listening to these golden words with quickening pulse. She looked about at the framed actresses who had flowered and withered and been forgotten. They had lived their day; they had reigned; they were out of it now. The girl with the ardent hazel eyes felt indeterminately sorry for them.

"We're giving you thirty dollars on the road," Steger was saying as he consulted a tabulated sheet in his hand. "And twenty-five when we get back in New York and settled down to our run!"

There was something dreamlike about it, Una felt, sitting there and calmly discussing the details of her stage work. The libidinous and illiterate Bob Steger was no longer abhorrent to her. A thrill even sped up and down

her backbone as her blue-covered "part" was thrust into her hand. She glanced through it, impressed by its size, ignorant of the fact that most of it stood for stage directions and cues.

"You've got twelve sides there!" announced Steger, with a wag of the head. "Oh, yes, by the way, this is drama, you know—you'll have to scare up a couple o' gowns."

"*I* have to supply two gowns?" asked the startled girl.

"Yep! Weinert always sticks out for that! And, by the way, you'll have to read that part to the old man this afternoon!"

"Read it? How?" asked the puzzled girl.

"Why, show him you can *act*—give him an idea what you're going to do with it!" He suddenly stopped, sobered by the look of alarm on her face. "Say, I guess I'd better coach you in those lines!"

He rose from his chair, crossed the room, and told the anaemic office boy without that he would be busy for the next twenty minutes.

Then he returned to the desk, took the part from the girl's hand, and stepped to the center of the room again. His face became intent. He mumbled and gestured as he ran through the lines.

"You come on crying," he told her, pushing her back toward the window. "Begin there: 'I was never so unhappy in my life!' Go on! Say it! See what you can do!"

It seemed foolish to her. She could not forget that it was all make-believe. She could not let herself go, "fling herself," as Steger put it.

"No—no—no! Cry!" he called out to her. "Get some sob into it!" And he repeated her lines, with simulated weeping, gasping and shaking and essaying exaggerated gestures of sorrow.

It astonished her to find so much power of expression behind his physical heaviness, to see his corpulent body capable of such attitudes of emotions. It surprised her, just as the agile dancing of Jim Sayles had done. She could not understand the solemnity with which these children of the theater accepted their roles, the unimaginative directness with which they lapsed into their world of make-believe.

"Try that again," he commanded. "Come on quicker. Hold onto that last word. Keep your voice up—up! And try to *feel* what you're doing; feel it! Now, once more!"

He let her go through the opening lines without interruption. Then he stepped in front of her.

"Say, didn't you ever cry in your life?" he demanded. She realized, now, that she was only an instrument in his hands, a machine on which emotion must play, a means to an end.

"Not very often," she admitted.

"Well, just picture Weinert takin' this part away from you, and try to weep over it! Howl! Wail! Screech! Get some punch into it!"

Still again she went through the lines. She knew she was making a fool of herself; but she became reckless. She saw his sudden nod of approval, and caught fire from it. There was, she felt, almost a touch of delirium in the whole thing.

"That's better! Give us more o' that!" cried Steger. She repeated the trick, unctuously, pantingly, hurriedly, as though fearful the secret of it might slip away from her.

They advanced to the second act, going over and over the harder part, like a horse over a hurdle. She was tired out when Steger took out his watch, looked at it, and told her to sit down.

"Don't you worry about old Weinert! You'll clear him," announced her rotund coach, as he put out a finger to his office buzzer.

Una, sitting there facing him, breathing hard with her exertion, felt that life was a strangely mixed affair. Here was her most malignant enemy, a man who had proved himself base, working over her, needlessly and even generously helping her when he saw that she required help. Men, she decided, could not be divided into the all good and the all bad, as they were in melodramas and moving pictures. Even Bob Steger had his redeeming features.

"Now, remember, first rehearsal tomorrow at ten, on the stage of the Standard. And don't forget about those two gowns!"

Una's face was clouded,

"I don't know where I can get the money for two stage gowns," she forlornly confessed.

"What's the matter with Jim Sayles?"

"Jim Sayles?" echoed the puzzled girl.

“Can’t he stand for a couple o’ gowns?”

“Why should I ask Jim Sayles to buy gowns for me?” she demanded, disheartened at the cloven hoof which her benefactor was so quickly revealing.

There was nothing but pure and unadulterated wonder on the rotund face of Bob Steger.

“You can’t get gowns from him?” he asked.

“Of course I can’t,” was the girl’s answer.

Steger seemed beyond his depth in the breakers of bewilderment.

“Then what in thunder’s he been slippin’ a hundred or two over to old Weinert to cinch this job for you for?” demanded the man at the desk.

XIV

It was Bob Steger himself who confronted Una at ten o'clock the next morning as she made the mistake, not uncommon with the novice, of trying to reach the stage of the Standard from "the front" of the house.

"The back of the house, please," he said, unedging the curtness of the command with a smile.

Una was somewhat in doubt as to his meaning. She was also puzzled by the preoccupied stare with which he regarded her for a moment or two.

He reopened the foyer door for her.

"Not this way," he explained, "for a few years. You take the stage door, little one, until you're at least a star!"

She was embarrassed, for a moment, at the thought of her blunder. But it did not rob her of her sense of elation, of almost lightheadedness. For she was conscious that she had at last crossed her Great Divide. She at last possessed a contract and a part. There were obstacles to be overcome, fires to be passed through, but she felt that the end would in some way be reached. Her mind was too full of a vague and wonderful future to be distracted by the side issues of the present.

Steger was still looking at her with his half-quizzical and half-cogitative stare.

"By the way, you needn't worry about those two gowns!" he finally announced.

"Why not?" she asked.

"Jim Sayles sent over a check to square for 'em," he announced.

Una was convinced that he was concealing something.

"Who told him about them?" she demanded.

"No one," Steger said. "I guess he just felt you'd need 'em."

"But he can't do it," protested Una. "I can't let him. I won't let him."

"You can't stop him," was Steger's answer.

"I must," the girl declared.

"But I still say you can't," persisted the other, a half-pitying smile on his loose lips.

"Why can't I?"

Steger was no longer smiling.

"Because he died last night," were the words that fell on Una's ears. "And the last thing he did was to send over his savings-bank balance of a hundred and forty bucks. He said you'd been kind to a dog o' his."

Una's breath caught in her throat. She was seized by a sudden sense of deprivation. She seemed, of a sudden, terribly alone in the world. A shadow crept along the sunlit canyon of Broadway, with its beleaguering rattle and bustle and dust. She was shaken by the thought that there was, after all, something hollow in what had seemed like victory, something mocking in her momentary hope of happiness.

Jim Sayles was dead! Two tears, of which she was foolishly ashamed, trickled down her cheeks.

"They're taking him back to Syracuse," Steger explained as his hand reached out for the spring door at the foyer front. "He's got folks there."

The man of the stage abruptly flicked the papers in his hands against his leg and turned in through the opened door.

"You'd better be beating it back to that rehearsal," he said, letting the door swing to after him.

There was something hard and heartless, she felt, in any such overprompt return to the sordid actualities of life. She had not yet learned the exactions of that implacable profession of hers, the solemn task of amusement that must go solemnly on in the face of accident and illness and death itself.

Still blinded by tears she made her way to the stage door of the Standard. She stopped in that narrow and boxlike entrance to wipe her face.

She could not quite accept the fact of Jim Sayles' death. A persistent feeling that she would see him again, that he would still be found making cocoa in his shabby front room, made Steger's news seem like something remembered from a dream. The whimsical figure seemed too near to her and all her newer life to be lost. Yet, as she made her way into the many-odored, high-arched cavern of the Standard's cleared stage, the thought of Jim Sayles, even against her will, was driven from her mind.

The sheer height of the shadowy space in which she found herself was intimidating. The fly-loft, with its festooning platforms, its rope ends and sand weights, stood like a grim cave bearded with stalactites. Toward the mouth of this cave, near the footlights, burned a bunch-light, a cluster of electric globes on an iron standard. Mattressed against the wall stood countless tiers of scenery, wings and flats and profiles and dog-eared canvas frames. The flooring of this cave was rough and worn, scarred and seamed like a withered face, pitted and lined by its thousand battles with pretence. The dark auditorium beyond the stage apron stood empty and chilly and morguelike. The life was all in the neighborhood of the bunch-light.

Standing or squatting about that light, some on property chairs, some about sand pails set to receive cigarette ends, some about a worn deal table, was a group of idly preoccupied men and women. There were many of them, for the cast of *The Wine of Life* was an exceptionally large one.

Una, as she approached the light, felt her young body swept and scorched by countless inquisitive eyes. It was an enfilading battery of glances, audacious and appraising from the men, envious and veiled from the older women alive to the eternal menace of youth in the purlieus of the antiquated.

For one minute the murmur of their talk ceased; then it began again, leaving the newcomer awkward and ignored in the center of the stage. She could hear them, as she looked about for a seat, laughing and chattering of things that were a sealed book to her. More than ever she began to feel like an outsider. Yet it was more resentment than fear that possessed her. For in any other walk of life, she felt, the mere dictates of common sense would have devised some manner of bringing people together less awkwardly, of properly presenting a newcomer to her associates, of making her feel less of an intruder. The gallantry, the courtliness, the romantic picturesqueness of these strange people of the stage, Una was beginning to learn, was something which they put on and took off with their make-up. They seemed so steeped in it during their working hours that they were inclined to shun it during their idleness.

The overlooked girl remembered the twelve “sides” under the pale blue paper covering and managed to achieve a dogged and bitter sort of patience. She was regarding the merriment about her as an affront to Jim Sayles when a man who had been sitting in the darkened auditorium climbed to the stage apron and crossed to her side.

"Are you my Sorrowful Sue?" he asked with an unexpectedly companionable smile.

When he saw that the girl had failed to catch his meaning he took the script from her hand, glanced down at it, and nodded his head. She assumed, when she saw the much heavier script in his own hand, that he was the leading man.

"It's all rather new to me," she confessed, feeling the need for some response to his smile.

"I'm a beginner myself," he said with a groan that ended in a laugh, "at least in this sort of work. This is my first play. That's why it hurts so to see them butchering the life out of a newborn baby."

"Then you're not—not an actor?" ventured Una.

"No, I'm merely an author, the necessary harmless author. Do I look like an actor?"

Una studied him. He was tall and clumsily made, with a bitter line or two about the mouth, where a suspicion of discontent was promptly neutralized by the warmness of the meditative brown eyes. If he looked almost boyish in his rough tweeds, with his tanned skin and his rather untidy hair, that impression of youth vanished when Una noticed what must have been a premature frosting of gray above his temples.

Una decided that she was going to like him, though she was left wondering whether that decision stemmed from his impression of being mentally alive or from a quiet and comforting voice that made her think of an old doctor with a pain-dispelling bedside manner.

He endured her scrutiny and brushed aside her answer.

"Are you a good weeper?" he asked, with a gesture toward her script.

"I began that way," was the girl's surprising reply, given with equally surprising dignity. "I made my first appearance as Flamant's child in *Sappho*. That was twelve years ago."

Her new friend smiled.

"Did you, now! And Weinert's been telling me this is your maiden effort. And I come barging over to give a fatherly tip or two to an old-timer."

A stir about the stage took his half-ironical gaze from the upturned face that was making him think of a marigold in evening light.

"I'll be seeing you," he called back over his shoulder as he crossed to the table by the bunch-light.

Una wondered at the tidal change in the group until she heard a pinkish-faced actor, dapperly clothed in a sand-colored pin-stripe suit with padded shoulders, audibly whisper behind his hand: "Here comes Covington!"

Yet that, at the moment, was not what entirely held her attention. For she also heard a small-mouthed Thespian with a double chin and a belted waist, as he blinked at her, murmur with jocular solemnity the one unmistakable and all-descriptive epithet of "Sandpiper!" From that hour forward, in fact, Una was secretly known to the rest of the company as "the Sandpiper."

Yet as she sat there on the sofa waiting for the star to make her deliberately belated appearance, the girl from Chamboro was the possessor of something which could be claimed by no one else in the company. She was the only young person in that arena of emotionalism. They seemed faded, all faded. In spite of their exuberance of gesture, of their garrulity, of their flashiness of attire, life had taken something from them, had left them wary and overwise. They needed, even the prettiest of them, a more cunning light than that of the sun to bring out their beauty. They needed the trickeries of dress, the accessories of the toilet, lip rouge and mascara-beaded eyelashes, to leave them at their best. And Una, as she looked at those faces struggling so valiantly against the gray neutralities of time, wondered if she would ever be like them, if she too would some day be forced to a layer of cosmetics and slave bracelets and synthetic pearls and sapphires.

Then all chance for further thought ended, as the noisy group silenced and stiffened, uncommonly like a line of rookies confronted by an inspection officer. Even Weinert, at the deal table, stood up.

For Miss Covington, the star, was on the stage. She was there in a tilted Cossack cloche and a Russian mink coat, moving across the boards that were her rightful domain, moving with an oddly undulating swing of the hips that was not quite a swing, advancing with measured steps that seemed both fawnlike and regal, and leaving an aura of perfume in her wake.

Una shrank back from taking part in the salutations. She waited until Weinert called for more lights, spoke a few brief words to the languidly smiling Miss Covington, and rapped sharply on the deal table for attention.

He announced to the assembled company that he believed he had a remarkable play, thanks to the patience with which Mr. Frank Frendel, the author, had responded to managerial suggestions, and he hoped that both his

new friends and his old would co-operate with him in making it a Broadway success.

"So his name," Una mentally recorded, "is Frank Frendel."

She also assumed, from the looks that passed from actor to actor, that one of Weinert's little weaknesses was the making of such speeches.

His mink-clad star was plainly restless as her manager went on to explain that the time was short and that the work for the next fortnight would be hard. Rehearsals during that time would be ceaseless. Time had been promised the production in the Standard itself, three weeks from the following Monday, provided the play showed up as it ought to during its split week on the road. It would come in as a stopgap, but it would remain anchored as a success.

At this a listless cheer or two arose from the assembled actors, and under the lee of it the Demosthenes of the moment retired to the preoccupied Miss Covington's side, giving way to the calm-voiced yet moist-browed Frank Frendel, who seated himself under the bunch-light, opened his manuscript, and began the task of reading his four acts to the workers who were to interpret them.

"Louder, please!" lilted an actor whose blue socks and blue shirt and blue handkerchief overneatly matched his own puffy blue eyes.

Una could see a flash of anger on Frendel's face. The tyro in playwriting, obviously, was not having an easy time of it.

"If you can't hear me," he said coldly, "come closer. I don't happen to be an auctioneer."

That challenge brought a shuffling of chairs and a constriction of the listening circle. But Una, when the reading was over, could see that Frendel was both tired and dispirited by the unprofessional faultiness of his phrasing. She nursed the momentary hope, as she caught his eye while the assistant stage manager was accumulating all names and addresses for the call board, that Frendel would seal his earlier friendliness by asking her out to lunch, to a late-afternoon lunch where she could question him about certain problems in her new part.

She even made it a point to see to it that her departure from the stage entrance coincided with his.

He walked with her, through the pallid gold light of late afternoon, as far as Broadway. There he stopped and looked down at her.

“I’m wondering,” he said, “if we’re not both in the wrong business.” Then he laughed at her quick look of reproof. “I guess you’re right, lady. It takes steam to make the grade. Or, if I read those eyes of yours aright, it’s the Laodiceans who always lose out.”

“I’m sure,” Una said, “you’re going to have a success.”

There was an edging of acid to his smile.

“And when I’m the Clyde Fitch of the coming era,” he appended, “they’ll be printing your name in electric bulbs up there and drinking champagne out of your slipper.”

It was the undiminished crusader light in the wide-set hazel eyes that took the acid out of his smile and replaced it with a pitying sort of kindliness.

“Dream on,” he said as he signaled for a passing taxicab, “and may all your dreams come true!”

XV

From that afternoon forward all existence, to Una, took on a dreamlike and unsubstantial air. She found herself ushered into a new and feverishly busy world where she was played on by too many stimuli and confronted by too many new conditions.

She not only had her part to memorize and her cues to fix, but in odd hours there were stage gowns to be fitted and altered, a make-up box to be purchased and properly equipped, and a characterization to worry over. Nor was it easy for her to fix in her mind a series of ever-modified and ever-ramifying stage instructions. She grew to dread the repeated quick pad of a director's feet down the darkened auditorium aisle and the whip-lash of an impatient reproof.

"Don't ham it like that. Don't smear so thick. Just be human for a change. And try and remember this is the English language we're using."

To Una, in the midst of her lines, he called out: "We'd rather like to know what you're saying, lady. You've got to hit that back wall, and hit it with every word."

"I thought, Mr. Salmon, I was shouting," Una called out into the darkness, with the unconscious effrontery of a beginner which even her forced smile could not entirely unedge.

"Shouting my ear! You were so damned confidential I thought you'd fallen asleep. Take it again."

And it was taken again. So many things, in fact, were taken again that precious hours and days slipped away and *The Wine of Life* showed itself unwilling to come to life. Progress proved so unsatisfactory that night rehearsals were started, ordeals in shabby halls and out-of-the-way corners of the city. Many of these lasted until long after midnight.

Una, in her anxiety to improve her reading, went to Frendel when he was sitting broodingly in one of the aisle seats.

"*Why* can't I get those lines right?" she questioned, her crumpled script in her hand.

"You're better than you were," he admitted.

"But I want to be right, exactly right. And since they're your lines I'm sure you could show me how."

He studied her for a moment. Then he shook his head.

"I can't help you. I'm not an actor."

Una knew a surge of disappointment.

"But you're intelligent," she said, remembering to show six teeth.

It brought from him a responsive smile, even though a restricted one.

"I'm intelligent enough to know you've got something, Baby Rejane, even though you haven't got it broken and harnessed yet." His hand pat on her shoulder was almost paternal. "You'd better stick to Salmon."

But, instead of sticking to Salmon, the intent-eyed girl went to Bob Steger, who seemed busy enough with the commercial side of the production. He listened to her readings, suggested, a "delayed take" on one or two of her speeches, and pointed out how a "dead pan" would help to bring a laugh on her best comedy line. She accepted his suggestions, just as she accepted her work, with a solemnity which even Steger, for all his heavy facetiousness, could not shake. She confessed that her part was small, but she began to realize the intricacy of the structure in which it was at least a fraction. She began to see things from the inside, things she had never even guessed at.

She began to see that actors were not the only factors in a production. She found that "props," gravely enough imagined through earlier rehearsals, eventually had to become tangibilities. She saw that shirt-sleeved carpenters had their own mysterious structures to bring into being. She learned that lighting alone was vital to a production, where the switch board played its silent part in the achievement of theatrical effects.

But most of all she liked to toy with her make-up box, which seemed like a small metal doorway into the dominions of romance. Even before it was called for she would spread a towel on the dressing-room shelf where a light-crowned mirror stood and from the box take out the different instruments of transfiguration. Side by side she would place liners and liquid base, rouge pot and powdering brush, cold cream and powder, mascara and eyebrow pencil, not omitting the rabbit-foot powder brush which, by every credo of back-stage life, was to bring her luck. She knew little about make-up and her experiments were not always happy. But she preferred to learn through trial and error rather than question the case-hardened sisters about her.

And finally it came home to her, during those hectic days, that play-acting was anything but a lighthearted pretending at things. It was, she grew to see, a methodic and scrupulously exact spinning of that delicate cobweb called Illusion, a cobweb whose final tenuous integrity, whose very existence, depended on every line and every filament of character holding true. And she was morosely happy in her struggle to understand it all.

Yet along the horizon of that happiness was always a cloud or two. She knew they were laughing at her a little, those older and more calloused actors. She knew they were still designating her as "Sandpiper" behind her back. She had heard one of the women refer to her as "a climber." She had heard another older woman—who periodically slipped away to one of the empty dressing rooms for a marijuana cigarette—vigorously declare that "Sandpiper sure has lovely eyes!"

This was more balm to Una than she would have openly confessed. But in any moment of weariness or dejection she had one great warm fact to hug to her thin breast: she was at last on the stage. She at last had a part!

The tension of *The Wine of Life* company increased as the rehearsal period approached its close. It took on more and more the dignity of a vast issue. All other affairs of life dwindled into trivialities. Nothing else was talked about, thought of, worried over. Una found something exhilarating in this ever-increasing excitement. It sustained her through a week of broken rest and physical weariness and ill-chosen and over-hurried meals. It buoyed her up through the troubled waters of a dress rehearsal, where a first-act set failed to fit, where many props were found missing, where costumes were seen to clash, where familiar movements and lines vanished in thin air and overtried nerves showed a tendency to explode into sudden and unreasoning anger.

It all seemed misty and dreamlike to Una. She moved through everything with the preoccupation of a sleep-walker. Equally dreamlike was the next night's journey to Toronto, the only "week stand" where the company had been able to get "half-time" on short notice. Una accepted without wonder the novel experience of sleeping in a berth shrouded by curtains. She accepted without even inward protest the noisy talk and the tobacco smoke that lasted deep into the night. As she wakened, from time to time, she raised her window curtain and stared out at the stars and the ever-passing lights and the ever-receding hills.

Somewhere along those glimmering threads of steel, she knew, they would pass Chamboro, Chamboro wrapped in sleep, with its Main Street

empty and its blinds drawn and its once green lawns strewn with drifting leaves. Yet the thought of her hometown brought her no nostalgic qualms.

It seemed years since she had left its quiet streets, since she had carried the plethoric rattan suitcase to the station where the yellow lamps still burned. It seemed worlds away now. It no longer meant anything to her. She even wondered, when its memory awakened no lasting emotion, if she was already growing hard.

But she brushed that thought away with the claim that on the long road of Art there could be no divided loyalties. And from that older life she was cut off, forever. In no circumstances, now, could she ever turn back to it. She had outgrown it and its narrowly contented life and its quiet and maple-shaded streets where children could be happy with roller skates and neighbors could discuss the best spraying mixture for climbing roses.

It was not without its appeal, in a way. But it wasn't Life. And she, at last, had found what she had been looking for. The doors of living had swung wide to her. She was, at last, on the stage.

XVI

Una was at the theater long before seven. She had already unpacked the secondhand Taylor trunk which held all her worldly belongings, once more laid out her new japanned tin make-up box and with borrowed needle and thread made an alteration or two in the skirt of her second-act gown.

By half-past seven she was fully dressed, "made up," and on the stage, where she loitered about, rapt and wide-eyed, very much in the way of carpenters and scene shifters who bumped against her and bellowed at her with the offhanded resentment of workers preoccupied with their own importance.

Una's own preoccupation was not unmixed with a consciousness of her importance. She had a naïve and childlike faith in her own future. Her conception of stage destiny was still a romantic one. She knew that her part was not large, yet she believed, with the blindness of youth, that she might in some accidental or extraordinary manner make a hit. She had read of so many young actresses who in one hour, in one scene, had burst like a sky rocket on the heavens of fame. She nursed the secret hope that she could translate her second-act scene into something pathetic, that, with all her limited material, she might yet touch the hearts of her hearers.

She no longer worried about her lines. Her memory, in fact, was excellent. She could have recited almost any part in the production, so vividly had it impressed itself on her mind. And she was too much a novice to know the meaning of "stage fright." She was too unconscious of the perils besetting her, of the possibilities of disaster, of the danger of a tongue-slip magnifying itself into a calamity, to waste time on futile and foolish worry. She could not account for the sense of strain, the unrest, that pervaded the waiting company behind the asbestos curtain. She found it impossible, as a perspiring assistant stage manager announced "Half-hour!" and still later "Fifteen minutes" and still later "Overture," to read anything ominous in the words. Yet as the thump of the plush-covered seats, the murmur of talk, the tuning of a violin or two, and then the opening bars of the orchestra itself, came thin and muffled to the people back of the "drop," Una could see the faces about her become more pale and worried, even under their make-up.

Miss Covington herself, who had ordered a sheet spread under her wooden chair in the wings that her heavily trained gown might not be soiled,

looked ill and worn out, even under the high-colored cosmetic which seemed to stiffen the skin of her face as varnish would stiffen leather. The comedian who had christened Una the "Sandpiper" leaned silent and dolorous against a paint frame. Beside him the bald-headed "heavy," privately rehearsing a scene which still troubled him, went through mysterious and pantomimic gestures, as self-immolated as though he stood alone in a world of loneliness.

It was the young electrician, turning for a moment from his switch board to study Una, who startled her out of her preoccupied silence.

"Say, kid, you're made up too red for this house. Those lights'll make you look like a Comanche!"

"What should I do?" asked the girl, remembering a little bitterly that not one of the women had offered her a helping word.

"Scoot down and slap on a coat o' powder!" he told her, as the stage manager gave a double clap of the hands to "clear" the stage. A light winked beside the orchestra leader, a bell tinkled, and Una, as she shrank deeper into the wings, knew that the curtain was rising.

The play had begun. The comedian trotted briskly out with a set and foolish smile on his face. The dolorous and worried "heavy" waddled after him, actresses as unreal as painted dolls stepped into the white glare of the lights, spoke their lines, went through their evolutions, laughed their forced and foolish laughs.

In the wings across the stage Weinert and Miss Covington were arguing, gesticulating, contradicting each other. Una could see that some unexpected trouble had arisen. The still debating couple were joined by Frendel, who stood equally perplexed by some new problem.

Una, to her surprise, saw that Frendel was waving and motioning for her to join them. He had avoided her, she thought, since their last meeting in New York. But now he was making repeated circular movements of the arm, as a sign for her to cross behind the backdrop.

When the girl had picked her way through the braces and frame-ends she found Miss Covington inspecting her with a narrowed eye. She heard the star's whispered: "Damn Wallace, anyway!"

But what held Una's attention was Frendel, who moved closer to Weinert. The author looked remote and institutional in his evening clothes.

"Give this girl a chance at that bit," he was whispering.

"What girl?" asked Weinert.

"Miss Carberry here," said Frendel. "She'll swing it."

Una felt a surge of gratitude at both the "Miss Carberry" and the discovery that Frendel was holding out a helping hand to her.

"Could you go on and read Wallace's six lines at the end of this act?" Weinert whispered.

"Of course," Una whispered back. Had he asked her to go on and play Covington's part she would have given a similar answer. For one moment, in fact, she had thought that the star had collapsed and Weinert was coming to her with the part. For one ecstatic moment this hope burned in her brain and went out again. It did not seem preposterous; from her childhood she had read of such things. She still tranquilly believed in their possibility.

"Do you know the lines?" Weinert demanded.

"Yes, I know them," was the unruffled girl's response.

"Here they are," he said, thrusting a sheet of paper into her hand. "And for God's sake, get them right. Go on at the cue, 'Barbara is still in the billiard room.' Go right up to the end of the piano. Get as close to Covington as you can. And *speak up*. And for heaven's sake tone down that make-up before you go on!"

Weinert was off, the next moment, called by the frantic signs of the stage manager, who led him back to the wing where Miss Covington stood and raged. Their argument, whatever it was, now became a three-sided one, but Una did not wait to listen to it. She ran down to the quietness of the dressing room, was hurriedly helped into her new costume, and coated her face with white powder, smoothing it with her puff. She regarded herself for one satisfying moment in the mirror, and made her way back to the stage.

The star was on as Una reached the stage level again, already deep in her first "emotional" bit. The entrances were crowded, and the listening girl could not see the movements on the stage. But she could feel the warmth from the new five-hundred-watt lights that made the air above the speaking figures seem subaqueous, a misted liquid in which a million fish-motes floated. From that waterless aquarium Una could hear the familiar throaty drawl of Miss Covington, stubbornly courageous in its struggle to depict calmness. For things were not going well, the girl gathered from the whispering figures in front of her. The star had tripped on a rug that she had three times ordered tacked down; her fan had not been left on the piano as it should have been, and the audience had tittered as she tried in vain to break

the wire stem of the property-rose which she pinned on her lover's lapel. The other members of the company, as they came off, wore solemn and apprehensive expressions. From a double row of college students, in the front of the gallery, came audible and satiric remarks during the star's early love scene.

"Isn't that fierce!" was the "heavy's" disgusted comment as the scene ended with nothing more than a scattered pattering of hand claps.

"She's not big enough for that stuff, and she knows it," said one of the painted stage women at Una's elbow. The listening girl was startled by a sudden voice behind her.

"Here you, quick!"

It was Weinert; and even as he spoke, the familiar words, "Barbara is still in the billiard room," sounded from the stage.

Una, wriggling and pushing through the watching crowd, stepped out into the glare of the footlights. As she did so, that misty dizziness which sometimes comes from looking down from a great height swept over her. It was not fear. She was not frightened. It was more a vast and muffling wonder.

She was astonished to find herself so close to the audience, with a slope of upturned faces at her feet, with cliffs of faces shadowing her, with receding inclines of faces, twinkling here and there with the lens of lifted opera glasses, all seeming to shelve and strain toward her. The very light in which she stood seemed startlingly and unnaturally vivid. She felt the need of readjusting herself to some new condition which she could not quite fathom. She would succeed, she knew, if they would only give her time, if they would only allow her to prepare herself for her task.

She found herself at the end of the piano, facing the woman in the trained gown of shimmering silk. She knew what she had come to say, and she knew that she could say it. But the machinery of conscious thought refused to mesh. Some arbitrary and wilful genius within her seemed demanding time, and still more time, to co-ordinate its messages.

"What is it, dear?" interpolated Miss Covington, in her placid contralto drawl. But from the side of her mouth she bit out, almost in a hiss: "*Say it, you fool! Say it!*"

Una looked at her in mild and indignant wonder, knowing no such lines were in the text. She was possessed by the consciousness of something dawning and coming to birth, of gathering power reaching its climax and

exploding into utterance. To retard or hasten it seemed something beyond her own volition.

Bob Steger, who was out in front with a representative of the Shubert offices, saw that cataleptic figure at the end of the piano and dropped his head in his hand and groaned, groaned aloud, with an attempt at articulated misery that was not as mocking as he had meant it to be.

Una heard that sound, and understood it. It wakened her, as a dash of cold water might have done.

Her message to the woman in the shimmering silk dress came from her lips as easily as a bird from a cage. The familiar and friendly drawling voice answered her. The play went on again. But Una had received her baptism of fire.

She hoped for better results from her second-act scene. There would be something striking, she felt, in that sudden and unheralded entrance of a weeping woman—and for a week she had been experimentally sobbing in every key and register, with every choke and shake that she could command, until her neighbors had begun to pound on walls with boot heels. She had even stopped to study the crying of children in the street. She picked up a trick of voice here, a breast movement there, a face distortion somewhere else. Her own weeping she made a composite of them all. Of this, when she had perfected it to her taste, she had come to be inordinately proud.

There was, accordingly, the vigor of confidence, the zest of the artist no longer uncertain of herself, in Una's second-act entrance. The one thing she counted on was the sympathy of her audience. If she "felt" her part, as Steger expressed it, the people in front would do the same.

Una had wept her way to the side of the stately and still shimmering Miss Covington, two-thirds of the way across the stage, before the audience seemed even conscious of her presence. She began to fear that she was falling into the common error of not "throwing out" her voice, so as she advanced she added to her weeping a crescendo movement. She even defied the star and turned to the face-stippled gloom in front of her, that her own distorted face might be seen. And her body continued to be shaken by its convulsive sobs.

There was one moment of bewildered silence on the part of the audience. Then from gallery and pit alike came one common shout and roar of laughter. That wailing figure was too much for their sense of humor. Some strange mood or accident made them accept her as gravely intentioned

comic "relief." They gloried in her sorrow; they rocked and shouted and reveled in her misery.

The weeping Una, as she faced them, saw all her air castles of artistry go crumbling away. They were not taking her seriously. They were laughing at her. And as she mechanically went through the contortions and heavings that two weeks of rehearsal had made almost second nature, actual tears welled up to her eyes. She shook with a paroxysm of weeping which she could not control. The tears, coursing down her face, washed off her make-up.

Miss Covington was forced to improvise "business" with the vase of flowers on the table beside her. One or two of the older actors in the wings were doubled over with mirth. Weinert, in the "tormentor," was dancing and gesticulating and calling out to her: "Cry more! Cry more! Keep it up!" for he knew that laughter, whatever it may rise from, had its plain commercial value. But still Una wept, and still the house laughed itself into contented weariness.

Even when the broken threads of the dialogue had been caught together, and Una was compelled to go on with her speaking lines, the audience read humor into every speech she uttered, tittered at her red-eyed solemnities, laughed outright at her final words in which she had forlornly expected a quiet sob or two, and good-naturedly gave her a hand as she made her exit.

"Why didn't the brat say she was going to spring that weep act on us?" snapped the dazed and envious comedian as Una groped her way into the shadows.

"Why, you damned fool, she didn't know it herself!" chortled the comprehending "heavy," his belted waist still convulsive with diminishing little waves of mirth.

Una, as she groped her way through the semi-darkness, heard them. But she was already too bathed in misery to know any deeper hurt.

It was Frendel who stopped her on the iron stairway that led to the dressing rooms. He put a hand under her chin and lifted her tear-stained face, as he might a child's.

"Don't let it worry you," he said with a low-toned quietness that left the girl's throat tighter than ever. "You're not the only one who's being thrown to the lions tonight."

"The lions?" she echoed in tearful perplexity.

“Oh, God, can’t you see what they’ve done to my play? They’ve manhandled——”

He broke off, with a gesture that implied the futility of words. Then, still studying her face, he forced a laugh.

“We’re in the same boat all right. We’re just two little bleating lambs sacrificed on the altar of low comedy.”

“But it was going all right until I——”

“Cut that,” he commanded. “I still say you’ve got what it takes. And some day we’ll show ’em.”

She wiped her face and smiled her gratitude for those fraternal words. It had not impressed her as possible that anyone else could be unhappy during that night of trial and error.

“But it’s going to be a success,” she told him. “It’s got to be a success.”

“Is it?” said Frendel. Then he shook his head. He stood silent a moment, as a faint patter of hands betokened the fall of the curtain on his second act. “It’s only the absence of feathers that keeps it from looking like an Indian massacre to me!”

XVII

Frank Frendel was not the only one who knew they had a flop on their hands. It was equally clear to the astute Vera Covington, though that star refused to go into eclipse without a final effort at effulgence.

She insisted on extra rehearsals for her company and demanded renewed text changes from the author. She reminded her associates that Canadian audiences were notoriously cold and contended *The Wine of Life* would have a chance only when it got away from the polar regions.

This blithe claim, however, did little to allay the feeling of unrest that had crept through her company. The older actors, Una noticed, wore veiled and troubled faces, as though they carried secrets too unpalatable for open discussion. But the ghostly wires of that grapevine circuit running from make-up box to make-up box, from dressing room to dressing room, were busy with rumors and counter-rumors.

To Una it seemed impossible that a structure so laboriously fabricated could fall to pieces. She refused to believe that she was clinging to a wreck. She had even felt that she alone was the one unhappy and ill-used member of that earnest-minded assemblage of artists. This feeling had not diminished when, after looking through the four daily papers which contained reports of the performance, she found that her name was not once mentioned.

"What did you expect," asked her time-worn stall-mate in the littered dressing room where the bright light betrayed her frown of disappointment, "a four-column headline about you bein' the Baby Bernhardt of Broadway?"

Una forgot that sarcasm, however, when in the more leisured theatrical page of a weekly called *Saturday Night* she found a belated paragraph that mentioned her work. It spoke of her as a newcomer of promise and even ventured a brief analysis of what was described as her "comedy bit."

"This young lady," the paragraph continued, "seemed to have an uncommonly keen appreciation of ironic humor. The strokes were broad, but behind them was a definite sensitiveness to dramatic values. There may have been moments of uncertainty, but the spark was there, the promise of future power. The one puzzling thing is that a young lady so beautiful as Miss Una Carberry could reconcile herself to a make-up so hopelessly hideous."

Those words were like wine to Una, who had no knowledge, at the time, that they derived from Frank Frendel's talk over a midnight bottle of Canadian Club shared with an old college chum turned critic.

The girl read and reread the paragraph, staring at her own name until it fell to pieces under her eyes, until it meant nothing. She wondered why her colleagues could remain unitedly silent about it, being too young to have drifted into a knowledge of that insidious disease of stage workers usually diagnosed as jealousy. But she cut out the column review and decided to buy a dozen more papers.

Then she suddenly asked herself where they could be sent. Where indeed? Her first thought was of Jim Sayles. But Jim Sayles had passed beyond all memory and all care of her petty little struggles. The curtain had come down, for all time, on that bony face with its wide and friendly smile. It dawned on her, as she sat above the outspread paper, how companionless she actually was, how few mortals cared whether she failed or succeeded, how few she would have to share in her future triumphs, when those triumphs came to her. She felt that sometime, later in life, she would have more leisure for establishing the ties of affection and gratitude with those about her. As things were now, it was all worry and work and struggle to show that she was not a failure. Sometime there would be more of a chance for the softer and milder things of life.

Then, of a sudden, she thought of Hempel. An undefined sense of shame crept over her as she remembered him. The hurlyburly of the last two weeks in New York had wiped him out of her consciousness. She had not even called to see him, nor sent him a word of explanation or farewell.

She marked the paragraph in the column which she had cut out, and under it wrote, "This is my only excuse." Then she folded it and put it in an envelope, addressing it to Hempel's Twenty-Third Street studio. Yet once she had parted with the clipping she felt that she had parted with some pillar of moral support. This feeling of deprivation drove her to buy another copy of the paper. In it, from time to time, she kept reading the paragraph which spoke of the promise of the future and the spark being there. She went over it, again and again, until the words seemed to wear out, like the pages of a club-room paper too often read. They melted into a mere jangle of sound. Yet from even that jangle she could extract a soft undertone of music.

It was that same afternoon she met Steger, not fifty yards away from the theater door.

"Why so blithe, little one?" he asked, with his heavy yet not unkindly smile.

"It's good to be working," she said, unconsciously repeating a phrase she had heard fall from an older actress the night before.

Steger stood looking down at her, with his habitual half-studious, half-admiring stare. It was a mannerism to which she had become reconciled. It no longer touched her into a vague and inarticulate uneasiness.

"Can you keep a secret?" he asked her.

"What is it?" she said, her apprehension a-leap at the solemnity of his round and wrinkled face.

"You dig out Weinert and draw what you can from him," Steger advised. "For between you and me and the gatepost this company's goin' to close on Saturday!"

Una, as her own place and her own performance became more fixed, had continued to feel that the play would pull through, that the ill luck of an untoward first night was already forgotten. As to the goodness or the badness of the play as a whole she had no means of judging. All possibility of perspective had long since departed. She could not see the forest for the trees.

The very fact that she was so submerged in it, that she had become so intimately a part of it, filled her with a quick sense of injustice at the thought of some power above and beyond its originators being able to stop it.

"Closed—for good?" she cried, incredulous. It had taken such labor to get it under way, it had been so bulky and unwieldy to start in motion, that she felt some sheer momentum should carry it on, crushing through every puny accident and obstacle.

"Weinert's goin' to step from under," Steger confessed to her. "Covington thinks she can carry on. But she's not strong enough. Of course you'll get your fare back to New York. But you deserve more than those other people out of this. You just go to Weinert and tell him you've got to have money. Tip him off to what you know—but don't ever say *I* put you wise. He'll weaken, all right. He'll have to! And, say, don't let the old boy crab those two gowns o' yours! Get'em into your trunk! Your money paid for 'em, and they're yours!"

So Una, fortified with the indignation of the basely deceived, sought out Weinert, who astutely denied that the company was going to close. He threw

up his hands at Una's demand for money, drew her aside and haggled for time, and, realizing that equivocation was out of the question, finally compromised on one week's salary.

One third of this sum Una took back to Steger. A dull color spread over his face as she handed him two five-dollar bills folded together.

"What's this for?" he said, unfolding them and holding them fanwise between his fingers.

"You once paid my fare to New York," Una answered, without a tremor. "That's what I still owed you."

He held the money out to her. His stare was almost an angry one.

"What's the good o' goin' back to *that*?" he demanded. "I don't want this money, and I won't take it!"

"You've got to take it!"

Something about the impersonal firmness on her face made him waver.

"Why, you'll hit the old burg on Sunday with about six dollars to the good," he protested.

"I'll get along," she announced, with her quiet and sober smile.

Steger looked down at her, with an answering sobriety.

"I'm no archangel," he solemnly averred. "But, say, I'd give a good deal to make good with you!"

"You have!" answered Una, moved by that declaration into an attitude of letting bygones be bygones.

Steger saw the softer light come into the lucid hazel eyes. She stood before him, beleagueringly slim and girlish, strangely unlike the women with whom he had lived and worked and idled. There was, in that moment of passing mildness, something bewilderingly soft and melting about her.

Over his face spread that same veiled hunger which she had once seen in Hempel's eyes.

"I don't suppose you could even think of hitching up with a bum like me?" he said, with a laugh that was quite without mirth.

She shook her head slowly from side to side.

"I—I could make it a blamed sight easier for you," he explained, hesitatingly. "There'd be things I could throw your way."

She was still shaking her head as she looked ponderingly up into his many-wrinkled and puffy eyes. Her calmness seemed to help him to a readjustment of his own feelings.

"Well, I don't blame you," he announced, with humorous self-abasement. "And I'll bet it's single-harness for yours, this next five or six years!"

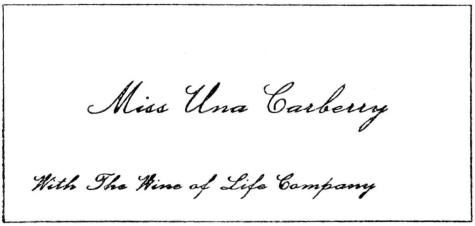
Una meditated repeatedly over that last statement of Steger's, from time to time, and the more she thought over it the more restive-minded and perplexed it seemed to leave her.

XVIII

Una's return to New York, ignominious as it was in many features, was not without its consolations. She came back with a newborn confidence in herself. She felt older and more experienced. There was no longer a touch of timidity to the level gaze of the deep and wide-set hazel eyes. She had passed through her baptism of fire.

Nothing could now rob her of the claim that she was at last a "professional." She went back to Broadway like a soldier going home from active service, outwardly worn and shabby but inwardly proud and happy.

One of her first tasks was to order a hundred professional cards. These she had printed in imitation English script, on bulky pasteboard, at a cost of seventy-five cents. She waited in the little shop off Broadway while they were run through a small motor press, surveying the result with much satisfaction. Her card read:



She suffered a momentary qualm of conscience at the thought that *The Wine of Life* company was no longer in existence. But in a case of shipwreck such as this, she finally assured herself, she was justified in catching at anything that offered support. And she stowed the cards away in her pocketbook, with a satisfaction not unlike that of a slave who is at last the possessor of his papers of emancipation.

Then began again the wearying rounds of the offices and the agencies. She was more experienced, by this time, more adroit in her manner of approach, more assured in her method of address. The result of this was a more businesslike directness on the part of the men to whom she applied for work, a more active interest in what she was able or willing to do, a more apparent willingness to take down her name and address.

But the season was late, she was told again and again, the year was proving an unprofitable one; there was no part open that would quite suit the ingénue of *The Wine of Life* company.

Before the end of the first week she was compelled to sell her two stage gowns, still as good as new, to a Sixth Avenue dealer at a calamitously low price. The following week she had to turn to her list of artists' addresses and go about seeking work as a model. She thought of Hempel many times during that week, but some vague shame kept her from going to his studio. She wished to avoid explaining, she kept telling herself, the failure of the production in which she had figured. Yet she knew, at heart, that her reluctance to meet Hempel lay on other and more personal grounds.

Twice, during the next month, she secured "extra" work in city performances. This brought her in a meager ten dollars a week. Averse as she was to appearing en masse and speaking lines only as one of a mob, she was alert and conscientious in going through her foreordained movements and speeches, and in the second production was openly proclaimed by her stage manager as a good "worker."

She was, by this time, quite fixed in her determination to adhere to "the legitimate." She could never willingly forsake "drama" for "musical comedy." She had heard and seen enough of that branch of theatrical work denominated as "musical" to realize the gulf that separated the two. Drama, she knew, was more respectable. It had not that Dionysian taint which seemed to attach itself to its lyric derivative, with its show women and dancers and pony ballets and chorus girls. She was virginal by instinct. Her abhorrence for the unsavory side of Bohemianism was innate.

She met with an occasional affront and an occasional temptation, from time to time, for she was still too young and too attractive to pass unnoticed in a world where physical appeal was the primary asset. But these she both ignored and evaded. She was too set in her purpose, too preoccupied on her remote yet ever-alluring ends to be greatly troubled in spirit by the casual uncleanness of the road over which she was hurrying.

Steger sent for her, at the beginning of the new year, and jubilantly announced that he had "copped" a great part for her.

"It's a 'medium' in *The Airship Girls*," he explained, "and it's good for thirty a week. You'll do a month of one-week stands, then Chicago till the end o' the spring. Then we're boiling it down to bring to Broadway for a 'roof' production. That'll keep you goin' all summer long—and a chance to show these Rialto sheep what you're good for!"

Una shook her head. “I can’t take it,” she announced.

Steger seemed nonplussed.

“But it’s good for a straight six months! And thirty a week, right through!”

“It was kind of you to think of me,” was Una’s answer. “But I can’t take it!”

Steger groaned audibly. He repeated her phrase, “To think of me,” with an expression of disgust on his heavy face.

“Why, I’ve been pullin’ wires for three weeks to get you that part,” he grimly confessed. He was less flippant of manner than of old. And there was something that amounted almost to hunger on his flabby-cheeked face as he sat studying the girl in front of him.

“I’m sorry,” was all she could say.

She realized, as she stared back at him, how ameliorating were the influences of purely business relationships. She had been able to condone much in him as an active agent in *The Wine of Life* company. Now that their lives had nothing in common she was keenly alive to the grossness of the body before her, to the significance of the flabby-lidded and overprotuberant eyes.

“Say,” he ventured out of the silence that hung heavy between them, “what’s the matter with you havin’ dinner with me tonight?”

Again Una shook her head.

“I’m sorry. But I can’t!”

“Then tomorrow night?” he demanded, as though it were an issue he had determined to settle one way or the other.

She could afford to smile at him with her slow and wistful smile. This smile had the trick of sobering rather than lightening up her face. It seemed to touch her youth with a melancholy and autumnal pensiveness. There was a forlornness in its beauty; it was like late October sunlight on misty wheatlands. It stabbed through the blinking Steger with the poignancy of possession denied. And it might have been his once, he remembered, if he had only played his cards differently.

“You can’t imagine,” the girl was saying, “how busy this looking for parts keeps me!”

"A part isn't the only thing in the world!" ventured Steger out of a ponderous bitterness.

"It is for me," said the girl, with her forlorn little ripple of a laugh, as she rose to her feet. And in her final smile and bow as she turned to go, there was something wordlessly valedictory, something which made even the stolid and self-satisfied Steger realize how far apart their two worlds lay.

"Well, good luck to you!" he called out after her, almost blithely, with the abandonment of enforced relinquishment. For he felt, at heart, that their circles of activity would never again come together. And no road other than their work, he knew, could ever unite them.

It was, oddly enough, the same Shubert representative who had sat beside Steger on the opening night of *The Wine of Life* who somewhat startled Una with a request to come to his office.

When Una appeared before him—there was no wait, this time, in the outer reception room—he shook hands with her, swung a chair about on its heel, told her to sit down, and began talking to her as though Una Carberry and her career were the subject of his daily meditations.

"By the way, are you engaged?" he finally and offhandedly inquired. She had found out, in the office below, that his name was Uhlmann.

"I'm considering an offer for musical comedy," was Una's equally offhanded reply. But her heart was going like a pneumatic riveter.

"*You're* thinking of musical comedy?" And Uhlmann's surprise was exaggerated for his own personal ends.

Una opened her handbag and took out her vanity case, as she had seen older actresses do. It was meant as a gesture of indifference. But she was thinking, at the moment, of her wasted labors with poor Jim Sayles, of the nights of drill in chorus work, of the slowly learned dancing steps that might have been of some use in musical comedy.

"The song-and-dance stuff isn't up your alley," Uhlmann was contending.

"Why isn't it?" asked Una.

"Because you're cut out for something bigger. I've said that ever since I saw you do that crying act up in Toronto. It was a wow."

If Una waited until he went on again, her silence had an undertone of something close to guilt.

"And right here, lady, I've got the greatest little part for you that ever happened. We're working over an English comedy called *Lady Wantage's Release*, making it quick-step and American and calling it *The Sleep-Walker*. There's a part in that—no bit, remember—the part of a slavey, a sort o' kitchen Cinderella who's held down and imposed on and over-ridden until every ounce of spirit in her seems broken. She cries and whimpers through a whole act and a half. Then, all of a sudden, the worm turns—turns! Do you get that! D'you get the drama of it? She has her big crying spell, then, out of a clear sky, she lets out at 'em. She gives 'em a flood of billingsgate that'll make their hair stand on end. Oh, it's great—great!"

"And you wanted me for that part?" Una inquired, without enthusiasm.

"My dear girl, that part was made for you. I've been nursing it and hiding it away for you for the last six weeks. You can make up thin; and you can make up young. And you can cry—you've proved *that*!"

Una, as she sat there fusilladed by his factitious enthusiasm, was thinking that all life's triumphs come with a tinge of disappointment, that so many victories in some way seem involved with a secret defeat.

"Er—there's just one drawback," Uhlmann was explaining. "The cost of this production is something fierce. It's keeping us tied down in the matter of salary list. We can't do what we want to, especially this spring."

He had been fussing with a pile of papers on the table before him. He suddenly wheeled about in his chair and shot the question at her: "Miss Carberry, what would you play this part for?"

Una thought the matter over. There was no show of either haste or excitement in her voice as she answered him.

"For fifty dollars a week," she said, "with gowns supplied."

His gesture of mingled surprise and incredulity was the essence of that profession for which he so sedulously labored.

"Fifty dollars!" he cried. "Why, in an off season like this I can get ex-stars for a figure like that!"

"But they wouldn't be young," retorted Una, with her slow and pensive smile. "And very few of them would be thin."

"I could get twenty women inside this office in an hour, who'd snap up this part for less than that figure—women with Broadway reputations."

"The figure seems a very low one to me," was Una's retort. "And as I say, I've had this other offer."

"Are they paying you fifty dollars a week?" challenged Uhlmann.

"I'd refuse to play with them for less," was the girl's quiet-toned answer.

Uhlmann essayed a gesture of impatience.

"Look here, let's get down to business. I'll give you forty a week, supply gowns, and draw up a contract in ten minutes' time!"

Una was firm. There was no wave of intoxication to bewilder her judgment. She could afford to be both definite and definitive. It was not the sort of part she wanted. It was not the character of stage work she had hungered for. But she was almost at the end of her rope. And beggars, she acknowledged, could not always be choosers.

Uhlmann's practiced eye saw that argument was useless.

"All right then," he conceded, "fifty dollars!" And his right hand went out to a contract blank, in which he began scrawling heavily inked lines.

"And gowns," added Una.

"And gowns," he echoed, as he continued to write.

"When do rehearsals begin?" Una casually inquired. She wondered why the fire, the rapture, had gone out of it all. It seemed a matter of mere business, of exactions and counter-exactions.

"Monday at ten," he answered, as he stood up and made room for her at the table: "Sign here! And here, please!"

She took the pen in her hand, studied the written additions he had made to the printed form, pondered over them for a moment or two, and signed her name without a tremor.

"We expect great things of you, Miss Carberry," said Uhlmann as he blotted the signatures.

"I'll do my best," answered the girl, a little absently. She was, in fact, wondering why she could be so listless and diffident. Was it, she asked herself, that she was growing older, that she was already old, if not in actual years, at least in spirit, in something more tragic than mere time itself?

"Monday, at ten," repeated the curt and businesslike voice of Uhlmann, as his finger touched the electric-bell button on the side of his desk.

XIX

From the first hour of its first rehearsal Una had small love for her part in *The Sleep-Walker*. She was still too much a novice to have any definite idea of its dramatic possibilities. She still had the beginner's passion for something that was "sympathetic."

When she heard her fellow-actors designating her role as a "rube part" she even grew to abhor it, to abhor it only as a young woman keenly alive to personal ridicule can despise that which leaves her the butt of ceaseless laughter.

Yet this very abhorrence, and the listlessness in which it resulted, only seemed to add to the effectiveness of her interpretation. The part, it is true, came to her already fixed in character, thanks to its earlier success on the London stage. There were no exacting demands for originality. But her sense of mimicry was strong; she soon learned to reproduce the attitudes and the antics of an English stage manager who knew what he wanted done and just how it was to be done. Her memory, too, was good, and she was scrupulously attentive to details. There was a certain acidulated pleasure, as the actors became letter-perfect and the play rounded out into shape, to hear the titters and guffaws of her companions as she rehearsed her scenes. She went through these scenes with a vague sense of shame; she could not rid herself of the thought that she was "clowning" for the mere sake of fifty dollars a week.

The Sleep-Walker's six days on the road was little more than a week of dress rehearsals. It was a week of ceaseless toil and contention, of revisions and counterrevisions, under the ever-argumentative scrutiny of the firm heads and the "play-doctors" from New York, with alterations and additions and subtractions enough to bewilder the oldest actor in the cast.

Una noticed that her part, on the whole, showed a tendency to expand. She became very tired and nervous toward the end of the week, and even had a few sharp words with the English stage manager as to the "reading" of one of her lines. It was the smiling and placative Uhlmann who brushed aside the quarrel with a whispered word or two in the manager's ear—but Una adhered to her "reading."

Uhlmann came to her, later, and praised her work. He said it was not the sort of thing to go well "on the road"—it was especially meant for the metropolitan audience. Misinterpreting the cause of her depressed spirits, he tried to cheer her up by wise shakes of the head and cryptic warnings to watch out for what she was going to do to New York.

Weary as Una was in mind and body that opening night of *The Sleep-Walker* on Broadway, she could not escape the infection of feverish excitement that had already crept through the company. She felt, as she heard the preluding orchestra through the "drop," the universal group impulse to "key up," to concentrate in one supreme effort, to give everything one could. She stood ready to strain every nerve to crown her work with sincerity.

Yet, as she made her entrance with her smudged face and her tightly braided pigtails, studiously toeing-in as she carried her great pile of crockery plates, the roar of derisive laughter that came from the audience sent a wave of bewildering nausea through her spare young body. So complete was her surprise that she dropped the plates—and this untimely accident gave rise to so prompt and so prolonged a roar of laughter from an uncomprehending audience that a discreet management thereafter nightly supplied Una with three dollars' worth of crockery to meet the same fate.

But all she knew, at the time, was that they were laughing, and laughing at her. She was the object of their derision. It filled her proud spirit with a wayward and petulant anger. It made her sullenness something more than mere pretence. It added to the comicality of that most hated of parts. She was given a "hand" as she stumbled off. Somebody, in the darkness of a wing shadow, said, "Great, kid!" But her misery was immeasurable because it was inexpressible.

Her third-act scene, the sudden explosion of anger at those above her, was merely a matter of dynamics. It was merely a matter of husbanding her voice and energy until the right moment. It was easy to do, because it "carried itself along." She had mastered the scene at the end of one week's rehearsals. And she abhorred it less than the other scenes, because in it she felt she rose above the commonplace. She felt that she could give it a touch of dignity. She had persuaded herself that even insolence, enacted with sufficient passion, could be translated into something not unlike tragedy.

In that third-act scene, accordingly, she let explode all her pent-up emotion, all her smoldering indignation, all the passion of a frustrated great desire.

The audience, held breathless for a moment, watched the ecstatic anger of that grotesquely impassioned figure. Then still again, louder than before, came the inundating tidal wave of laughter.

It rose and receded and rose again; it reawakened in remote and weak-sided ripples; it interrupted speeches and embarrassed the actors. One woman in the balcony became hysterical and had to be helped out of her seat. An extremely stout man in the second row of the orchestra gurgled and choked and rocked whenever Una began to speak a line.

Why or how it was she could not understand. All she knew was that she was the butt of their derision, the target of their foolish and vapid laughing. They applauded and shouted for her at the end of the scene. An effort was made to go on with the action, but the audience would have none of it. Una had to be pushed bodily on the stage by the indignant Uhlmann.

There she stood blinking up at her mockers, with scarcely a head-nod of thanks, as desolate in spirit as a Christian martyr in the pit of a coliseum. And a critic, on the following day, spoke of Miss Carberry's scrupulous adherence to the fidelity of her role, even in taking her curtain calls.

That next day also brought the verdict that *The Sleep-Walker* was to be the laughing hit of Broadway. Una's part was revamped and rehearsed, her characterization was studiously "broadened," and the play settled down for an all-summer run.

Una found herself interviewed by a dramatic-column writer or two, and from the voluminous pages of the Sunday papers she occasionally saw her own face staring out at her. She also found herself the heroine of various exploits and the theme of various paragraphs, at the hands of an industrious and imaginative press agent. But she continued to go through her work with the mirthless and monotonous regularity of a captive in a treadmill.

She consoled herself with the memory that she was at last able to save money. She was rigorous in her self-denials, saving wherever it was possible. Every cent was counted; every unnecessary expense was curtailed. She had learned too well the misery of being without money; she was determined to feather her nest while the chance was there.

Then, when she had saved five hundred dollars, she startled the rest of the company and took the breath out of Uhlmann and his associates by handing in her two weeks' notice.

They expostulated in vain. They implored without result. They offered an increase in salary, a two-year contract for the part, with a guarantee of

forty weeks a year. But it was all useless. She hated the role, and she intended to give it up. And to this decision she clung with the blind obduracy of youth.

As soon as she was free she began looking about for a new part. The Independents, outraged at her abandonment of an assured success, branded her as unreliable and carried their punitive measures to the point of denying her an audience. The Syndicate, viewing her as an Independent follower, found themselves with nothing to offer her.

Yet she was not discouraged. She discovered new producing offices. She ferreted out new agencies. She told herself that she was no longer unknown, that she could afford to wait. She felt that somewhere, in that calling with all its multifarious activities, there must be a corner for her.

She lived frugally, convinced of the fact that in due time her chance would come. She even became a little listless in her rounds, a little less exigent in her chasing up of accidentally discovered clues, a little more impatient of the long waits and the overtalkative habitués of unventilated anterooms.

Among other things, during that interregnum so fallaciously known as "being at liberty," she decided to improve her mind. When in a bookstore in search of a copy of *Romeo and Juliet* for nocturnal study she stumbled on a novel that announced itself as written by Frank Frendel. It made her wonder why the author of the hapless *Wine of Life* had made no effort to get in touch with her, had sent her no scrawl of good wishes on her opening night.

But she bought the book and carried it home with her, to read with an initial eagerness that gradually merged into disappointment. She had prepared herself to admire it, she felt she ought to admire it. But it held too many words and phrases that remained meaningless to her. It was beyond her depth. Its author had both a vocabulary and a knowledge of upper-class life, of life among the well-to-do of Long Island, of travel in Europe and social distractions in Newport and Narragansett, that placed him in a world she had never been able to reach.

Her days, she decided, had been too empty and her interests too restricted. She bought other books, from a dictionary to a secondhand volume on self-culture, from Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* to Coleridge's *Lectures on Shakespeare*, and into these, night by night, she delved. She even felt, in time, that a new horizon was opening up before her.

But as winter wore into spring she began to wonder what the open country was like. The once magic walls of Broadway looked dingy in the

daffodil-yellow light of April, for all the azure dome above them and the blue shadows at their base. She caught herself sighing, more than once, for a glimpse of green fields and cool streams, for the smell of lilac blossoms that used to blow across the hedges and line fences of Chamboro in the early spring dusk.

She thought, once or twice, of taking an excursion into the country and finding a tree-shadowed lane where she could pick apple blossoms from over a friendly wall. But she decided, in the end, that it would be better to save her money. She would need clothes, she warned herself, since the betraying bald light of the sun-bathed streets was beginning to make her ashamed of her older and shoddier dresses.

So her excursions were into the department stores where the vernal equinox had expressed itself in assailing showers of finery. Yet each addition to her wardrobe was duly weighed and pondered over. Every cent was counted. She had learned too well the misery of being without money to drift into that improvidence so characteristic of the play-actors among whom she lived. She had the future to think of.

Once, when loneliness weighed heavily on her, she went through a Manhattan telephone directory looking for Frank Frendel's name. She found several Frendels there, but no Frank. She refused to regard the impulse to call him up as in any way connected with the vernal mating propulsions which were not entirely restricted to wooded hills and open fields. She wanted to talk to him about his book, about other books he might be writing, especially about a second play he had once vaguely acknowledged to be under his hat.

But that chance was not given her. And in a renewed mood of loneliness she found her thoughts swinging about to Andrew Hempel. Already, over her memory of those earlier weeks when she had posed for him, was creeping a coloring of regret, as though they held something to be envied. Those quiet days in the disordered studio were happier than she had realized. They took on, down the narrowing vista of time, a misty halo of the idyllic.

Una's feeling of regret for something lost, something missed, merged into a pain that was almost physical as the spring days lengthened and the lassitude of early summer crept over the city. She finally summoned up sufficient courage to adorn herself with her new hat and frock and pioneer down Fourth Avenue to Twenty-Third Street.

A feeling of relaxed will crept through her as she made her way slowly up the familiar stairways to the studio. She nursed a womanly hunger for the

resurrection of a relationship that had once meant happiness. She felt that if Hempel would be kind to her she could be responsively kind to him. She thought of the homelike little room next to the studio, of Hempel's simple and happy life up there above the chimney pots. She even felt that if he would say again what he had once said she might be unable to answer as she had once answered him.

Her heart, she found, was beating a little faster as she knocked on the studio door.

She heard Hempel's voice, and a moment later a pale and mouselike young girl opened the door. This girl wore a model's costume, an old-fashioned brocaded gown with huge panniers.

Una, as she stepped into the studio, said she was sorry to interrupt a sitting. The artist rose from his chair and shook hands with her. It was not an interruption, he protested; they were both glad of a few minutes' rest.

Some nameless constraint in his manner made Una's heart sink. He had seen her in *The Sleep-Walker*, he confessed; it had struck him as very clever. He had read of her success and had clipped two of her photographs from the Sunday papers. He showed her a few of his newer pictures, and some printed proofs of a number of earlier drawings for which she herself had posed.

Una, as she gazed about the room, harvested the knowledge that he had already rented the second room. The door into it stood open, draped with a green velour curtain. She noticed, with a pang, that the mouselike model in the panniers was quietly lighting the gas-stove behind the panel screen with the gold storks. On the wall she also noticed a pastel of herself, which Hempel had done months before.

"I wonder," she ventured, "if you'd let me buy that from you?" And a second pang went through her as Hempel, without hesitation, drew out the thumbtacks that held it in place and handed it to her.

He refused to sell it. It would be an honor if she would accept it from him as a souvenir of other days.

That, for some reason, brought a lump to her throat, a lump that made talking none too easy. And Hempel himself seemed unexpectedly silent, unexpectedly self-contained.

"I mustn't keep you from your work," Una said, after a brief yet pregnant silence which he seemed unable to break.

He followed her out through the door as she stepped into the hall.

"Good-by," she said at the stairhead, in the shadows that seemed deep after the skylighted studio. It was a moment or two before he saw she was holding out her hand.

"Good-by," he answered, taking her hand. Their eyes met, but it was only for a moment. She turned away and started down the stairs. He stood leaning over the banister and looking after her.

"Good-by," she said again as she was halfway down the creaking stairway. She had meant to say it lightly. But there was a choke in her voice she could not entirely control.

Hempel did not answer her. But a minute later she heard the sound of a closing door. The echo of that closing door took on an ominous sound, as though somewhere in the House of Life one chamber stood irretrievably shut.

XX

Una began her search for work with a new and more desperate energy. An accruing mood of desolation made her path seem both clearer and narrower. She shook herself free of her earlier diffidence and surrendered to a hunger for work.

But work was still not easy to find. Her renewed rounds of the agencies left her tired in body and depressed in spirit. She felt so much an outcast, at the end of her prolonged and pedestrian search, that she sat meek-eyed before the rotund Madame Hernandez when the latter asked if she would consider a society-girl "bit" in Katherine Kildean's road tour of *Retarded Spring*.

Una wanted neither a bit nor the best part of a year on the road. But the shadow of Time, she realized, was falling across her path. And when she finally signed up she consoled herself with the thought that while working with an experienced actress like Kildean she would at least be learning something from day to day.

Then ensued what she always regarded as a lost year in her life. For one of the first things she encountered was the fixed enmity of the aging star, who promptly checkmated the newcomer's efforts to bring distinction to a trivial role and as promptly cut the part until the so-called "society girl" saw that, for all her three resplendent gowns, she was little more than a walking clothes-horse.

Una was not happy in that small and self-immured company, already bound together by its big year on Broadway. But she façaded her unrest with a determination to improve her mind. Her one extravagance was the purchase of volumes that would help her along the thorny byways of culture; and her habit of studying textbooks during her long waits resulted in her being regarded as a dry-as-dust intellectual, as an introvert who failed "to belong."

It was the consciousness of being so very much alone, she assumed, that prompted her during a holiday hiatus in New Orleans to send a Christmas card to Frank Frendel. She sent it in care of Weinert's office. But no response overtook her in her wanderings.

Una was glad when *Retarded Spring* headed north and she saw the skyscrapers of New York once more tower above the ice floating down the Hudson. If she felt like a lifer released from Sing-Sing she knew she was merely out on probation. She had much lost ground to reclaim. But she had lived frugally and saved her money. And with a ponderable backlog she could be more particular about her next part.

Yet the exile from the road found no parts awaiting her. Even her name, she discovered, was fading from the memory of the dispensers of destiny on whom she called. But she refused to acknowledge defeat.

It was as she hurried through Shubert Alley after a fruitless covering of the old familiar trap line, the trap line still holding no solitary pelt for her garnering, that she came face to face with Frank Frendel.

He seemed genuinely glad to see her. His handclasp was warm and his study of her face was an intent one.

"It's been a long time," he said, still holding her hand.

Una laughed and said road actresses were like whales who had to come up to Broadway to breathe.

"I'm glad you came up in my bailiwick," he announced. "For this is rather a coincidence. I just put in a plug for you with Carl Mathers. But let's drop over to Rector's for a bite to eat before we go into that."

She told him, as they made their way toward Broadway, that she was "at liberty," that she had been in New York for several weeks, and that she had been hoping their trails would cross before too much water flowed down the Hudson.

"I've been in retreat," he confessed, "up in Connecticut. With the world shut out as I struggled with a new book. And writing a book, I've always contended, is just about the same as having a baby."

She had never before been in Rector's and the opulence of her surroundings tended to constrain her. But she was actress enough to conceal her embarrassment as she consulted the menu, refused a drink, and smiled at Frendel's expressed hope that she hadn't yet reached the guinea-hen-under-glass era, since he had only three dollars and thirty cents in his pocket.

"This has been so pleasant," he said at the end of the meal, "that I don't see why it shouldn't happen often. It makes me hate to tell you that Mathers just said he wanted an ingénue for that Cleveland stock company of his and I mentioned *you*."

Una's interest in Rector's promptly waned at that information. It was pleasant there, basking in the warmth of Frendel's metallic brown eyes that made her think of the dulled glow of a gun barrel. But it was the early bird, she remembered, who usually got the engagement worm. She was glad when Frendel looked at his watch, paid his bill, and announced he was an hour late for a talk with his publisher.

Una lost no time in seeking out Carl Mathers, who proved both quick-mannered and quick-acting. Inside of two hours the new ingénue had signed a contract, bought a new Taylor trunk, and made a berth reservation for Cleveland.

Stock work was not what she wanted, but she had often enough heard that it was a fine field for "experience." And during the months with that industrious company of Broadway expatriates she worked and studied with avidity, absorbed much, and found her associates considerably more companionable than in either *The Sleep-Walker* or *Retarded Spring* company.

Her gift of a good memory, too, proved a valuable asset. Once she had shown herself a "quick study" she was given larger parts and eventually made general understudy for the company. The heat and the hard work often tired her out. She learned to prize an hour or two on the cool waters of Lake Erie. When this was impossible she resorted to the luxury of an open taxicab drive, if only for half an hour, through the parklike suburbs of the lakeside city. But her leisure moments were so rare that she found little time to give to the row of books she had brought along with her to better her mind.

Frendel, on his way to Chicago, stopped off to see her work in *The New York Idea*. But his visit was disappointingly brief. It involved merely a midnight supper in a noisy restaurant where the twin spearheads of music and talk held back any advancing line of intimacy.

Once he studied her face and warned her not to work too hard. But when she went with him to the lamp-strewn station-yard and said good-by beside his waiting sleeper, she was disappointed when he did not kiss her. She had hoped he would, in spite of the colored porter beside the car steps.

When at the end of the summer Una returned to New York she lived for the first time in an apartment hotel, one of modified grandeur with elevators that rose as slowly in their shafts as did its habitués in their profession. From there Una once more began the old rounds of the agencies and managers' offices.

She felt, by this time, less of a beginner. She was even fixed, at first, in her determination for only a New York engagement. But she made the discovery, as the weeks sped away, that she had arrived too late in the field to be a dictator of terms. She eventually reconciled herself to the thought of the road.

When she was offered a part in a revival of the romantic drama, *Princess Espina*, for a tour of the west, she accepted it. Still again it was not what she wanted. But one had to take what one could get. She spent her last days in the city making what purchases she required, her movements shadowed by the forlorn preoccupation of impending exile. She bought shoes and clothes, medicines and cooking lamp, rubbers and a raincoat, as though she were a second Crusoe about to face a second island of desolation.

Then the "road" swallowed her up.

For another long and monotonous season she journeyed about the face of the globe, from city to city and town to town, one of those homeless and mirthless and thankless purveyors of amusement who bring romance to the provincial mind with the same readiness that the whipped dog jumps through its paper hoops.

Life, on that "grapevine" route over which *Princess Espina* was booked, became a round in which one febrile day was like another, with the same cheap hotels and unspeakable cookery, with the same unclean dressing room adorned with Rabelaisian wall writing, with the same boardinghouse lists on the call board, the same seeking out of single-globed stage entrances at the end of blind alleys, the all-night jumps, the lardy lunch-counter pastry meals, the changing from one train to another and the endless early-morning watches in squalid and cheerless waiting rooms, the ever-recurring exigent call for laundry work, the unheated theaters, the cheap lithography, the bad water, the dirtier and dirtier costumes, the props that slowly approached dissolution—for everything but a piano was carried by the company—the drops that became shabbier and shabbier under their canvas covers just as the players became wearier and wearier under their thin mask of merriment.

Youth, and youth alone, could endure it, could remain blind to its exactions. For the first few weeks Una took a vague and dreamy delight in it, in its constant movement, in its ever-shifting scenes, in the discovery that old lines could take on a new meaning under new vicissitudes, in the fact that a scene could go big in one town and fall flat in another.

The glamor did not entirely go out of each repeated adventure. But what had once been pure romance became a trifle faded and threadbare, like the

painted drops and flats that were carried from town to town. The treadmill monotony of the thing resolved life into a misty triangle, the three points of which were theater, hotel and station. The one thing that consoled Una was the Tuesday-night pay envelope of yellow manila. She saved her money, tucking it away in a homemade "boodle-bag" of chamois which she secured, with two safety pins, to the inside of the slip-top that covered her pointed young breasts.

In one of the larger towns, when she went to the public library to obtain a newly issued book on voice production, she stumbled on a copy of *Who's Who in America*. She promptly turned to the *F*'s and found Frank Carlson Frendel duly registered there. The abbreviated paragraph recorded him as having been born in Morristown, New Jersey, as having graduated from Lafayette College, and as having taught for two years at Lawrenceville. Later he became the Paris correspondent of the New York *Star* and still later its dramatic critic. It surprised her to learn that he was the author of five books, one of which, apparently, was a volume of poetry. His birth date showed him as younger than she had thought, as only twenty-nine when she had regarded him as well on in his thirties. It also showed that his birthday fell on February twenty-eight, just five days later than the date on which Una found herself delving into those details of his life.

She took advantage of this to send him a humorous birthday card, directing it to the Sutton Place address she had unearthed from *Who's Who*. Along with it she enclosed a carefully selected half-dozen newspaper clippings, clippings in which her stage work was favorably commented on.

She felt closer to him, in some way, after even that meager knowledge of his career. But what most lightened her heart, from that pallid report of his past, was the discovery that it held no record of his having married.

Lighter than ever, however, was her quickened heart when at the week end she received a long and friendly letter from the author of *The Wine of Life*. He hoped she was surviving the ordeals of the road and acquiring that diffused sagacity essential to success in such a calling. He also said that he disagreed with Anatole France when that cynical philosopher claimed actresses were pleasant to look at and listen to but proved invariably ill-bred and usually more spoiled by luxury than by poverty. "They may have been all that," conceded Frendel, "but Monsieur France tried hard enough to marry one!"

Una gave considerable thought to that, just as she gave repeated thought to a number of the literary allusions in the letter which seemed lost on her.

She felt the need of widening her range of reading. Busy as her days were, she made it a point, thereafter, to purchase a new book or two at each town she came to.

When the *Princess Espina* company closed, the following April, Una knew a restlessness which she refused to accept as the physical disquiet of the maturing and unmated adolescent. The thought of marriage had no place in her scheme of things. Yet once back in New York she lost no time in trying to get in touch with Frendel at his Sutton Place studio. And unexpected gloom descended on her when she found he had sailed for Europe three weeks earlier. A friendly note of farewell, sent to her on the road, caught up with her by way of Mather's office only after she was deep in a search for a new part.

The new part was not easy to find. Her name may have been little more than a memory in that busy mill of amusement where the wheels grind fast and the grist flies far, but her earlier arbitrary throwing up of a Broadway role at the height of its run had been duly registered against her. Summer found her still going beelike from office to office. But no "straight" part presented itself.

Both her hope and her bank balance sank lower as the days began to shorten. And rather than face a winter of idleness she finally signed up as second lead for a road tour of *The Guinea-Pig Groom*. She had no love for the play, with its coarse jocularities about a bridal-night impersonation, and she had small love for her part, with its double-talk lines that never failed to provoke laughter. But she clung stubbornly to the fixed belief that all experience, good or bad, was eventually beneficial to the serious artist. She became a trouper again, facing without protest the familiar hardships of early trains and unclean dressing rooms and precarious cookery.

It was at the end of March, in Saginaw, that the dull routine of her road work was broken by the advent of a reputed scout from the Shubert offices. Such was the report, at least, that passed from excited actor to actor back stage. Una, reminding herself there was a chiel among them taking notes, put everything she could command into her first-act work. When, early in the second act, her wandering eye assessed the tiers of faces and she discovered the so-called scout to be Bob Steger, she lost her enthusiasm and relapsed into those more obvious readings which seemed to satisfy the simpler-minded audiences of the road.

Steger did not come back stage, as she had expected. But apparently by accident the next morning as she and her company made ready for the next

jump he confronted her on the station platform.

He shook hands with her with a premonitory dolefulness that was almost touched with pity.

"I wasn't so good, was I?" she said with a rueful laugh.

"Not so hot," he affirmed. "But Cornell herself would flop in a part like that."

He turned and regarded with a jaundiced eye the company scattered about the bald platform. Those birds of plumage that could seem so brilliant under the floodlights looked dishearteningly gray-tinted and neutral and draggled under the searching light of open day.

Steger turned back to his friend from Chamboro, his face heavy with well-paraded concern.

"Got any idea where two more years of this is going to land you?" he demanded.

"Where will it land me?" asked Una, half challengingly, half defensively.

"With the buckwheats for life!" was his curt retort.

"Would you mind speaking English?" she mildly suggested. She was used to the circuitiveness of managers. And she knew how behind that apparently artless derogation lay some ulterior motive. But the charge still held its sting.

"I mean a couple more seasons of this cheap road work'll put the Indian sign on you for life. It always does. It always will. You just can't get away from it."

"Did I say I was trying to get away from it?" was the prompt challenge that came from wounded *amour propre*.

Still again Steger stared about the bald platform with its lounging groups, its pile of battered trunks and prop cases, its lonely-looking tracks circling out into sordid and lonely-looking suburbs.

"You don't mean you're going to be satisfied with this?" he dolorously demanded.

"Why shouldn't I be?"

"Because, damn it, you're able to do the other kind of work. Because you ought to be doing the other kind of work."

"And?" prompted Una.

He deciphered the mockery in the hazel eyes that were more worldly-wise than they once had been. It enlightened him on more things than one. But, above all, it made him feel the foolishness of further equivocation.

"Listen to me," he said, abruptly solemn. "I've just got a toe-hold on a great play, a play by a big man, a play that's good for a solid year on Broadway once it's wound up."

"They always are," observed the woman at his side.

"But this play's different. It's got an idea behind it. It's original. And I'll tell you why, old trouper. *It's about a good woman!*"

She remembered, at the moment, how Frendel had once said that the great drawback to Virtue was its inability to make good drama.

"I'm so sure of this play," Steger went on, puzzled that the novelty of the thing should so miss fire, "that I'm going to swing it myself or go to Sing-Sing." He stepped still closer to her. "And what's more, I'm coming to you first. I'm giving you first crack at that part."

"Why to me?" she asked.

"Because there's just one type of woman can swing it. And that type isn't common."

She let the oblique compliment pass without comment. Yet she wondered why women so seldom relished being called good.

"Just take this script along with you," Steger was saying, "and get hep to the sort of chance I'm holding out to you."

"What chance?"

"The chance to get off the road and be given a cracker-jack company and guaranteed a Broadway production the end of October."

"On what terms?" was Una's cool-noted query.

Steger's protuberant eye became opaque. His smile even grew sorrowful.

"That's where the catch is," he finally confessed. "It'll take money to produce this bird. And backers are scarey in an off season like this. I know you've got a nest egg of your own. And if you'll swing in with twelve or fifteen hundred and be satisfied with two hundred a week and a percentage after the Broadway opening, I'll——"

A repeated call of "All aboard!" cut him short even before Una could raise her hand. She had heard talk like that before. And she had a memory of

this would-be benefactor that made her almost laughing "No thanks!" as definitive as her dive for the moving car steps.

"Won't you read the script?" cried Steger as he followed the moving car along the platform.

"No thanks," Una said for the second time. She left him, a figure of dejection in the clear morning sunlight. And he left her remembering that men were an odd mixture of the grotesque and the generous, of the venal and the virtuous. And she was beginning to understand them a little better.

There were times, with her season ended and the staccato life of New York once more surrounding her, when she questioned if she had not been a little too peremptory with Steger, if the suggested chance of practically buying her way back to Broadway might not have been worth a little more consideration. For she found herself more than ever an outlander in that city which showed no craving to partake of what she was craving to give it. Her repeated rounds of the agencies and offices brought her nothing of promise.

She was glad enough, in the end, to accept leads in a summer-park stock company, a more or less precarious venture which was to forestall the "straw hat" theater of a later era.

She did not lose her faith in final success. But she had her doubts, as she approached the city that was to be her home during the dog days, as to the wisdom of that temporary surrender. She stared out at the bleak desolation of the suburbs, the surly slum houses festooned with clothes lines, the back yards freckled with tin cans and old tires, the ragged urchins playing baseball in empty lots, the loiterers about a street-corner poolroom. But above the clangor of an old-clothes man's wagon bell she caught, faint and far off, the mellow tones of a hand organ. The sound of the music consoled her. That, she told herself, was what Art did to the ugliness of life. It brought glamor back to the world. And she too, since she was destined to be an artist, would play her small part in bringing a touch of lost magic back to meaningless lives.

Una worked hard that summer at her different roles. She made up well, was responsive to directing, and seldom failed in her lines. She acquired a local following and was sometimes asked for her autograph. Yet she was not sorry when the days shortened and the purring electric fans were no longer needed in the dressing rooms. The house manager told her, in the last week of her engagement, that she was the best worker who'd ever been under his roof and that some of her stuff made him think of Clara Morris.

"And some day, lady," he added, "you're going to make Maude Adams look like an also-ran."

But the lady who was to make Maude Adams look like an also-ran found little corroborative evidence of her success on her return to Broadway. When the best that was offered to her was a bit in a translated French farce and a walk-on in an Empire Theater English tea-cup comedy she returned to her earlier stock management and signed up for another year on the road.

She still clung to the belief that, no matter what the nature of her work, she was always learning something. And this fortified her for the now familiar hardships of "sleeper jumps" and split-week journeys. She remembered how Frendel had once told her that some day, when he got a little wiser at the game, he'd like to write a play for her, a play tailored to fit that personality of hers with its pin-feather faith in itself. She had not entirely liked that intimation of being pin-feathered, but always, at the back of her brain, she nursed the consoling thought that she was, day by day and month by month, shaping and equipping herself for that stellar role which was to be hers sometime in the dim future. So during the summer, when the lengthening days had ended her road tour, she stoically dropped back into stock work.

It was a shoe-string company playing a jerk-water town. But, after enduring for three weeks the alcoholic uncertainties of an autumnal lady star who could no longer learn or remember lines, the management overlooked Una Carberry's youth and pushed her forward into what were practically stellar roles. And Una made the most of her chance. She worked as she had never worked before. When her easier-going colleagues were seeking relaxation in midnight beer parties and all-night poker games she was usually walking the floor with her dog-eared "sides" in her hand, memorizing her new part. She was never late for rehearsals and she never missed a cue, learning, in time, to cover up for a delinquent player in whose head the conflicting fumes of bromo-seltzer and Scotch produced obvious fogs of forgetfulness.

She even acquired a limited but loyal local following. Thanks to the machinery of publicity which began to exploit her, and the more romantic nature of the roles to which she was assigned, she became a favorite in that restricted area of theatergoers. The manager of a local hosiery factory even named a new line of full-fashioned three-thread silk stockings after her. She dispensed autographed photographs of herself to high-school girls and began to receive a few fan letters.

She had no delusions as to the dimensions of this success. It was not, after all, what she wanted. But it was helping her on her way. At the end of her second season, in fact, after a change of management, she was able to insist on an open and acknowledged stellar rating.

The new star, it is true, played only the popular-priced houses, even though they chanced to be in the more populous centers. But she could luxuriate in the privilege of the best dressing room and a guarded chair of her own at rehearsals and the envied seclusion of the Pullman's drawing room when they were on the wing. She seemed to be always tired. But the sight of her electro-plated face in the columns of a local paper and a glimpse of her ornately lithographed figure on the billboards of the cities of her conquest could always raise her spirits.

It was at the end of one of her most wearying weeks, while playing Mauch Chunk with a leading man tottering on the verge of delirium tremens, that a figure out of the past invaded her kingdom of forgetfulness. That invader meant nothing to her when the doorman came to where she was wearily packing up for the final jump to New York, and handed her a card on which was inscribed: "Mrs. James Atwood Ostrander."

She was still puzzling over that unknown and unremembered name when a woman with a brown veil drawn up over her hat brim pushed her way into the disordered dressing room.

This prematurely plump young woman stood regarding the actress for a moment, regarding her with innocent and wondering eyes. The round face under the veiled hat brim was even alight with a tremulous admiration touched with envy.

"Una!" she finally gasped. "Una Carberry, to think that you should come to this!"

Any ambiguity that might have reposed in that declaration vanished as the newcomer cast an admiring and envious glance about the room with its burnt-out air and its litter of gowns.

"Don't you know me?" she demanded, nonplussed by the calmness that remained in the other woman's eyes.

Many and many a face had confronted Una's narrowed gaze during the last few months and the last few years. But memory, groping back through the past, brought a glimmer of light.

"You're Aggie Mumford," she said, turning over the card and frowning over the new name.

"Cousin Aggie," corrected the other, a trifle disconcerted by the paraded weariness of the woman in the peignoir.

"Of course," Una acknowledged as she brushed the talcum powder from a velvet cape she had taken up to fold.

"Oh, Una, I do want you to help me," her visitor cried out in an unexpectedly wavering voice.

"How?" asked Una.

The other hesitated.

"I don't know how to begin. But when I found out it was really you, when I'd made sure it was really and truly our Una Carberry, I just had to come and see you."

Like all reputedly prosperous stage folk, Una was used to appeals from indigent members of the profession. While she disapproved of their improvidence and did not always respond to the "touch" of a seedy down-and-outer, she never altogether forgot her own need for help when she herself was a mere beginner. But her quick survey of this well-clothed cousin intruder persuaded her that the suggested help was not to be in the form of money. And there was still much for her to do that night.

"How can I help you?" she asked, struggling with a weariness that was more than physical.

The woman with the innocent and wondering eyes stepped closer to the dressing table, her small mouth firm with determination.

"I want you to help me get on the stage," she said, meeting the glance of the calm hazel eyes which now seemed those of a stranger.

Una once more consulted the card.

"Does this mean you have a husband?" she questioned.

The plump lady winced, but her small mouth remained firm.

"Yes; I've been married nearly two years now. But Jim and I don't—we haven't been getting along very well together. He's away so much. He travels for a Boston shoe company. He's—oh, we've changed, some way. I've been really miserable for a year. I want to get away—I want to *do something*!"

Una, after a glance at the other's curves of incompetence, inquired with protective coolness: "And where do I come in?"

“I want you to help me get a start,” the unhappy wife was saying.

“At what?”

“At the same work as yours.”

“Have you ever done any of that work?” asked the woman with the tired eyes and the deepening shadows under her cheekbones.

“No,” acknowledged her visitor. “But I could, I *know* I could.”

“What makes you think so?”

A slightly injured look crept over the face under the veiled hat brim.

“Why, you remember how I always loved the theater, how we went to everything we could that winter in Detroit.”

Una sat down and regarded her visitor. Those weeks in Detroit, when two blindly callow girls had basked in the tinsel glory of cut-rate matinees, now seemed a world away.

“But do you feel that helps any?” she inquired.

“Not exactly,” was the hesitating reply, “but when you want a thing the more you see of it, surely that means something.”

Una, instead of replying to that statement, again looked at the card.

“If you’ve a husband,” she ventured, “you must have a home.”

“Of course I’ve a home.”

Una sat back and drew a deep breath.

“Then, my dear Aggie, go back to it. I’m too tired to preach. I’m afraid I’m almost too tired to talk. But take it from me, for I *know*. I *know*. You won’t find it what you expect. You won’t get out of it what you’re looking for.”

“Why won’t I?”

“I’m too tired to go into all that.”

“But look what you’ve got out of it!” cried her amazed and slightly indignant companion.

“What?” demanded Una.

“Why—everything,” answered the other, with a vague hand-wave about her.

Una laughed a little.

"You can't go on the stage, Aggie. You couldn't. You'll ask me why, but I don't think I could explain—not tonight, anyway. You wouldn't understand what it's like, what it costs, what it takes out of you."

"You seem to like it well enough."

"I have to like it. It's my business, the same as your Jim's business is selling shoes."

"And you mean you wouldn't be willing to help me?"

"I *am* helping you, in the best way I can."

The small mouth became firm with disbelief.

"I certainly didn't think you'd turn out this way, after all we did for you when you hadn't two nickels to rub together."

Una disregarded that note of animosity.

"I'm simply trying to tell you the truth," was her almost listless response.

Una's visitor stood for an awkward and tearful moment or two, adjusting herself to a new and altogether unexpected condition of things. She stared down at her old-time friend in the peignoir, as though something on her ungrateful cousin's face might enlighten the incomprehensible.

"Una Carberry," she finally said, not without a muffled note of feminine malice, "I never saw anybody change as you have! And in just six or seven years!"

"I agree with you," Una admitted. Her movement as she got up from her chair was plainly dismissive. It added to the indignation of her visitor, whose glance became a more accusatory one.

"I'm beginning to understand how you could keep on with your junketing around the country when your mother was dying in that Chamboro hospital after being turned out of her own house and home."

"Was dying?" echoed Una, chilled by a cold blast out of the years that were over.

"And you so terribly busy you couldn't even come to her funeral!"

Una, subsiding on a trunk top, knew the desolation that comes with the cutting of all final ties. She was quite alone now, alone in the forest tangle of life where she would always have to find and follow her own trails.

"I never knew," she said in low-noted unhappiness.

The other woman's laugh of scorn wakened her from her reverie.

"And she wasn't my own mother," the actress cried in a voice sharpened with resentment. "She always hated me."

"If she did," cried back the retreating Aggie, "there might be others who feel the same."

It was not until Una was alone in the heavy-aired dressing room that she got up from the trunk top. She crossed listlessly to the globe-crowned mirror and there studied her own reflection.

What her face looked like, or how it had changed, she was not able to tell. But it had, she remembered, made many people happy. Audiences seemed to like it. And only that night, she also remembered, the house manager had reported they grossed eighteen hundred and twenty-three dollars in their final week. It was a long ladder she had to climb. Slowly, rung by rung, however, she was going up from the bottom.

But, as she might have told Aggie Mumford, it was coming at a cost. Her heart chilled a little as she studied the faint purplish shadows under her eyes and the deepened hollow under her cheekbones. She didn't want to grow old. And yet, she told herself, she was no longer young. And, in one way, she had never lived. She had been confronted by the diffused admiration of an audience that confounded her with the glamor of a make-believe world. But she knew a hunger for something less long-circuited, something more intimate.

She wondered if, when she got back to New York, Frendel would be there. The thought of Frendel made her pause, in the last stages of her packing, and lift from her crowded trunk tray the dog-eared copy of Shaw's *Three Plays for Puritans* he so solemnly advised her to read.

She riffled through the pages, wondering why she could never see in them what Frendel must have seen there. To her they remained oversmart and insincere and baffling. Her ideas of all drama, she suspected, were too workshoppy and old-fashioned to let her appreciate the novelties of this Great Eccentric who classed himself as better than Shakespeare. For Frendel, who knew so much more about such things, had called Shaw the great exploder of complacency, the anarchist with intellectual St. Vitus dance who had kicked off our stage all that lovely old faded pomposity of the Victorians.

Perhaps he was right, she admitted with a sigh of weariness. She didn't know. But she would find time, in some way, to go over those plays more carefully and try to get at what others found in them. She didn't want Frendel to think she was a whole era behind him in culture. She wanted him to respect her, just as she respected his scholarly mind, even though he did have the habit of saying things she couldn't always decipher, things like his earlier warning to "remember the roots of everything are underground" and his still earlier defense of one of his *Wine of Life* scenes by quietly affirming, "We've got to change the truth a little in order to make men remember it."

Yes, she wanted to be more like him. And she wanted his friendship. Perhaps she wanted even more than that. But the thought, arresting as it was, stood eclipsed by a later thought as she packed away the book. Tired as she was she found herself wondering if the time would ever come when she would have a chance at a Shaw play on Broadway.

XXI

Una, once more in New York, looked long and earnestly for a part, however small, that would bring her back to that metropolis. Her quest, however, was not a successful one.

She resented the repeated claim that she now belonged to "the road," the chorused charge that barnstorming with the hay-tossers could spoil even a clever actress for Broadway. She vowed, with her small teeth gritted together, that she would yet show the managerial sheep how wrong they were.

When she faced the inevitable, and finally signed up with Uhlmann for a season of stock at Chesterville, she did so with certain stipulations. She was to be billed as both star and manager of her own company; she was to have a twenty-five-dollar increase in salary; and during her season she was to do Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

Uhlmann winced at the *Romeo and Juliet* stipulation. An ironic flicker of amusement even came into his guarded eye. But Una insisted on the Shakespearean production.

"You'll bump into trouble with the old bard," he warned her. "It takes a big-leaguer to swing that Juliet role."

"I intend to prove I am a big-leaguer," affirmed his new star.

Two days later she was startled by a telephone call from Frank Frendel. He had arrived from Europe five days ago, he explained, and after gum-shoeing along Broadway had unearthed her address from Weinert's office. "And I can't sleep," he added, "until I see you."

"Why not?" she questioned, doing her best to keep a quaver of happiness out of her voice.

The answer that came over the wire was a second surprise to her.

"Because I've got a play I want you to look at. And if it doesn't fit you like a glove I'll eat my hat."

A faint afterglow crept into her evening sky of disappointment.

"How about dinner together, here at my studio?" Frendel was saying.

"When?" asked Una, after a moment's hesitation.

"Tonight, any time after seven."

That promptness, with its implication of impatience, still further lightened Una's heart. She dressed with unusual care, took a taxicab to Sutton Place, and was a little relieved and at the same time a little disappointed when she discovered that Frendel had a Porto Rican houseboy to serve the meal waiting for them.

It began as a memorably happy meal for the wanderer in from the road. Frendel, for all his quietness of manner and speech, was glad to see her. Instinct told her *that* even before, after helping her off with her wrap, he turned her face to the light and studied it long and intently. His own face, she noticed, looked older and a little more lined. The frosting of gray above his ears was a trifle more accentuated. But the mellow kindliness about the mouth with its quick smile remained unchanged.

"I don't think they've hardened you," he said as he studied the wide-set hazel eyes. "No, they haven't hardened you. They mustn't. In fact, I don't think they can. For there's a certain sweet prose in that face that tells me you're going to stay captain of your soul."

"It *has* to be prose," Una announced, "when you're on the stage, and being there means being on the road."

She was thinking, at the moment, of how in one of her tank-town hotels with a communal bathroom she had complained about the condition of the tub and an easygoing landlord had replied: "It's just *got* to be like that, lady, when so danged many people use it!"

"Then it's time for a holiday," Frendel claimed. "I worked pretty hard myself, on the other side of the pond, until summer was slipping away. Then the wheels simply refused to go around. So an artist and I, an artist called Carmer, invested in a broken-down French car in Trieste and motored north through the Dolomites. We intended to head for Munich, but we had engine trouble between Cortina and Bolzano and sidetracked into a Bavarian inn just outside Garmisch. There we had swimming and kingly beer and mountain air, with the Zugspitz towering over us every morning when we woke up. Then we patched up the car and went on to Oberammergau and Innsbruck and Salzburg and wandered on from one Tyrolese town to another until our tires wore out."

The sound of those names that were strange to her and the thought of those wanderings that were so different from her own depressed Una with a

sense of the gulfs that yawned between them.

But every gulf was bridged, a moment later, by Frendel's next speech.

"I wish," he said, "you and I could do that together some day."

The silence with which she responded to that, however, brought her host down from the heights of wishful thinking.

"It was meeting Sascha Guitry when I went to see the Bauern players at Partenkircken that broke the trance and sent me back to my own play," Frendel quietly continued. "I went at it hammer and tongs and by the time I passed under the bronze lady who stands for liberty I had the final act ready for Weinert's once-over."

"Weinert?" echoed Una.

"Yes, he wants to put it on. And put it on in this dour city of the death watch."

"What do you call it?" asked Una. She asked it casually, intent on not seeming selfishly eager. Experience had taught her that in the play-world many a proud hope could fade away overnight.

"*Eden in the Afternoon* is the title," Frendel was saying. "It's a love story, of course. Every real play has to be a love story. But in this case it's only an Indian Summer sort of love that comes to my heroine. It comes almost too late, after she's gone through too much. But that, I think, is what gives punch to the thing." His laugh was slightly mordant as he added: "And makes it cut a little deeper than *The Wine of Life*."

"*Eden in the Afternoon*," Una repeated, with a musing light in her narrowing eyes. "*Eden in the Afternoon*. Yes, I like the title."

"The important thing," said Frendel, "is whether you like the play. When would you care to look over it?"

"Right now," said the lady of the stage.

Her promptness surprised Frendel a little. But it plainly brought no displeasure to the author of the new opus.

"I'm going to call you Una after this," he said as he brought her the folio of typed pages, placed a standard lamp beside an easy chair for her, and smiled over her refusal to take one of his cigarettes. "All right, Una," he said as he withdrew to the far side of the room. Then he turned to her. "By the way, I discovered a river named after you in Yugoslavia. And I've been

wondering if you're descended from the Una who faced the lions or that other Una in the storybook."

"What Una?" asked the lady already bent over the script.

"Why, the Una who said:

"'I can dance and I can sing,
And I can do most anything!'"

"I never heard of her," murmured back the other, deeper than ever in the typed pages before her.

Frendel watched her as she sat with the strong sidelight falling across her intent face with the tender hollow just under her cheekbone, shadowing her rounded throat where the inviting smoothness of her skin struck him as still adolescent and unsullied. She remained girlish in many ways. But he wondered at an odd note of mystery about her, a something that seemed still indecipherable.

Then, realizing she was off in a world of her own, he sighed and crossed to his desk, where he spasmodically busied himself penning replies to a number of overlooked letters. Then he crossed the room and again sat studying her.

"What do you think of it?" he asked when she turned the last page, put down the script, and leaned forward, staring into space. He had the satisfaction, even before she spoke, of seeing an animal-like glow in the brooding hazel eyes.

"I'd give a year of my life to play that part," she said with low-toned solemnity. She had always had an instinctive sense of values. And she had learned, on the war-scarred boards of more than one stage, what "went," what an audience responded to, what held that ponderable substance an actress could get her teeth into. And she repeated, more to herself than to the author: "I'd give a year of my life to play that part."

"A year with me?" was the unexpected question from the quietly smiling author.

It both startled and perplexed her. But she refused to read any darker meaning into a query that was capable of more than one interpretation.

"When is Weinert counting on production?" she found it expedient to inquire.

"This season," Frendel told her.

A shadow fell over the meditative hazel eyes.

"Then that puts me out," she slowly intoned. "I've just signed up for a stock season with Uhlmann."

"You'll have to break the contract," Frendel said with decision. It was his turn to be surprised by the quick look with which she inspected him.

"I have never broken a contract," she said with a prompt quietness which led him to suspect that she never would.

"But this play was written for you," he argued. "It was you I had in mind when every word was put down on paper. I felt you were there beside me, in spirit, when I worked out every scene. And I've kept hoping it would bring us together, when it went into production."

If she scented danger upwind she preferred ignoring the baying of instinct. She knew a worth-while vehicle when she saw one. And it took the right sort of play to carry one safely up to stardom.

"Would Weinert wait for a year?"

"I'm afraid not," Frendel answered. "A year, to these Broadway people, is a long time. And I want to tie you up with him when he's still warm."

Una moved her head slowly from side to side.

"I have my contract with Uhlmann," she said with a finality that sharpened her voice.

"And you prefer the road to *Eden in the Afternoon*?"

A slight sharpness, she noticed, had crept into her companion's voice. It seemed to give a double edge to some thin blade of disappointment turning in her breast.

"You mustn't misunderstand me," she warned. "I like *Eden in the Afternoon* so much that I'm wondering if we couldn't get Weinert to wait until I'm free." The hardening of his mouth did not escape her. "Or perhaps it's you who don't want to wait."

"What do you mean by free?" he countered. "I've always tried to believe you hadn't said good-by to the spirit of adventure."

"I like to play fair," she protested, "no matter how much I want a thing."

That assertion in no way added to her companion's happiness.

"I like to see you so unassailably on the side of the angels," he finally admitted, "but you must know as well as I do that getting a play on is a good

deal like warfare; it *is* warfare. And I've still got a battle to fight with your friend Weinert."

"Why with Weinert?"

Frendel covered his hesitation by crossing and taking the script from her hand.

"He's not yet persuaded about your swinging this part. He doesn't say you're too young for it. But he feels you'll never understand the character until certain things happen to you. You see, you're so calamitously virginal."

It took her a full minute to harvest the full meaning of that charge. Her delayed response to it, when it came, was an oblique one.

"You mean I ought to marry?"

"That would help," he said with a cryptic smile.

She managed to smile back at him.

"But nobody seems to want me."

"It would help some," he repeated, brushing aside her claim of being unwanted. "But marriage, of course, is a pretty fragile thing in your profession."

"It wouldn't be with me," said the woman who believed in not breaking contracts.

"But aren't we being rather mid-Victorian about this marriage business?" he asked with a lightness that failed to cushion the shock of the question. "I've been wanting to kiss you ever since you came in through that door."

She was not frigid, she told herself as she sat regarding him. And, as he had once said, it was the Laodiceans who always lose out. But some stubborn streak of puritan-mindedness touched her with an abrupt sense of loss. She was ready to respect Frendel for his learning, his knowledge of the things her busy life had missed, but she lamented the discovery that he was, after all, very much like other men. It gave her the feeling of a curtain being rung down. She felt, suddenly, very alone in the world.

Her laugh, as she looked at him, was not without its touch of bravery.

"And then what?" she asked.

"That all depends on you," he said with an answering laugh. "Oh, I'm not asking you to live with me," he went on as he saw the look of tragedy in

the inquiring hazel eyes. “But I love you, my dear, and I don’t see why you can’t love me a little.”

It neither stirred nor shocked her. All living, she remembered as she stared at the script in his hand, was a compromise.

“If you cared for me,” she found herself saying, “you’d wait a year.”

It was not like love-making as she had read of it in books; it was without the passion that permeated similar scenes in all the stage dramas she had strutted through. It left her with the feeling that something long waited for and treasured had been quietly taken away from her.

He crossed the room and sat on the arm of her chair. She could see hunger on his face as he took her hand. It was the same hunger, behind its urbanity, she had seen in Bob Steger’s gaze.

“I’d wait a year,” he said, “if you’d make it worth while.” He stooped and kissed her unresponsive lips. “I want you.”

“Are you asking me to marry you?”

She assumed it was the abruptness of that question, more than the question itself, that held him silent for a full half-minute. His delayed laugh seemed a protective one.

“Who was it said marrying a successful actress is like marrying the town clock? Oh, don’t get me wrong there! It’s because a lady of the stage really belongs to her public. It doesn’t make for home life.”

“You haven’t answered my question,” Una reminded him. “Or are you asking me to sleep with you without being married to you?”

His face hardened a little under the directness of that challenge. He got up and stood silent a moment.

“Since we’re removing the upholstery from the skeleton of truth,” he said with a grim sort of quietness, “I may as well tell you I’m already married.” He waved her back as she stood up with a gesture inherited from stage experience. “We needn’t get melodramatic about it. It isn’t, in fact, generally known.”

“Are you ashamed of it?”

Frendel, with defensive gravity, considered that question.

“In a way, perhaps I am. You see, it was a combination of gin party and factory-girl prettiness and a moonlight trip to Elkton. I was in my last year at

Lafayette. And it didn't work out right."

Una declined to ask why. But she could be equally firm, she knew, about either trespassing on the territory or obliterating the memory of a background factory-girl wife.

She wondered why she found herself unable to feel sorry for him, just as she had been unable to feel sorry for Aggie Mumford. But living, she maintained, was like rehearsing. When a mistake is made, it should be corrected. And smoothness came only when the corrections were insisted on.

Frendel noticed that her glance had gone back to *Eden in the Afternoon*. His laugh was wary and a trifle wistful.

"I suppose you're wondering with Voltaire why the blackest rogues can sometimes write the best lines?"

"You're not a rogue," she said. "But I've rather fixed ideas about certain things. I've had to. I think I always will, after seeing what happens to so many girls who go on the stage."

"And one of your fixed ideas," Frendel suggested, "is to be a career woman?"

"I want to succeed," she told him, "sometime, in some way."

She watched him as he lighted a cigarette, almost impatiently motioned her to a chair, and seated himself.

"Of course you do," he agreed. "But does it ever leave you with the feeling that some day you may wake up and find life a bit empty?"

Una laughed. "On the contrary. It's altogether too full."

"Too full," said Frendel, "of things that may not seem so important when all the dust settles down."

"That," Una reminded him, "is what you seem to be saying in your play."

But he wasn't thinking about his play.

"Oh, it has its glamour, I suppose," he was saying. "I don't mean fan letters and milk baths and jeweled garters and stage Johnnies and dining with some Diamond Jim Brady of tomorrow. I'm thinking more of when you put over a part and hear that sudden thunder of applause against a curtain and step out and see them standing and cheering, and can tell yourself they're your people, that you belong to them and they belong to you."

"It doesn't always happen that way."

"But it will, some day, with you."

It struck her as odd, in the circumstances, that they could still talk together so companionably. It even seemed a matter of regret to her that this ugly thing known as sex should creep into life to complicate it. She had long since learned not to look for the flowering of knighthood in a field where frailty was so often a shortcut to accomplishment, where promiscuity walked with propinquity and the emotional extravagances of a make-believe world smoothed the road for erotic adventuring. She had lived in the midst of those adventurers. But she had never been one of them. They were children at heart, most of them, rootless and improvident wanderers who refused to look into the future.

"I may want to succeed," she protested, "but I'm still flesh and blood."

She resented the quick look of pity that came into his eyes.

"Very adorable flesh and blood," he said with a smile that ended in a sigh. "But you still have the God-given prerogative of deciding what altar you're going to place it on."

It was his gentleness, she decided, that made him seem dangerous. The technique of seduction, as she had seen it, did not go along lines like that.

"I suppose," she ventured, "you'll never feel the same about me?"

His reply to that was not an immediate one. He took up the script of *Eden in the Afternoon*, glanced at a page or two of the text, and then looked at the lady who was regarding him with faintly troubled eyes.

"I'd been hoping," he quietly explained as he placed the script back on the desk, "that this thing was going to bring us together, that having it come to birth, part yours and part mine, would be almost as though we'd got together to bring something worth while into the world."

"But it's altogether your child," she maintained.

"No," he countered, "a play isn't that parthenogenetic. That's a big word, I know. But what I mean is I merely plant the seed and you watch over it and make it grow. It would be our baby."

He was conscious of her growing discomfort.

"Our baby?" she said with a frown that persuaded him he had shocked her. And that conviction brought a second look of pity which she for the second time resented. "I'm afraid I'd still prefer my stock to the stork," she

said with a clipped intonation that brought a smile of appreciation to his author's face.

"Of course you would," he admitted with that perilously companionable voice of his.

"And after this," she cried, "you'll hate me."

He waited for a moment before answering. "Not by a long shot. It doesn't change my feeling about you. And I'm afraid nothing will."

That seemed to bring him closer to her again, after the earlier impression that he was in some way dissolving in thin air, that she was losing something she wanted to keep. It was the same feeling, she remembered, that she had known as a child when she had once watched her carefully built snowman melting in a March sun.

"And what are you going to do with your play?" she questioned.

When he met her gaze the quiet gentleness of his eyes hurt her a little.

"What would you like me to do with it?"

She sat pondering that question.

"I haven't the right to decide," she finally proclaimed.

"Then I'll do the deciding," he said as he rolled the script up, circled it with a rubber band, and stowed it away in a pigeonhole of his desk.

"What does that mean?" asked Una, conscious of her own quickened pulse.

"It means I'm going to withdraw it from Weinert," he said with a deprecating laugh, "and keep it in cold storage until you're ready to tackle it."

He arrested her cry of protest.

"Not a word," he commanded with mock severity. "I've got to do *something* to redeem myself, haven't I?"

XXII

Una faced the hustle and bustle, and the incidental hardships of another season in stock with the inner fortitude of a farm collie who has a beef bone buried for later consideration. The warming thought that the stellar role in *Eden in the Afternoon* might some day be hers left her with something to live for, kept her almost happy on her treadmill of work.

Yet she refused to acknowledge that she was merely marking time. She was in training, she contended, as an athlete might be for some final stadium test of skill. She still accepted without question the stage dictum that all "experience," good or bad, was helpful. She even surprised Uhlmann by the care with which she helped to select the new company, just as she later bewildered him by the strictness with which she conducted that company. The same persistent virginal nature which Weinert had deplored prompted her to insist on personal decency in her working companions and comparative cleanness in her productions. She refused to consider bedroom farces and promptly blue-penciled salacious passages out of her scripts. A startled leading man, who had blandly insisted on making love to her and had later made one of his stage kisses over-erogenous, was sent off bag and baggage. His hurriedly secured successor, after twice appearing at rehearsals in a happy state of inebriacy, followed the same course and followed it with a promptness that was equally startling.

"What's our Baby Belasco going to spring on us next?" asked an old "heavy" who resented being ordered around by so youthful a dictator.

For Una, without quite knowing it, was taking on the mood and manner of a dictator. She seemed more than ever intent on success, more than ever impatient of incompetence. If she demanded what was best in her colleagues she retained their grumbling respect by invariably giving what was best in her. Her growing knowledge of stagecraft, her sharpened ability to get into a character, her quiet and decisive judgment when a footlight issue had to be settled, eventually won their reluctant admiration.

"That woman gets away with murder," complained the autumn-tinted ingénue, "just by pulling the personality stuff."

For Una Carberry had personality. And if she exercised that elusive and abstract quality for the achievement of her own ends she remembered that a

show of weakness was sometimes more effective than a parade of strength. She learned in time that honey harvests more flies than vinegar does. She was no longer a girl, but her appeal to the eye was immediate, especially from the stage. About her maturing face, with the ghost of a hollow under either cheekbone, was a conciliatory air of wistfulness, the wistfulness of a woman still hungry for the unattained and no longer sustained by the momentary illusion of fame. There was even something piteous, particularly in the light of open day, about the droop of the softly curved lips that seemed once framed for sweetness. The dark-lashed hazel eyes, shadowy with a vague weariness, perhaps more of the spirit than of the body, were still beautiful in their depths. But those eyes carried a look of hunger, of something unsatisfied, which served to sublimate what might have been mere physical appeal into an appeal of the spirit.

"She gives me a pain in the neck," once observed her supporting ingénue, "with that drooping-violet air every time she wants to get her own way!"

But that air of pathos was not without its rewards. It tended to make her the idol of those young women known as "matinee girls," who accepted her celibacy as something holy, as something both to sorrow over and to emulate. It awakened the interest of the impressionable male who from his dollar orchestra seat could speculate on the delights of finally winning a flower so long unwon.

For Una's personality proved a ponderable asset in her stock work. When linked with an appropriately selected role, and especially those roles which more cynical centers like New York might regard as slightly old-fashioned, this appeal of the spirit usually paved the way to box-office success. The local clergy approved of her campaign for clean plays. The local Woman's Club, on the eve of her *Romeo and Juliet* production, asked her to speak on the art of Shakespeare—an experience which she dreaded until a desperate appeal to Frank Frendel brought her four pages of neatly typed and appropriate observations, with the appended postscript: "Tell the old girls to put *that* in their pipes and smoke it!"

Yet Una knew just how far her success went, just how far it could go, and just what its dangers were. The deeper shadowing and the broader strokes that went in "the sticks," she always remembered, would never go on Broadway. This conviction gave her the feeling that she was carrying a candle through a windy world, nursing a secret light that must be guarded for its secret ends. And in her interpretation of Juliet, she felt, she would find a passing chance to uncover that flame.

But the luster of the *Romeo and Juliet* production was dimmed a little by the shoddiness of the costumes Uhlmann sent out from New York and the incompetence of a stage crew that left the house of Capulet always reedlike in its unsteadiness. Many things went wrong, from the breaking of Abraham's shoddy sword in the first act to the deliberate overplaying of the Nurse throughout the drama and the last-minute "hoking" of the Apothecary. But Juliet went through it all with a dewy-browed determination based on the belief that ardor could leave new footprints along the well-trodden sand of experiment.

Her notices were not unsympathetic, and at the end of her first-night performance she was called before the curtain for an unexpected speech over which she had worked, previously, when she should have been asleep. But the box-office response was less generous than that of the press, and there was no call for a second week of the Bard of Avon.

So Una went stoically back to those vehicles which had proved themselves sure-fire to provincial audiences. She plodded on in the only field that seemed open to her, inwardly accepting her minor successes with that indifference which marks those who have failed in the greater issues of life. She did her best to reconcile herself to the well-worn parts which Uhlmann and her audience demanded of her, to the ever-recurring morning rehearsals, to the daily matinee made up mostly of young girls and candy-eating idlers and rapt-eyed matrons who left babies at home, to the long, hot nights when the obsolescent gas jets made the worn dressing room as hot and fetid as a stoker's hole. Life was made no brighter for her when a note from Frendel told her he had been sailing on Barnegat Bay for a week, to sweep the barnacles off his brain.

Yet she declined to burn her hands in any passing flame of martyrdom. She did her best to like her following, to like that small inland city with its competing movie houses and its decorous maple-lined streets and its sedate houses behind their companionably open lawns. It made her think of a more prosperous Chamboro. She strove to endure without protest the consciousness of a success that was not success, a triumph that at heart would prove both shoddy and fleeting, a glory that stood inglorious under the sterner light of her still secret aspirations.

But for these pains, it is true, time brought its own anodynes. She was a person of importance in that city of homes, a sun in her own small planetary system. The town, without stopping to question how much the result was a matter of its own volition, had identified their new apostle of culture with itself. She was accepted as their personal property, their specially appointed

delegate of romance. And as her name became more and more a household word strangers began to waylay her shyly on the passage between theater and hotel; her dining-room waitress would tell her how swell she was in her last part; more ardent spirits even sent her flowers and a timorous invitation or two. She could feel, as she added role to role, an electric bond of affection growing up between her and her audiences, a provocative stubborn adoration that prompted her, at times, into those more obvious readings of her emotional scenes which resulted in the more enthusiastic applause of her listeners. She tried not to "ham" and "hoke." But there were occasions when that raw wine of response brewed in proletariat approval seemed to drug her into passing indifference.

When asked to judge a children's play competition in the grade school she consoled the defeated team by giving it a prize purchased by herself. When a local department store went so far as to name a new shade of domestic silk after her she was not indifferent to the honor. And when a high tea was given for her at the Country Club she even contentedly admitted to the older actress who had overplayed the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* that it was, after all, something to be the big frog in a little puddle.

At that same high tea, among the somewhat stiff-mannered citizens who shook hands with her as though she were the object of a municipal reception committee's activities, she encountered a face which she had seen, from time to time, in the theater.

This man, who repeated his name of "Ruthven, William Ruthven, ma'am," as he bashfully took her hand, struck her as being very honest and big and ruddy-cheeked. That same large frame, with its slightly thinning head-thatch, its weather-darkened face, its honest and wide-set eyes under the ruffled thatch of a brow, had caught her absent and wandering glance during more than one of her performances. He had stood out from the audience as a type more normal, more full-blooded, more material-minded, than the ordinary habitué of a summer stock theater. And after her rehearsal encounter, that morning, with an effeminate young actor who persisted in lisping his lines, she found something consoling in her new acquaintance's full-blooded masculinity.

William Ruthven, in fact, carried the guest of honor back to the city in his high-powered car, pointing out the more attractive suburban homes on the way, but sitting beside her, as a rule, somewhat embarrassed and silent. It was not until she alighted at her hotel that he hesitatingly confessed he had long been an admirer of hers and gravely proclaimed his belief that her Lady

Babby was the greatest Lady Babby ever seen on an American stage. "And I'm pretty hardboiled," he added, "when it comes to play-acting."

Compliments such as this neither embarrassed nor elated her. They were too much a matter of her daily food. The personality of the large and grave-eyed man from whom this praise had come somewhat puzzled her, however; she was ready to forgive him for being what her colleagues might call a corn-rustler.

When, two days later, a formally worded note sent to the theater announced that his car would always be at her service during the day, Una returned an equally formal note, thanking him for his kindness. But the matter was not to rest there. For the next day, at the end of the afternoon performance, the car was waiting at the stage entrance.

Una, after a moment of inward debate, stepped into the tonneau and instructed the boyish-looking chauffeur to take her for a short run in the country, a run that must last fifty minutes exactly, she repeated, remembering she still had to make herself letter-perfect in the new play on her crowded schedule.

That dip of less than an hour into the cool green hill-shadows proved surprisingly refreshing and at the same time vaguely disturbing. For she wondered, as she rocked homeward across the lengthening evening shadows, if her whirling squirrel cage of work wasn't cheating her out of something. She even fell to wondering if she couldn't afford a car and a chauffeur of her own. She had, she suspected, been giving altogether too much time and thought to the mere drudgery of life. She had even neglected her more leisured reading of Shaw.

The next afternoon it was William Ruthven himself who awaited her at the alley-end of the stage door. He seemed disappointed when she told him she would have to be back in her room in twenty minutes.

"I was hoping," he said, "we could have a spin out to Valley View. I rather felt a half-hour of country air would make your supper taste better tonight."

"That's kind of you," she agreed. "But I really can't afford it."

Her rewarding smile was not wasted on him.

"Then we'll take ten minutes out to Lincoln Park and ten minutes back. I've got a pretty good idea of how busy you must be. But you mustn't forget your health."

That was something, she told him, she didn't need to remember.

"I don't want to be nervy about things like that," he explained as they swept down a tree-shadowed avenue, "but I felt I knew you, after that curtain speech when you called us all your friends and said you knew now we really *were* your friends."

Una's smile was tempered by the memory of that speech, when her envious leading man in the wings had audibly designated it as "that Mother's Day tripe!"

Three days later she was surprised to receive a somewhat stiffly worded note from Ruthven asking if she could dine with him and his sister on the following Sunday. This invitation Una declined. The toiling artist, she had long since found, paid dearly for all such excursions into the bypaths of society. Sunday marked her one brief half-day of rest; and the demands on a work-wearied brain to be ceaselessly agreeable to accidental companions often proved more than she could meet.

Yet the next week, when Ruthven wrote asking if she would take supper with him, after one of her performances, her curiosity was piqued. She could not quite comprehend that large-framed man with the quiet eyes. She was teased with a desire to purge her soul of its trivial curiosity.

She thought the matter over, and a little to her own bewilderment, broke a rule to which she had long adhered at considerable sacrifice to herself, agreeing to take supper with him the following Thursday night after the performance.

That day was marked in her memory, for through the open door of her dressing room she had overheard the pale-eyed *ingénue* remark to her ever-envious leading man: "What do you think? Old Carbie's taken to joy riding!"

That phrase of "Old Carbie" had pierced through her like a spearhead. She was not old—not old, at least, in years. But she took life more seriously than did the easygoing time-servers in a profession where only the climbers ever reached the peak. That peak was still beyond her, but she was at least the head of her company. And hard work may have put the stamp of sobriety on her, but she wasn't and never would be a dehydrated stage hack. She wanted her share of life, real life, as much as the next person. Yet that lightly uttered "Old Carbie" stuck in her craw. And out of the dull ache it left she cried out for her lost youth; she shut her teeth in the face of the besieging years and vowed, with the bitterness of unsatisfied womanhood, that she would not be old, that she would not admit defeat at the hands of time.

She studied her face in the mirror between the wire-covered bulbs. Then she slowly and methodically began her second make-up for one night. She beaded her eye lashes more carefully than was her wont; she blended the rouge on her slightly hollowed cheeks with unusual care; she pinned on a spray of hothouse roses with a personal satisfaction until then unknown to her. She was almost the last one to leave the theater.

Ruthven was waiting for her with the car, standing beside the opened tonneau door with his hat in his hand.

"Pipe the rube pick-up!" observed the company's *ingénue*, with a slow and insolent stare at the unusual sight of a cavalier awaiting her misanthropic superior. "Our Carbie's going skittish on us."

The remark did not escape Una's quick ear. She refused to let it shadow her evening. But for several weeks to come that uncomprehending wielder of *ingénue* parts pondered over the problem of why her pertest of comedy work failed to win the approval of her company's managing spirit.

XXIII

If Una's acceptance of Ruthven's invitation was a surprise to her, their belated supper together was an even greater one.

She had been only too well initiated into the outside world's attitude toward the stage woman. She had followed the devious trails of "the road," facing the sallies of second-class hotel managers, discouraging the attentions of predaceous-minded drummers, countering the advances of provincial stage-door Lotharios who showed a fixed determination to regard the children of dramatic amusement as roving and irresponsible daughters of joy.

During that supper she had looked for some final and insidious outcropping of animality. But Ruthven had shown no signs of wanting to put grape leaves in his hair. There was, in fact, a certain old-fashioned gallantry about his attentions, an almost ponderous dignity that made his services something more than mere thoughtfulness. If she had, at first, been needlessly afraid of him, she had later been needlessly afraid for him. He was no adroit and experienced Don Juan screened by a mask of rustic simplicity. He was almost aldermanic in his sobriety. During that protracted supper, even after his second glass of wine, he remained as decorous and dignified as an undertaker. There was a rough honesty about the man, his companion decided, for all the quiet doggedness of purpose that continued to perplex her. There was even something flattering, she felt, in that very doggedness.

It was Una who was facetious. She was so desperately and experimentally lighthearted that she more than once wondered if that recent stage-door charge of going skittish on them was entirely wide of the mark. For she was determinedly and expositionally gay, as though anxious to satisfy herself as to her own capabilities, as though to discover how thick the shell of Time had fixed itself about her.

Her host found her gaiety reassuring. He talked more freely as the supper—and it was a much better one than she had looked for—proceeded. She could afford to lapse offhandedly into the backwaters of the incidental, to let trivialities for the moment seem important.

He had defied her to guess his age. But to do this she had discreetly refused.

"I'm not so old as I look," he said with his slow smile.

That reference to age brought over her a little shiver of the body. Her companion, with his almost childlike directness, was puzzled by it, so plainly puzzled that she felt the need of explaining.

"And I'm so much older than I look," she cried, even as she harvested joy from the expostulatory cloud of denial that gathered on his honest face.

"Why, you didn't look much more than a girl the other night in that balcony scene!"

Una sat up, inwardly repeating the phrase: "Much more than a girl!" It had been meant to console her. But as she turned it over in her mind, as a child turns over an acorn that has established itself as inedible, an invisible blade of misery pushed its way into her heart. She was, in truth, no longer young. No longer young!

"Oh, it's terrible to be old!" she said with a grimace that was not all mockery.

"Why should it be?" demanded her puzzled host. "We like spring, of course. But summer isn't so bad. And autumn can be rather pleasant, if you've got the right sort of apples in your cellar bins."

"But we women are such cowards about that sort of thing," she protested.

He looked at her and smiled.

"You've nothing to be afraid of," he quietly affirmed.

She felt it would be useless to explain how, in her line of work, the passage of time spelled tragedy and the dimming of charm meant disaster. And as one star faded there was always another to take its place.

"It won't be long," she cried in half-laughing unhappiness, "before they'll hate this war-scarred old map of mine."

His solemn eyes rested on her face for a moment or two.

"But *I* like it," he found the courage to affirm. "And I like it a lot."

Her smile of gratitude was a restricted one. She felt the need of more solid ground under her feet. Her laugh, as she looked at him, was an effort at retreat.

"So do other people," she protested. "We had nearly nine hundred dollars in the house last night." She stopped and laughed again. "That, you see, is what they brought me here for—to be liked."

"I know it," he admitted, a trifle disconsolately. "But I don't mean that way."

The ice, she felt, was growing dangerously thin for so ponderous a figure. But the very risk, the very uncertainty of the situation, had its unexpected relish.

She was not unconscious of the fact that at a word she could bring everything down to everyday life again. But it was something new, in those straitened days, to encounter the luxury of a purely personal admiration.

"What way do you mean?" she found herself asking, even to her own surprise.

"I don't mean what you pay a dollar for and pass up over the footlights," he said with a faint tremolo in his voice.

"But that's the only way we *can* be liked," she maintained. "Instead of staying a *person*, we grow into a sort of institution. You admire us about the same as you do a public library!"

"Oh, no I don't!" was Ruthven's prompt retort.

"And we ourselves get the institutional feeling," Una went on. "We have to satisfy ourselves with a sort of denatured affection, the kind you really can't swallow, but is good for keeping the pot boiling."

His slow smile showed his appreciation of the figure—and she had once suspected that he was a little stupid! She found herself relishing the chance of being candid with him.

"Then I can't see what you get out of it," he told her, studying her smiling face with his solemn eyes.

"Exactly what the little girl with the rag doll gets out of her make-shift," was Una's answer, "only we have the disadvantage of knowing the doll's nothing more than a doll!"

A look of surprise crept into Ruthven's face.

"You don't mean to say you're ever dissatisfied?" he asked.

"One gets tired of the hard work," Una acknowledged.

His look of surprise was superseded by one of hope. He spoke quietly, yet there was an undertone of eagerness in his voice.

"It's funny," he said, "but I never thought of acting as being hard work!"

She could afford to smile at his mistake.

"Well, take the part of Juliet that you saw me play a couple of weeks ago. We put on a condensed version. My part was cut down to about seven thousand words. That means I had to learn, by rote, not only those seven thousand words, but also the cues that led up to them, the movements with which they must be spoken, the steps and gestures which must fit in with the steps and gestures of the people on the stage with me. And the same week that these seven thousand words were being recited by me twice a day, before an audience, our company was coming together every morning at ten o'clock and I was reciting another part of over seven thousand words, this part of Louise for *The Two Orphans*, the part the audience is seeing this week. Besides making myself letter-perfect in that part, I was studying out the stage business, making sure each member of my company was doing what was needed, deciding on costumes and scenery, ordering props, and revising the time or the tone of the performance as a whole. But besides that, too, at night after I'd gone home from the theater, I was studying the script of *Frou-Frou*, which we'll put on next week. By Monday or Tuesday I'll have to know by heart, practically, that part of *Frou-Frou*, and she had to speak enough lines to fill six or seven solid columns of newspaper type. And that keeps up, of course, as long as the season lasts, week by week and month by month."

She enjoyed his stare of wonder.

"I should think you'd go mad!" he murmured.

"No, it's not that that worries stock actresses; it's the terrible fear that some day they may lose their memory. We always get to believe that some day our memories will just lie down between the shafts, like an overworked horse, and refuse to budge again!"

A slow look of pity surged up into the honest face across the table from her.

"I used to think I worked hard," he finally said. "But what you've just been saying makes me wonder if I really was."

She surrendered to a rising curiosity to know more about him, about what his life had been. There was something appealing, she found, in the sheer ponderous honesty of his face. She abhorred handsome men, she told

herself; she had seen and known and worked with too many stage fops who were the center of their own little universe of egoism. She liked strength, resolute and self-reliant strength—and William Ruthven, she felt assured, was the possessor of that strength.

"What did your work use to be?" she asked.

"Nothing very romantic," he confessed. "I own the Ruthven Plow Works here. It took about fifteen years of good hard grinding to get that plant built up. And next year we're going in for tractors."

"And you've been successful, of course?"

"Oh, I guess I've made enough money to worry along on. My old-maid sister—she runs the house for me—says I've made too much. It makes me discontented."

"I suppose that means you're very rich."

"Not what you New York folks would call rich! But I've got a rather comfortable home up here on Elmwood Avenue, and a stock farm out at Cedar Valley. I keep that just to play with. But somehow or other, it just won't let me lose money on it!"

The wide-set hazel eyes were studying him with their pensively abstracted stare. He was carefully folding and refolding his napkin. The quietness with which he spoke, as he went on again, seemed an achieved calmness, something sternly imposed on an ardor which might prove too apparent.

"I've been a widower for nearly nine years," he said, not raising his eyes as he spoke. "I've got friends, and all that. I've traveled around a good bit. And I guess I've had a good enough time, as things go. But I've been lonesome somehow. I've wanted something!"

He lifted his eyes, at this point, and his level gaze met that of the woman across the table from him.

"I never knew what it was I wanted until you came to this town and I watched you night after night. Then I found out what it was."

"Well?" she said, afraid to smile, for fear of seeming to mock his solemnity.

"I knew I wanted you," he said.

His grave eyes were staring deep into her own.

"Me?" she laughed, a little nervously.

He placed one large hand on the folded white napkin and leaned back in his chair.

"I wanted to know if you wouldn't marry me," he said, his deep voice slightly tremulous, as though the continued calmness of his face was something coerced and conscious.

There was no gaiety in her quick little defensive laugh.

"But you don't know me," she argued.

"Oh, yes I do," he proclaimed. "I know you well enough. I've watched you night after night. I've seen you do all those pieces of yours. And I can't just explain it to you, but you've grown to stand for something I've been missing out of life, the other things, the things money and work and a fat stock farm don't seem to bring in!"

She could feel her heart go down, stop by stop, against her will. Her shoulders heaved with a sigh which she could not control.

It was the old, the eternal error again. It was the never-ending mistake of confusing the stage role with the woman herself, of identifying the romance behind the footlights with its mere interpreter. It was the mistake which the uninitiated were forever making. She herself had nothing to do with this strange hunger of his; she was merely the vessel which carried the sacred oil. It was Juliet, bathed in the moonlit loveliness of a midnight garden, to whom his work-calloused heart had gone out. It was not to Una Carberry; it was not to the work-wearied body of the aging and disillusioned woman who wore the cap of Juliet. It was to the spirit of youth and romance, the spirit to which she was little more than a bond servant.

Her face must have clouded, involuntarily, for the man facing her moved in his chair and spoke again.

"You don't think you could do it?" he was asking, in the same quiet voice as before. Yet this time a touch of pain seemed to make his calmness almost tragic.

"It's not a matter of whether I could or not," she told him, with the sharpness of the indeterminate answering pain cutting through her. "It's because I wouldn't!"

"Why?" he demanded.

"Can't you see why! It wouldn't be fair to you, from any standpoint! You'd find me out, sometime, and it would be too late when you did find me out!"

"Find out what?" he asked, with his unimaginative directness.

"That I'd cheated you out of what you were looking for! That I wasn't what you took me for! That you'd carried home a heroine out of a book-story and found her nothing more than a woman with a thirty dollar wig on, and the wrinkles beginning to show. It's not even good business! It'd be so much easier to buy the wig, for example!"

"It's not a question of business," he protested, disregarding her perverse and ironic bitterness. "It's something outside of business."

"That's exactly why it wouldn't be fair. It would be worse than buying a pig in a poke, as they say. It would only turn out that I wasn't at all what you expected!"

For all her bitterness, there was a hunger which she could not explain eating at her heart. A sense of desolation settled about her, a desolation which she had felt more and more, at times, when she had allowed herself to be idle.

"I'd risk that," Ruthven was saying.

He hesitated a moment. Then he looked up, with the eyes of a man steeled to face life's direst extremity. Still again Una was touched with vague admiration at the thought of his doggedness. It would have been uncouth in a figure less suggestive of latent strength.

"Is there anyone else?" he asked.

She thought of Frendel and what Frendel had once meant to her. Then she thought of Andrew Hempel and how he too had tried to lure her away from the narrow path of duty. It seemed strange, as she thought of them, that each figure should be dimming and diminishing in the vista of time.

"There's nobody else," she finally and solemnly asserted.

But the light that assertion brought to his eyes flashed a warning back to her. "There's nobody else," she amended, "except one hundred and sixty pages of a script I've got to study and master next season for Broadway."

"Next season," he echoed with a note of disappointment.

"You see, we have to keep planning ahead. And we have to work so hard. And we have so much to learn and so much to do before old age comes

creeping over us!"

He brushed that claim aside, almost impatiently. But his face saddened and a silence fell over them.

"Then I'm going to ask you just one thing," he said out of that silence. "I'm going to ask it now, because I'll be leaving town in a couple of days and you'll be gone before I get back. I'm going to ask you not to forget me. I'm——"

"There's no danger of that," she interrupted, wondering at the feeling that they could seem like two lifelong friends gropingly approaching their friendship's first understanding.

"Why?" he questioned.

"You have been so kind," was her answer.

"That's not what I mean," he went on with his painstaking and deliberate directness of manner. "I want you to remember that I'm always here."

He paused as though afraid of making a misstep.

"I suppose you think a lot of that New York play," he ventured.

"I'm going to star in it," she said with a tenseness that was lost on him.

"Well, I hope it's a big success. But if anything should ever happen to make you change your mind, if things didn't go right, or if you came to see differently, or got tired of this work of yours, or got sick, or—or needed a change or anything, I want you to let me know."

"You're still being kind," she murmured.

"It isn't kindness. It's more like selfishness. But it's an offer, and it's always going to stand good. I can wait, if I have to. I ought to wait, I suppose. But I'd like to show how good and square I could be to a woman like you."

Una, watching him, shook her head slowly from side to side. She refused to smile at the homeliness of that phrase of "good and square"; it was at least language she could understand. There had been times with Frendel, she remembered, when that subtler-minded man's allusions and implications had seemed beyond her. The quiet sobriety of this newer suitor seemed to dignify his importunity into something crowned with a companionable sort of safety. Yet everything, of course, was impossible, was almost absurd.

"Can't you promise me that much?" he was asking.

“It isn’t fair,” she replied.

“Why isn’t it?”

She leaned forward a little in her chair, studying his weather-ruddied face with her shadowy hazel eyes from which the last trace of hardness had melted. He was very tanned, was her inapposite thought; that meant he was very much in the open air, in the sanity of sunlight and whipping winds. So deep was that coloring of wind and sun, in fact, that it seemed able to cover like a mask any emotion beneath it. He would never be voluble, like her playmates of the stage. Neither his voice nor his features would ever quite show what he felt.

He might at that very moment, she told herself, be sitting before her the apparent picture of full-blooded health and at the same time be suffering keenly.

The thought of any such suffering brought no shadow to her own spirits. She found a wayward relish in her woman’s prerogative of holding a man’s happiness balanced in the palm of her hand. The sense of power, the knowledge of controlling a strong man’s joy or sorrow, was sweet in her breast. But she had sterner roads to travel. And she had to think of ways for making her answer less painful.

“Tell me,” she said with a fraternal leaning toward him, “have you a place at that plow factory of yours where you stow away the broken-down machinery and pile together the stuff that’s too tragically worn out?”

“Yes,” he said, plainly puzzled.

“What do you call it?”

“The boneyard,” he answered with his abstracted smile.

“The boneyard,” she repeated. “That’s the exact word I wanted. And that’s what you’ve just offered to be for me. When I’m getting old and worn out, when I’m just about good for nothing, you say you’ll take me in!”

“You’ll never be good for nothing!”

“When I’ve finished with my work, when I’ve eaten my pie, as they say, you’ll let me run aground and lie there at your side door in my cozy old age!”

“Oh, I’d take you now, if I could get you,” he declared, with his October-sunlight smile. “But that’s asking too much!”

“Just as the other would be asking too much,” she added, “on my part!”

"That's where you're wrong," he persisted. "I'm not a rapid-fire thinker. And I guess I move slow. But I don't move until I know I'm right." The squared shoulders heaved with a deeper breath. "You'll always mean a lot to me. I'll always want you. And I'd always be getting the best of the bargain."

She touched her fingers to her eyelashes as she laughed at his wrong-headedness. It both surprised and disturbed her that those same fingertips were slightly moistened by a tear or two.

"You're too big-hearted," she said, trying to keep the shake out of her voice; "you're too good, too fine, to be imposed on by a lady mummer like me."

He leaned back, gravely regarding her.

"I guess I've got a rival all right," he surprised her by saying.

Her thoughts flew back to Frendel. But Frendel was no longer of her world.

"I mean that stage work of yours," Ruthven was saying. "But some day, I think, you're going to get it out of your system. And when that day comes around I want you to remember what I've said. Will you?"

The lady of the stage pushed back her chair and looked dazedly about her, not unlike a sleep-walker returning to wakefulness.

"I'll remember," she said.

An impulse which she could neither control nor fathom prompted her to hold her hand out to him.

He stood up, at that gesture, and there was something old-world in his ceremoniousness as he rounded the table and held out his own hand. His great fingers closed on her palm and held it while his eyes rested on her face. She permitted no emotion to show itself; she imposed on herself a rigorous control. But he continued to hold her hand, a little hungrily, as though by that contact he were tapping some hidden and mystic reservoir of happiness.

Her fingers were conscious of the strength and warmth enfolding them, draining something away from them, it seemed, which left her less able to depend on her own strength. If it brought her any sense of happiness she found that happiness tangled up with pain. For it left her with a foolish sense of desolation, a desolation that made all her life seem ineffectual and even the future without purpose.

It was a mood, she knew, that must be strangled at birth. It had no place, it never could have a place, on her pathway to the stars. Yet when she withdrew her hand from Ruthven's it was as though a circuit had been broken. She glanced down at her watch with a defensive look of horror. She still had ten sides to learn, she told her new friend, before she could turn in that night.

XXIV

Frendel was waiting for Una when her train pulled into the gloomy Hoboken train shed. The sight of him there, smiling a welcome above the heads of so many strangers, made her feel less friendless.

"This is sweet of you," she said when he had pushed his way to her side.

"Uhlmann told me the corn-rustlers were giving you back to us," he explained, "and I made myself a reception committee of one."

He studied her face for a moment of silence. Then, to her surprise, he stooped and kissed her.

"You're looking tired," he said as though to extenuate the passiveness with which she received that kiss.

"I *am* tired," she acknowledged as she refused to take the subway and directed her steps toward the Twenty-Third Street ferry. "It's been rather a long season."

"It has seemed long to me," Frendel protested as they forged forward with the stream to the ferry slip. "But why come back to us by way of the back door?"

"I wanted to do over again," Una explained, "something I did a good many years ago. I wanted to cross the North River, just about sunset, and see New York as I saw it when I first landed here."

It all seemed familiar enough, the tink-a-link of pawl and ratchet, the crowding bodies and the throb of deckboards, the salty smell of tide water and the puffing tugs, the battlemented city in its tawny wash of evening light, the feeling of crowded and teeming life on its triangulated island that was the home of so many hopes and failures.

But Una was no longer afraid of that city. It touched her tired body with a sense of its vitality, its ant-hill activity. It was an arena of struggle where only the strong survived. And she intended to be among those survivors.

Frendel, arrested by the intent look on her face, lifted her hand and linked it through his arm. She wondered, as he smiled down at her, if it was the memory of Ruthven's more stalwart figure that made him look overurbanized and a trifle effeminate.

"You want to get your heel on its neck, don't you?" he said, with a head-nod toward the skyline of New York. And the quickness of his intuition startled her a little.

"It doesn't happen like that," she said with a laugh. "It has a million heels of its own to grind you down. And I don't want to be ground down." It seemed natural that her next question should be about *Eden in the Afternoon*. "I've been wondering about our play," she said with a warmer note in her voice.

"So have I," was Frendel's none too satisfactory response. "But let's not talk about that now."

"Why not?" asked the woman at his side.

"Because I'd rather talk about you. I've waited a long time, remember, for this meeting."

She could feel the tightening pressure of his arm on hers, but it failed to quicken her pulse.

"You haven't changed?" was the question she was prompted to put to him. But she altered it, at the last moment, to something less personal. She asked, instead: "You haven't changed your plans?"

"It's still your play," he said after a glance down at her. "But Weinert keeps saying you can't swing it."

He could see the curved lips lose a little of their softness.

"Weinert doesn't know what I can do."

"That," said Frendel, "is what I keep telling him. I know you can. But he won't listen to me."

"Weinert isn't the only producer in the world," Una quietly reminded him.

"But he wants that play. And it's something to have a producer who believes in your work, especially when you're rather new at the game."

Una wondered why they called it a game, when, in reality, it was such a fierce and never-ending battle.

"But you're not new at it," she contended.

"The old war-horses along the Great White Way say I am. They like to stick to the tried and true."

"But you haven't closed with Weinert?" Una asked with an effort at casualness.

"Of course not. I said I'd wait until you were free. And I've waited."

It was Una's arm, this time, that tightened on the bigger arm beside her. Their bodies swayed together as the ferry nosed into its narrowing slip. But nothing more was said on the matter until they were seated side by side in the taxicab that carried them across the city etherealized by the yellow twilight tinting the street-valleys already starred by their rows of evening lamps.

"What are we going to do about it?" she asked as Frendel took possession of her hand.

"About what?" he asked as he rolled back her glove and touched his lips to her wrist.

"About that play of ours," she reminded him.

"I think," he said, "you'll have to decide that." His laugh was slightly caustic. "I suppose you know there's a war on."

She had heard that on the far side of the ocean there was battling and bloodshed. But it had come to her like echoes from another world, a world remote from her dusty little domain of frantic parts and painted flats and rising and falling curtains. Something known as the draft had even taken one or two of her younger actors away from her. But she had been immersed, week by week, in a warfare of her own. And it seemed strange that anything so far away could shadow her world of make-believe.

"But it won't affect us," she protested.

He smiled his gratitude that they should be thus bracketed together. But his face, a moment later, became grave.

"It won't affect you," he acknowledged. "But the Amalgamated Press is trying to make it affect me. They seem to think I'm cut out for a war correspondent. And they're talking of sending me over there to report the fighting."

Una's heart fell.

"But you might get killed."

He pondered, for a moment, the source of that anxiety. Then he laughed.

"You can't get rid of me that easily, my dear. But I'll have to take my chances, of course, along with five or six million others along the front line."

"It's all so wasteful," she contended. "So useless and foolish!" She sat disturbed by the promptness with which her thoughts went back to *Eden in the Afternoon*. "Then what will happen to our play?"

"That," he again told her, "is for you to decide. Don't think I've lost interest in that production. But I've laid my egg there. And now it's in your basket. And I've a feeling you'll hatch it out into something alive before it goes bad in Weinert's office."

"But it's still your play," she protested. They had drawn up before the canopied entrance of the Forty-Eighth Street hotel that was to be her home for the coming weeks. But they waved the doorman away and continued to sit side by side in the hooded half-light of the taxicab.

"Of course it's my play," Frendel acceded. "And I'll expect my author's royalties if you ever maneuver it into a Broadway run. But my moves around this troubled vale of tears are going to be mighty uncertain for the next six months. So the simplest way out of the tangle will be for me to sign the rights over to you, along with a duly executed power-of-attorney. That'll give you a free hand to fight for our baby when I'm far away."

If Una felt a surge of happiness at that concession, she wondered why it should be so abruptly shadowed by a feeling that was far from happiness.

"Then you're really going abroad?" she found herself saying.

"I hear the bugles calling me," he said with a laugh that was both brief and forced. He leaned closer to her in the half-light. "That means there isn't much time left when we can be together. And while I'm still here you ought to be good to me."

The note of hunger in his voice did not escape her. And, being a woman, it brought its flash of gladness touched with triumph. But it was only a flash. And, dying away, trailed a feeling of distress in its wake.

"It's you who are being so good," she evaded, conscious that her path was not an easy one. She withdrew her hand from his and glanced at the impatiently patient driver with nothing but a sliding panel of glass to shut him off from them. Then she leaned forward as though to read the meter.

"I'll attend to that," Frendel said, almost sharply. His movement, as he recaptured her hand, was almost a violent one. "Can't we be together?"

She knew what he meant, and she wondered why no wave of indignation swept through her. She even wondered whether it was in him or in her that the source of some ghostly disappointment lay.

"Not tonight," was her low-toned reply.

She drew a deep breath of something more than weariness.

"I'm very, very tired," she said with a quaver in her voice.

He drew away and studied her for a full minute of silence.

"May I kiss you?" he said with a humility that was new to him.

She did not answer him in words. But she knew, as she lifted her face to his, that he would accept the movement as a response to his request.

It was, however, such a qualified response that he drew away from her again, with the ardor drained from his face.

"There wasn't much kick in that," he complained with a shielding and half-wistful laugh.

"I'm so very, very tired," she repeated, truthfully enough. But she knew a sense of inadequacy touched with shame, shame born of the thought that she was doing in a small way what many an ambitious lady in her calling had done openly and abandonedly. And the only way she could make amends, she told herself, would be to see that *Eden in the Afternoon* was in some way and at some time turned into a success.

XXV

For two days the refugee from the road denned up like a bear and let Time flow over her tired body very much as a stream purls over a water-logged stick. She slept around the clock, and breakfasted in bed, and again lapsed off into slumber behind closed blinds. When she wakened late in the afternoon she bathed luxuriously and without hurry, ate again, and noticed that the muffled yet ceaseless hum of the city could give a coloring of ironic peace to those passing hours of idleness. Then for another night and another day she let the depleted batteries of energy recharge themselves. And with returned vitality her interregnum of comalike indifferency ended.

It ended when Frendel sent Ida Matthewson to Una's new living quarters for an interview. Miss Matthewson, who was short, plump, and energetic, handled stage copy for an evening paper and conducted a column of theatrical gossip which was syndicated throughout the country. Her subversive questioning, since she showed herself willing to sacrifice the lamb of truth on the altar of the picturesque, led to a paragraph or two on "America's Youngest and Loveliest Juliet." When asked about her plans for the future Una hesitated.

"I suppose," she ventured, "you know David Tadesco?"

The column conductor laughed and glanced down at the timepiece on her plump wrist.

"Old Dave gave me this wrist watch for Christmas," she announced. "He believes in greasing the skids whenever there's a story to be launched."

If Una detected a hint in that announcement she stowed it away in her mind without comment.

"All he ever gave *me*," she confessed, "is the cold shoulder. I've tried to see him half a dozen times in the last two or three years. But every time I cooled my heels there he sent out word he was busy."

"The Caliph isn't easy," said Miss Matthewson, still occupied with pad and pencil. "But he does have a leaning toward the good-lookers."

Una knew well enough that Tadesco had merited his Broadway title of the Caliph. That eccentric yet adroit director-producer had groomed more than one obscure actress into stardom. He had built up an artfully fabricated

tradition of success. But, like all dwellers on those heights where the footing is never secure, he now preferred the solitude of safety to the crowded lowlands of experiment. A Tadesco production was always a Broadway event.

"I suppose you see him now and then?" was Una's second venture.

"Every week," announced the column conductor as she tucked away her notebook.

Una, even before she met the shrewd gaze of the older woman, felt it would be foolish to beat about the bush.

"Could you get him to read a play for me?" she questioned.

"Whose play?" was the quick and guarded inquiry.

"Frank Frendel's," Una explained, puzzled by a passing qualm of constraint. "It's a natural for a producer like Tadesco."

"So *that's* what Frendel's fishing for!" observed the case-hardened lady of the press. "And where do *you* come in?"

"I intend to star in it," announced the younger woman, with a decisiveness that made the narrowed eyes regarding her widen a little.

"Says who?" was the cynical query.

"I intend to have Tadesco say so," was Una's unruffled rejoinder. "And he will, once he sees the play. I'm wondering if you couldn't let him know he wouldn't be altogether wasting his time on me."

The immediacy of that attack seemed to call for an answering immediacy.

"I might," asserted the other, "for a consideration."

Una, confronted by that frankness, decided that nothing was to be lost by placing her cards on the table. She explained her interest in *Eden in the Afternoon*, outlined her intentions, and agreed to the calmly stated terms of her venal-minded intermediary.

"I'm no miracle worker," the latter announced. "But we'll see what a bee or two in the Caliph's bonnet will do. He'll be more interested, of course, once he knows Weinert wants the play. They always sidle closer when there's a nose in the trough." Then the astute lady paused, arrested by an afterthought. "What'll happen if the Caliph likes the play and doesn't like you?"

"If he takes the play," said Una, "he'll have to take me. And I'll show him I'm strong enough for a star part."

"It'll take a bit of showing, as I know him," observed the worldly-wise gatherer of theatrical crumbs.

But Una had her own plans as to that. In pursuance of those plans, after Frendel had sent her two slightly worn and pen-amended copies of the script, she devoted many hours a day to a study of the latter half of the third act, the act where Christina's outburst swept up to a final climax and stood a challenge to all Una had ever seen or learned of acting. She memorized the lines and marked her rises and crosses; she worked out what impressed her as appropriate business; she tried her voice at different pitches and experimented with different deliveries; she appraised each gesture and change of expression in her pier glass.

She brooded over the character she was portraying until she felt she was that character in the flesh, until her throat tightened with suffering and actual tears of distress dimmed her eyes. If that momentary thickening of the voice disturbed her she found consolation in remembering the dictum of a director who had once said: "Nothing succeeds like sincerity." And above all things she wanted to be sincere. She even found herself repeating the lines of *Eden in the Afternoon* in her sleep.

When she finally had a twice-postponed luncheon with Frendel at the Algonquin she found him unexpectedly quiet and withdrawn. He said that he, too, had been busy; he was finding so many loose ends to knot together before he sailed.

"I'm sorry you won't be here," she said in an effort to bring a little happiness to his hound-sad eyes.

"For what?" he asked, with a new sharpness in his voice.

"For *Eden in the Afternoon*," she told him.

He did not answer her. But his prolonged study of her face left her a trifle uncomfortable.

"I'm afraid I'm disappointing you in some way," she ventured out of a silence she neither relished nor understood.

He shook his head from side to side, with a condoning smile that was quite without mirth. Then he surprised her by asking one of his own enigmatic questions.

"Do you think Lamb's Chinaman was right in burning down his house to roast the pig?"

It was Una's turn to study her companion.

"I don't quite get the point," she finally admitted.

"It's just as well," he admitted with a sigh. "But I still say you are a very lovely lady to look at. I'm beginning to feel, in fact, that you're rather like our trailing arbutus. To the eye you are tender and soft and delicate, but the roots under all that flowery spread of fragility are surprisingly tough."

If she detected an accusation in that, an implication of hardness, she wrote it down to the discovery that he had found her unresponsive to the advances of the predatory male. And he knew, she suspected, that she always would be.

"You think I'm hard, underneath," she protested. "But I'm not. It's the kind of work I'm in that makes me seem that way. It shuts you off from so many things you'd like to do—and like to be."

He smiled at the note of regret in her voice.

"To reach the peak," he said, "you have to travel light."

"No, you really travel heavy," she contended. "You have to put on armor plate, or you don't last long; not in this sort of battle. You have to protect yourself behind a shell of what may look like selfishness. But you can still have a friend or two in the world. And I hope we're always going to be friends."

"I was hoping for something more," he said with a disturbing solemnity. Into his eyes, as he looked at the oval face with the shadows just under the cheekbones, crept a morose sort of pity. "But it won't be there, I know, until you get this stage madness out of your system. That, naturally, is always going to come first. For a while, at any rate. But you can't and won't weigh down those small shoulders with armor plate all your life."

That statement startled her a little, for Ruthven, in a different way, had once said much the same thing to her. She would be different, this second counselor was telling her, only when she was ready for the boneyard. And her revolt against that was both prompt and instinctive.

"It's not a madness," she cried. "It's something I've just got to do. It's my life work, exactly as writing is your life work, writing that's taking you to the far side of the world when I was hoping you'd be here to help me with *Eden in the Afternoon*."

If he wrung happiness from the reproof in her voice it was not a lasting happiness.

"As I've already told you," he reminded her, "I've laid my egg there. I'm merely the author. And authors, after the *accouchement*, are only an encumbrance."

It was his tone more than his words that brought her questioning eyes up to his face.

"You're not going to lose interest in your play?" she said with a flutter of anxiety.

"*You'll* take care of that," he answered with an acid intonation which even his commiserative smile was not able to unedge.

Una, in the days that followed, wondered why her talk with Frendel should leave her vaguely depressed in spirit. She was even more depressed when she found that military regulations prevented her from saying good-by to him when his ship pulled out. That sailing, she was told, was in convoy, with no definitely announced hour of departure. But, since she had heard such things were customary, she sent him by special messenger a hurriedly assembled hamper of books and cigarettes and candied fruit. She had no knowledge whether or not they were ever received. But she wrung consolation from the fact they had been sent, along with a note thanking him for all he had done for her and protesting, no matter how engrossing her work, it was going to be centered on making his play a success.

Just how centered it was on campaigning for that success was evidenced by the quickness of her response when the plump and bustling Ida Matthewson brought her the news that Tadesco had been intrigued into a promise to look over *Eden in the Afternoon*. His final surrender, the lady of the press intimated, had been brought about by a timely whisper or two along the grapevine circuit of Broadway to the effect that a second *Easiest Way* was somewhere in the offing, a whisper which the ubiquitous Ida had herself assiduously dispersed along the gossiping trails of theaterdom.

Una could feel her heart quicken at the news. But her ally, conscious of the luminous glow that crept into the rapt hazel eyes, dropped a warning by the way.

"The Caliph'll read your play," she warned, "but that doesn't mean much. And don't nag him if he's slow. He's as tricky as they make 'em. He'll try to fool you with that country-parson mildness of his. But

underneath, remember, he's as hard as steel. And you've got more than a play to get to first base with."

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"I mean you've got yourself to sell to the old boy. And since we're on that subject, you ought to have an agent."

"I've never had an agent," asserted Una.

"Well, they help," contended the other, "especially if you're going into the big time." The shrewd eyes grew more estimative. "And while you're waiting for the death sentence you ought to have a press build-up, a quickie or two to let the local nabobs know you're New York material. Time's short, of course. But if you want some stuff planted where it'll do the most good I can swing it—at the usual rates."

Una, without quite knowing what the usual rates were, found it expedient to accede to that suggestion. She was thinking about the best way of getting Frendel's script into Tadesco's hands.

"Then the sooner you get a wad of new photographs the better," her new field agent was saying. "Glossy prints and unmounted, remember. And I'll be hatching something hot enough to carry them across."

There seemed a sordidness about it all, with its deceits and obliquities, that brought a cloud across the skyline of Una's happiness. But newcomers and beggars, she remembered, could not be choosers. And her first line of trenches had already been won.

"Should I mail that script to Mr. Tadesco?" she questioned, her mind once more on the main issue.

Miss Matthewson gave this a moment's thought.

"No," she decided, "let me take it in to the old boy. That'll give me a chance to sprinkle his desk top with a tear or two of joy over him getting such a jewel of a play." Her laugh, as she rose to her feet, was curt and quiet. "He's not the only actor on this island of hams."

"You must know him pretty well," ventured the newcomer to the tangled fields of Rialto politics.

"I've come to know him," Miss Matthewson acknowledged, "about as well as you'd ever know an off-stager who play-acts around the clock. But he sure knows his business." Her repeated laugh was still curt and quiet. "And you seem to know yours."

"But you've never seen me act," ventured Una, uncertain as to the other's meaning.

"I'm not talking about acting. That's up to the Caliph. I mean you rather know what you're heading for and intend to be on your way."

"Do you hold that against me?"

"No, my dear, I don't. I take off my hat to you. I've seen too many of the weak sisters fall by the wayside, in this bright-light business where there's always a nice kind hand to help you on the toboggan. What's more, I think I'm going to like you. As Frank Frendel told me, you've *got* something. There's a light inside, somewhere, that kind of shines through, if you get what I mean."

A look of gratitude softened the abstracted hazel eyes.

"You'll never know how that helps."

The veteran of the press promptly brushed all threat of emotionalism aside.

"Oh, I guess you'll usually have a helping hand hovering over you. You're made that way."

"They don't always help," demurred Una.

"Well, let's wait and see if the Caliph is going to join the ranks," Miss Matthewson called back from the doorway.

Una, in the next few days, fortified herself for a long wait. But one week later, when she put down her script to answer the telephone, she found Ida Matthewson on the wire.

"You've rung the bell," was the triumphant message that came in to her. "Tadesco wants you at his office tomorrow at two."

Una could feel her heart start to pound.

"Then he's read the play?" she questioned, doing her best to control her voice.

"He didn't go into that, my dear. It's not his way. But he wants you there tomorrow at two. And two means two, remember."

Una stood silent, absorbing the full import of the message, the message that was bringing small tingles of gladness up and down her spine.

"Did you get what I said?" demanded the voice on the wire.

"Yes, of course," Una answered. "And I'm so glad. And so grateful!"

"Well, you seem to have won the first round. So get busy and give him a haymaker."

"A haymaker?" repeated the puzzled outlander to whom the language of Newspaper Row was still a foreign tongue.

"Yes, send him to the mat with some of that inner light I was talking about the other day."

"I hope he likes me," murmured the foolishly happy fame-seeker.

The other's characteristic curt laugh came over the wire.

"He will, my dear, if he feels you'll make good cannon fodder for his next season's campaign. But here's a tip before the shooting starts. Are you listening? Well, pin this in your hat. If you *do* click with the Caliph, just sit back and say this to yourself every morning: 'I'm going to take from that man what I wouldn't take from God, if the old buzzard will only pull me under his wing!'"

XXVI

The inner waiting room of the Tadesco offices where Una made her carefully timed appearance at precisely five minutes to two was not like other theatrical anterooms along Broadway. It seemed soft and cushioned, with an oriental rug on the floor and an equally oriental-looking secretary at a glass-topped desk, with upholstered chairs instead of the customary morguelike benches, and with portraits of earlier stars beaming competitively down from their heavy gold frames on the wall.

The occasion, Una knew, was both crucial and momentous. But no outward signs of nervousness showed on that flower-like face to which stage life had long since imparted the gift of inner control. She sat patient and passive, as a set-designer hurried in with a scene model, spoke briefly to the low-voiced secretary, and passed in through the door that shielded the Caliph from a clamoring outer world. She waited until the set-designer reappeared and a lank and yellow-faced man, who made Una think of a more youthful Jim Sayles, presented himself at the sacred portal and entered and again reappeared, bathing Una in an indifferent stare as he passed out. Then the desk phone rang and the equally indifferent secretary announced that Mr. Tadesco would now see Miss Carberry.

The renewed trill of the desk phone seemed like an off-stage sound effect to Una as she made her entrance, her entrance into that inner office which impressed her, with its muffling rug and its muffled lights, its black oak antiques and its busts and portraits and cabineted bijouterie, as more like a stage set than a place of business. But her attention was centered on the figure in the carved oak fauteuil behind the dark-wooded desk, the white-headed and white-collared spare figure in its contrasting black clothing that struck a note of the clerical, contrasting in turn with the Lydian softness of its surroundings.

Tadesco neither rose nor spoke as she advanced toward the carved oak throne. His mind seemed to be on other things as his abstracted fingers tugged at the one longer lock of white hair that swung tassel-like down the wrinkled brow, to be pulled at as habitually as an embarrassed sailor might pull at his cue.

His caller forced a smile and held out her hand. He disregarded that friendly proffered hand for another moment of silence. When he finally and

reluctantly let her fingers clasp his own soft fingers his gaze wandered off to the bust of Edwin Booth above the opposite bookcase. Una had the impression that she had been holding a fish in her hand. It accentuated her secret contempt for the air of voluptuousness about both the man and his environment, a contempt stemming from a startlingly white statuette of a nude Sappho that stood out like a splash of white in the rose-shaded dimness.

Tadesco, still sitting in sultanic silence, motioned her into a chair. Then, for just a moment, the slumberously alert eyes obliquely regarded her. But that wavering glance of appraisal, quite without approval or disapproval, left Una with the feeling that her clothes were failing to cover her.

"You're younger than I expected," he said with cold-lipped deliberation.

"It's a defect," Una retorted with unexpected spirit, "time seems to correct."

That unlooked-for show of spirit seemed to surprise him out of his lethargy. He emerged from abstraction and with almost contemptuous fingers tapped the blue-covered script that lay on the desk before him, murmuring as he did so: "*Eden in the Afternoon*."

Una waited for his next move. For years, she remembered, he himself had been a player of stage parts.

"I understand you control this?" he said in an indifferently hardened voice.

"It's my play," she affirmed, unconsciously hardening in the face of his own unexpected hardness.

"You didn't write it," she was curtly reminded.

"But I happen to have all production rights assigned to me," she smilingly explained, "and the author's power-of-attorney to handle it as I see fit."

Tadesco's glance at her was one of opposition grudgingly touched with admiration.

"And you want it produced?"

"I intend to have it produced," she answered with carefully achieved calmness, "just as I intend to play the part of Christina."

That flash of steel brought a countering flash of steel.

"What makes you think you could?"

"I *know* I could."

The Caliph sat back in his chair and tugged at his frontal dewlap lock of white.

"But how'd you make *me* know it?"

The calmness of the query nettled her a little.

"By going through the last part of the third act for you."

The wrinkling movement of the other's forehead was almost a wince.

"You mean now? And here?"

"Why not—if you're interested in the play?"

He riffled through the pages to the third act, frowned over a page or two, and turned to his desk phone.

"Send Warson in," was his curt command.

Una was conscious of a newer light in his eye and newer alertness in the monastic-looking body. But she herself chose to register indifference by glancing about the memento-strewn office that seemed so much like an astrologer's den. She remembered the story of how one of his stars, in a fit of temperament, had smashed a goodly portion of those precious souvenirs of past successes.

Warson, who proved to be the same lean and yellow-faced stranger who had passed Una in the waiting room, quenched his cigarette before approaching the Caliph.

"You know these lines, of course?" queried the maker of stars.

"Naturally," answered Una, refusing to be chilled by his coldness. She stood silent as Tadesco handed the script to the man called Warson.

"Read Phillip, starting at the top of page twenty-seven there. Don't walk it; read it."

"O.K.," said the younger man, his eye already on the written lines as he backed away.

If Una had faltered about any such impromptu support her earlier fears quickly vanished. Warson, she sensed, must once have been an actor. For, coming cold as he did to the text, he startled her by the spirit he put into his lines, by his instinctive professional response to sleeping words of print that

had to be given wings of feeling. Instead of being a hindrance, he was a help to Una in slipping into the mood she felt the part demanded of her.

She lost herself in that mood. She imagined the picture-strewn wall in front of her to be an immense audience and the rug-edge to be a row of footlights. She caught fire from that fancy, and held nothing back. She was at the bar of judgment, and she could, she knew, make good only by giving her unshirted soul to the task before her.

She both feared and expected that Tadesco would stop her, from time to time. But there were no interruptions. She even caught new courage from that discovery, sweeping on to a finalé that piled up like a wave and through its own mounting passion descended again into a sobbing trough of anguish.

She had learned what audience response was to an outburst like that. It was the sort of thing that had always brought its answering thunder of applause, its rewarding acclaim from a sea of upturned faces, its staccato clapping of appreciative hands.

But on this occasion there was no applause. When she dropped into Tadesco's Rachel chair, still panting and quivering a little from her exertions, she even wondered at the silence. She felt no approving hand on her shoulder; she heard no expected murmur of approval. Even her yellow-faced colleague, without so much as a spoken word, had tossed the *Eden in the Afternoon* script on his chief's desk top and taken his departure, lighting a cigarette as he went.

When she turned and looked up she saw Tadesco sitting at his desk, his face buried in his hands. When he declined to speak she uttered a quaveringly interrogative "Well?"

"*It stinks!*" ejaculated the man at the desk.

Una knew the sensation of a world crashing down about her ears. The word itself was abhorrent to her, for all its latter-day vogue with back-stage workers. But more abhorrent was the charge of incompetence it carried home to her.

"What makes it stink?" she indignantly demanded.

"*You* do," was the cruelly prompt reply. "You mug it. You miss everything by a mile. No, don't stop me. I *know*. It's the stuff they eat up in the sticks. But Broadway would lean back and laugh at it."

Una rose wearily to her feet. The tragic look in her eyes gave Tadesco his first moment of apprehension.

"Oh, it's not all your fault. You've got something. But I've just been going over your record. That road work's got you twisted up and tumbling over the shortcuts. It's all wrong. All *wrong*! And what's more, the act's written wrong. The whole approach calls for a pole-vault end. But it's only a two-foot hurdle. And even then you don't make it."

Una stood digesting her defeat. And as she did so she remembered Ida Matthewson's advice about taking from Tadesco what one wouldn't take from God.

"Could I ever make it?" she asked with an abrupt new humility.

The Caliph sat regarding her for a full minute of silence.

"I think you could," he finally acknowledged, "if you're ready to work as I'll want you to work."

A little bird stood up on Una's heart and started to sing.

"I'll work!" she cried with a note of intensity that brought a nod of approval from the man so meditatively pulling his forelock. It was a long time, he was thinking, since he had seen the luminous and animal-like glow that he detected in the eyes so hungrily resting on his face.

"You'll have a lot to unlearn," he said as he reached for the play script. "And it won't be easy."

"I'm not afraid of hard work," averred Una, still swept by tingles of triumph, even though it stood a qualified triumph.

"And there'll be a lot of things to take up," Tadesco added. "But not today."

The valedictory note in that disturbed her a little.

"But you'll produce *Eden in the Afternoon*?" she exacted.

The Caliph's face remained as expressionless as a mask. He let a torturing moment or two intervene before his answer.

"I think so. Yes, I suppose so, on certain conditions."

"What conditions?"

"Well, that you agree to the contract I draw up. And that you work out the way I want you to work out." His movement seemed almost one of impatience as he flattened the opened script with his soft white hand. "I'll have to rewrite that third act, of course. And patch up the first; and fill in that hole in the second. And that'll mean naturally a cut-in on the royalties."

Una had accepted Tadesco's earlier disparagement of the play as an adroitly timed effort at oriental bargaining. He was, she remembered, both wary and experienced. He was still a dictator of destinies. He still had the whip hand. But she too had known her ups and downs in the matter of bargaining. And when she saw that something was being definitely taken away from her, and from the author who believed in her, she was quick to register a protest.

"Frendel may not care to have his play changed," she said with a new firmness about her curved lips.

That statement brought a spark of fire to the face that had been so much like a mask.

"Frendel! What does he know about it? You want a success, don't you?"

"Yes, I want a success," Una admitted even while she felt she was in the midst of conspiratorial forces which she was not able to combat.

"Well, when your author friend has rattled around in this game for fifteen or twenty years he'll know what goes and what doesn't go. You've got to leave it to me. Absolutely! You've got to believe in me, first and last. For if you don't do that, if you can't do that, we'll both be wasting our time."

Una, when her gaze locked with the Caliph's, caught for the first time some inkling of that inner force which burned deep within the flabby black-clad figure enthroned behind the desk that had been her bar of judgment.

"I believe in you," she said with a tremulous meekness that was new to her.

XXVII

By the time the last arguments were over, the last concessions demanded and granted, and a much amended contract finally signed, Una came to understand just what it meant to be taken under David Tadesco's wing. If there were moods and moments when she felt like an old-time slave who was being sold down the river she could always find consolation in the thought that she was at last on her way to becoming a star.

That promised transfiguration, however, involved many unexpected alterations in Una's mode of life. Among other things, the Caliph insisted that she should move into a more resplendent hotel and patronize a more illustrious *couturière*. She was at all times to conduct herself with dignity, essay no excursions into radio or the movies without her manager's permission, surrender to no pleas for soap and face-cream testimonials, and attempt no press-promotion that did not originate in Tadesco's own bureau.

That bureau, in fact, swung quietly into activity even before the *Eden in the Afternoon* rehearsals began. There were many hours with photographers, many conferences with costumers, and many experimental seances with hairdressers. To these she submitted in silence, if not with satisfaction. But she refused to submit to the suggestion that she discard her own name of "Una Carberry" and adopt a stage name more euphoniously fitting to the figure of tradition into which Tadesco's press agent was transforming her. She would agree to no such interment and resurrection. She felt sufficiently disembodied when she found herself the talented daughter of a San Francisco musician better known in the capitals of Europe than in the cities of America, a deep student of Shakespeare and Ibsen, and a lover of country life who preferred growing Picardy dahlias to the blare and noise of Broadway night-life.

That reference to rural life made her think of William Ruthven. When a batch of especially good photographs came up to her, she picked out the one she liked best and mailed it on to the maker of plows.

Ruthven sent back a carefully written letter, thanking her for the picture and explaining it was already in a silver frame on his desk. With his letter he sent, in turn, an enlarged snapshot of his Elmwood Avenue home. On the lower edge of it he had written "The Boneyard!"

Una studied this picture with much care. It was a large, many-windowed house with wide verandas, partly screened by maples and beeches and elms. If it looked provincial in its commodiousness, with its parklike lawns and its iron fountain and vine-covered pergola and its weather-vaned garage of red brick showing through a row of silver birches, it also looked homelike. She found something appealing in its air of permanence, with the flat sunlight on its many-angled side walls of fieldstone crowned with cedar shingles. And beside the anomalous porte-cochère stood Ruthven himself, in light flannels, with a Great Dane resting its nose in his hand.

Una grew to like that picture. She had it framed in contrasting dark morocco and gave it a place of honor on her dressing table. And quite often, in her brief moments of leisure between trips to the Tadesco Theater and back to her hotel apartment, she would study it with smolderingly abstracted eyes. She found herself oddly susceptible to the sense of peace that seemed to dwell in it. She fell into the habit of turning to it in her moments of greatest worry and weariness. She came to find something companionable in the sunny cedar-shingled façade, the shadow-dappled lawn, the solemn dog so adoringly regarding the solemn figure in its over-jocund flannels. She even found something vaguely tranquilizing in it.

She had need of that tranquilizing note in the new chorus of interests that surrounded her. She may have felt that her long-looked-for day was about to arrive and she may have wrung a natural enough happiness out of the discovery that she was becoming a person of importance. But that happiness was neither deep nor enduring.

For from the day Tadesco finally assembled his cast and started in on his rehearsals, Una, even with the goal discerned, discovered that the ascent was not going to be easy. As he had so bluntly told her, she had much to unlearn. And he seemed determined to eradicate all that her hitherto wasted years had taught her.

She had picked up rumors enough of the Caliph's ways, of his mumbo-jumbo jargon about "punch" and his madness for tempo and timing and rhythm, of his mule-driving methods and his hair-pulling temperamental explosions, of his manhandling violence and his cursings and rantings and his frenzied outbursts of diabolism that lashed the overtaxed spirit of its victim into its last paroxysm of speed. She stood, from the first, ready to submit to those indignities. She had long since learned to knuckle down to a director's authority. And, like so many of her fellow-workers in the theatrical world, her faith in Tadesco was almost a romantic one. As she had so quietly told him, she believed in him.

But she was not prepared for the campaign of humiliation with which he confronted her. He seemed intent on tearing her down and rebuilding her along lines entirely his own. He centered both his interest and his enmity on her, affronting her before her company, telling her not to whine, then shouting out that he preferred whining to yodeling, demanding to know if she had any idea what a "delayed take" was, asking if she thought those stained-glass postures would pull an audience out of its seats, or if a *derrière* remained the most expressive part of an actress's anatomy.

It was the climactic sequence of the third act that gave her the most trouble. Tadesco regarded the end of that act as the high point of the whole play, the explosive crescendo that was to blow them out of their seats, as he had a fondness for putting it. But Una seemed without the strength to give it the force he was demanding of her.

"Take it again," he would coldly command as she stood panting and perplexed by a dragging sense of inadequacy.

And she would take it again, very much as a quivering horse would approach a hurdle that was too high for its leap. She would clench her hands and breathe deeply and shake with an inner eagerness to do a master's bidding. But it was never enough.

Yet at each trial, she saw, the hurdle was becoming less intimidating. There were even times when she felt that Tadesco was suffering along with her, that he too hungered to see the obstruction cleared. There were other times when she felt he was demanding the impossible, that his interpretation of the part was all wrong, that his build-up was too frenzied and flamboyant. She even began to wonder, in her moments of weariness, if the game was worth the candle.

But those moments became fewer and fewer. For with reviving energy would come a newer determination to make the grade. And more and more often Tadesco would take her aside and talk to her as though she were a school child who had disappointed an overdriven teacher in her classwork. In those quieter interludes she would tell herself that what she had accepted as a campaign of humiliation was actually a patient and painstaking schooling in a new type of stagecraft, that she was merely an instrument from which a master hand was trying to exact the final music of art.

Back on the empty stage that faced an empty auditorium, however, Tadesco promptly became the driver again. He backed her away from the familiar hurdle and goaded and lashed her on to a fresh effort. When she failed or faltered he made her try again. And yet again. And yet again.

When she sank, exhausted and sobbing, on the dusty stage floor, Tadesco let her have her cry out. He smoked a cigarette, had an argument with his scenic artist about the third-act set, and went leisurely down to his aisle seat in the dim-lit auditorium.

"Let's get back to work," he called out as Una gathered her still shaking body up from the dusty floor boards.

And once more the familiar words were rehearsed and the familiar act was attacked.

Only once did Tadesco slip out of his role of the slave driver preoccupied in getting the last ounce of action out of his chain gang. On a deserted stage after a five-hour rehearsal he was enumerating to his new star certain defects in her second-act love scene with Phillip.

"And don't let that flat-eater mask your face. I want it seen." He stood contemplating her for a moment of silence. "I want it seen," he repeated with a note of discovery, "because it can be a damned sweet face when it wants to be."

To that, however, she was too tired in mind and body to react.

"And you've got to warm up on that clinch with Phillip. It goes dead from the moment he puts an arm around you."

"What must I do?"

"Do? Why, shake the icicles out of your system. Get a little fire into the thing."

"But I'm never comfortable, the way he holds me."

"That's your fault, not his. Look, let him bend you back a little. Like this." The Caliph put one arm about her waist and one about her shoulders and flexed her straining torso so that her face was forced back. His own face was close over hers. Her recoil from the softness of the pressing body in black was instinctive. It took her back to a disconcertingly similar scene when Signor Muselli had imposed a personal caress on impersonal coaching.

"No; don't look away. And don't back away. Take it. Get alive for once in your life and take it. Be human and like it."

She was conscious of the altering tone and the quickened breathing even before she felt the soft arms tightening and the lips close on hers. It was not

a stage kiss. And she announced her knowledge of that by the grimness with which she freed herself.

Something close to hate showed on her tired face as she backed still farther away and wiped her mouth.

"Was that necessary?" she said with a low-noted intensity that left him silent. It was his shrug and his casual tug at his forelock, in an all too obvious effort to translate a misstep into a triviality, that released her slowly mounting anger.

"You may have pulled that with the others," she cried out, "but you'll never pull it with me."

His gesture was tartly placative.

"All right; all right! But you'd better save that acting for work hours."

His withdrawal into the impersonal was suggestive of an angler reeling in his fly after a fruitless cast.

But there was no further casting across those troubled waters. And if Tadesco made no reference whatever to that side trip into the pools of uncertainty he balanced the ledger, during the ensuing week, by putting his recalcitrant star through her paces with a ferocity which she accepted as more punitive than professional. But always, from that day on, the Caliph remained a less impressive figure to her.

When Ida Matthewson dropped in at Una's hotel apartment she was quick to see the strain on the shadowed face and misted weariness about the hazel eyes.

"You don't look as happy as a woman who has the world by the tail should," observed the lady of the press. She glanced around the luxurious-looking room and let her gaze come to rest on a scattering of unmounted photographs that covered the reading table. "I hope all this isn't going to give you the big head."

Una flung down her one hundred and sixty-eight sides that began to look like a cluster of worn-out bank notes.

"Not with Tadesco rubbing my nose in every line I read," was her embittered cry.

Miss Matthewson smiled her understanding.

"You're not the first, my dear. But you'll forget all that when the drums and cymbals start to sound!"

Una, as she wondered if it would indeed prove true, also wondered why her none too happy eyes should turn and rest on the morocco-bound picture of William Ruthven and his wide-lawned home so far away in the sticks.

XXVIII

It was claimed by the younger and more voluble members of the *Eden in the Afternoon* company, who liked to talk of Dantchenko and Katchaloff and Stanislavsky, that Tadesco rehearsed too much and too mechanically, imposing his will on them until they were automatons and, once pace and rhythm and business had been established, allowing no slightest hairline deviation from the established order.

But Una, facing the ordeal of an opening night on Broadway, did not altogether agree with them. She could not escape the sense of strain that invaded the entire group, the back-stage anxieties and apprehensions that quickened pulses even while it put a soft pedal on any pretences of casualness. Yet she was grateful for the armor plate of fixed habit in which she now stood encased. It gave her a sense of security which had stayed with her through a long and moderately triumphant dress rehearsal, when she realized she had become almost phonographic in her reading of her lines.

She had not entirely lost all feeling and knowledge of the character of Christina; her carefully predetermined movements were far from those of somnambulism; but her spoken words seemed to come less from her own body than from the air about her. The clock had been wound up, but the sound of its ticking was strange to her. She was, too, conscious of a sort of dual personality, one acting and exulting and suffering, and one sitting somewhere above her, aloof from her real self, wondering why she was wasting her life on a treadmill of words to amuse people she had never known and would never know.

"You shuah is cool as a cucumber," observed her new mulatto maid as Una submitted to the ministrations of an equally new dresser who was inspecting and adjusting the ivory-white gown for the opening garden scene.

"I'm only pretending to be," Una said with a glance in the mirror fringed with her opening night messages. Since her circle of acquaintances in the city was still small these telegrams were not numerous. She had hoped for a cable from Frendel, but none had come. Tadesco had surprised her by sending her orchids, along with a card curtly inscribed: "Earn these!" She was touched by two dozen carnations and a note of good wishes from Andrew Hempel, together with a slightly faded line drawing he had done of her many years before.

But what moved her most was the humorously lavish box of gardenias, arranged in the form of a horse-shoe, from William Ruthven. There was also an unexpectedly long telegram. If it was more sedately worded than those from her few fellow workers who felt the occasion to be the usual excuse for extravagance, she consoled herself with the thought that the feeling behind the guarded words was in this case genuine.

She had a sense of solitariness as she stood on the stage and heard the muted murmur of the audience through the still lowered curtain, a sense of being alone on an island over which a tidal wave of enmity might sweep her off to oblivion. It was a fixed rule of the Caliph's to allow no one in the wings as mere spectators. So she felt doubly alone as she heard the established Tadesco gong sound its three warning signals and knew by the hush that the house lights were being dimmed.

She was more worried than excited as the curtain went up and revealed the familiar stippled coliseum of faces that faded off into galleried dimness. For she had never fully agreed with Frendel and Tadesco about that first-act opening, the costly and lavish garden scene which the Caliph craftily regarded as "an ice-breaker," a purely pictorial prelude to waken and warm up an ennuied urban army with a hunger for novelties.

That elaborate garden may have been impressive in its scenic beauty, but it gave Una no build-up. It was against all rules, so far as she knew, for a star to be on the stage when the curtain went up. It was staking too much on a mere picture.

That it was an impressive picture she gathered from the silence of the house as, without a spoken word, she continued her pantomime of quietly clipping glowing cotton roses from a painted canvas wall overtopped by a dark green hedge that accentuated the summery whiteness of her gown. In one gauntleted hand she held a flat flower basket, in the other a pair of garden shears. The seconds went by, with only the sound of the shears snipping the flower stems.

Then suddenly out of the silence came an approving burst of handclapping from the audience, a burst that rose and prolonged itself until Una knew the Caliph had been right. He had broken the ice for her with a splurge of mere physical beauty. He had shocked them into attention by one of his structural audacities. And the promise that he had won their good will, that they were not hostile to her, took a load off Una's heart as she slipped into her lines and action got under way.

By the time the well-oiled machinery swung into motion, wheel by neatly adjusted wheel, pinion by pinion, with the precision of a jeweled watch where only the outer case was inconsequential, the new star became conscious of that mysterious alchemy with which a responsive audience can transform a responsive cast from mere artisans to artists. The thought that they were accepting her, that they liked her, was a help to her. The expectant hush as the double-threaded web of attention and sympathy was slowly woven together across the footlights told her the first act was going better than she had dared to expect.

There was one perilous moment when her gown caught on the back of a rustic chair, threatening for a breath or two to rip apart the delicate fabric of illusion that had been pieced together with so much labor, labor where every cue and cross, every gesture and intonation, every laugh and simulated tear, had been plotted and studied and finally perfected. But the dress was freed, the nervous flutter that went over the audience died away like a dying breeze, and the interlocking cogs of dialogue ground on to a triumphant end of the act.

The applause when the curtain came down was so loud and prolonged that it surprised her when she heard the Caliph ordering the house lights on. She had been taught never to shorten a laugh or smother a "hand."

"Why does he do that?" she whispered to Phillip.

"The wily old fox! Can't you see? He's holding them down for his third act. He doesn't want them to tire themselves out too soon."

"But a curtain call is a curtain call."

"Not with the Caliph. Watch him cut 'em just as short on our second curtain. And hold everything for that third-act explosion. *That's* when he drops the match in the powder keg!"

Phillip's prophecy proved true. Even as she hurried down for her "change," with whispered cries of approval from the company as she went, she heard the repeated quick order to throw on the house lights. And it reminded her that the one ordeal of the night was still ahead of her. When she was startled by a wave of weariness that went eddying through her body, once her dresser had finished with her, she dismayed that dresser by lying flat on her back for three minutes, lying corpselike with her hands at her side as she silently prayed for strength. Then, when her call came, she took a deep and quavering breath and made ready for the hurdle that had always been so hard to mount.

She knew she had cleared it, even before the curtain had come down, even before she saw the nod of approval in the tormentor and Tadesco's odd gesture of triumph as he lifted his arms and linked his plump fingers above his head, moving them back and forth as though he were shaking hands with himself. She realized this only mistily, for her body was moist and her knees were tremulous. The toxins of fatigue left her momentarily dizzy and indifferent, indifferent even to the thunder of applause that came sweeping in over the footlights.

It was, she knew, the thing she had waited and worked for, had hungered and toiled for. Yet it left her wondering why she could wring so little sweetness from it.

All her experience of the past told her that a curtain call was being demanded of her. And she mechanically adjusted herself for the response they were asking for, the footlight appearance she had earned. But Tadesco peremptorily waved her back. He was craftily sustaining that applause, stretching it out to the last attenuated ripple of hand clapping as the curtain slowly opened and closed like a great maw.

"The old boy knows how to milk it," Una heard a voice behind her exclaim.

But the Caliph still waited. He waited until a note of impatience crept into the repeated cries of the audience and his star had a repeated feeling she was being cheated out of something she had earned. It was not until the diminishing waves threatened to flatten out into silence and the Death Watch of the daily press was hurrying out along the empty aisles that Tadesco reached for Una's hand and led her out on the stage. He gave the appearance of coming reluctantly, hand in hand with a reluctant star. But the response, even before he reached the footlights, was instantaneous and explosive. He merely bowed and with his free hand tugged at his white forelock as he solemnly awaited the predetermined lowering of the curtain.

He waited in the wings, apparently perplexed by the continuity of the applause. Then he faced his new star.

"Take it alone," he commanded.

Una, leaning limp against a wing frame, shook her head.

"Take it, you fool," he prompted. "And tell 'em you love 'em!"

It was habit, and fixed habit alone, that kept her steps steady as she moved out on the stage and advanced toward the footlights, facing a new thunder of applause. For they were on their feet by this time, clapping and

cheering as voices from the gallery de-sexed her by shouting "*Bravo!*" through a background tumult of whistling. When a dowager in a stage box unpinned her corsage and tossed it at the feet of Broadway's new star that gesture was followed by other flowers from other women in near-by orchestra seats.

Una waited until the tumult subsided. She waited as a punch-drunk ring fighter waits for the bell that is to end some ghostly battering on brain and body. The occasion was not new to her, but the conditions were different. This, she remembered, was New York. New York and success. But never in all her life had she felt so tired. The one thing that sustained and saved her was habit, the conditioned reflex in emergencies that made little demand on intelligence. She recalled, in time, Jim Sayles' injunction about always showing six teeth.

The smile she forced was an abstracted one, but it brought the cry of "Speech! Speech!" from different parts of the house. And when silence settled on the wearied and waiting audience her second response was more automatic than consciously willed.

"Thank you. Thank you all," she found her voice saying in that fluty and liquid-noted coo which experience had taught her was the correct intonation for gratitude when the gratitude was not quite expressable. "I can never tell you how much this means to me, and to all my company and to Mr. Tadesco." She waited for the reawakened hand clapping to die down. "And thank you again, dear friends. For after this reception I know I can call you friends."

The applause that confirmed this modest claim, the applause from tiers of faces utterly unknown to her, left her for the second time that night with a ghostly feeling of solitariness, of being alone in a world overhung with gray vapors of weariness. It made her farewell bow of thanks a singularly humble one. The spectators who saw how a trickle of tears was washing her make-up off accepted them as tears of gratitude. But both Tadesco and the back-stage toilers who went joking and singing to their dressing rooms knew well enough they were tears of fatigue.

"You shuah made a hit this night," ventured the new star's mulatto maid as Una sank limply into a chair. "You shuah histed 'em out o' their seats, Mis' Carberry!"

Una felt gentle hands gently disrobing her.

"The Caliph's saying we'll run right through the summer," observed her dresser, after shaking out the last-act gown that would have to go on the

ironing board before the next performance. “I suppose you’ll be waiting up with the rest of them for the morning papers?”

But Una did not wait up for the morning papers. She tumbled into her waiting taxicab and wound through a phantasmally remote city to her hotel, where she had no memory of undressing and tumbling into bed, the bed that held her tired and lonely body for twelve long hours.

XXIX

The success of Tadesco's production did not come home to Una during the first week or two following the opening of *Eden in the Afternoon*. Una was too preoccupied in improving her reading of certain lines and making those minor amendments to stage business which the Caliph suggested; she was too busy acknowledging telegrams and scribbling off notes of thanks and being interviewed by reporters and feature writers. Since she had been surrounded by an aura of scholarship, these interviews sometimes took the form of experimental interrogations by undergraduate editors and sometimes became inquisitional at the hands of women's-page reporters on the quest of romance. One of her interviewers was a clergyman, determined to unearth moral values in Christina's deferred happiness. Another was a radio commentator who wondered why so attractive a woman should be so unwilling to release the minutiæ of her love life to a million waiting fans.

Next to the exactions of being so repetitiously photographed she found the most tiring by-product of celebrity to be the giving of occasional talks, previously and carefully prepared, to women's clubs and schools and culture groups. She was not indifferent to the applause and the request for autographs which followed these talks, just as she had not been entirely indifferent to her opening night press notices and the more leisured Sunday résumés less stippled with misprints. It neither annoyed nor elated her when one critic proclaimed that she was far from flawless as an artist but that even with a sense of character still chaotic she could make her acting always moving and occasionally masterful. She nursed no resentment when the dean of the Rialto scribes explained how, if judged by mature artistic equipment alone, Una Carberry could never claim first place among Tadesco stars, though she seemed to outdistance all of them in flashes of convincing realism and a memorable poignancy of natural emotion.

It was not unpleasant to see that printed praise, just as there was a November-sunlight sort of warmth in seeing her pictured face creep like a pandemic across the continent. But as her clippings accumulated she reacted less and less to them. When she found the old intoxication no longer there she told herself it was because she was always so tired.

This, in one way, was quite true. Her role was a heavy one and her hours of freedom were few. She soon realized that she had to conserve her

strength, telling herself that she was not a woman, but a tool, to be kept in perfect order for its own esoteric ends. So her rest hours were rigidly budgeted and all her energy was carefully saved and centered on stage expenditure. It was so jealously guarded and treasured, treasured with a miser's care, that she neither smoked herself nor permitted smoking in her rooms, after finding that tobacco was not good for her throat, the throat that was always guarded and watched, standing, as it did, her final instrument of expression. On clear days she made it a point to walk twice around the reservoir in Central Park, disguised under a veil or sun glasses, breathing deep and lamenting the fact she hadn't a dog for companionship, a dog like William Ruthven's Great Dane.

For she would return from those walks with an accruing sense of solitariness, to dine early and alone and hurry on to the theater, where in place of friendship she found and accepted the diffused affection that the world gave her over the footlights. On matinee days she usually ate dinner in her own dressing room, demanding silence for half an hour while she relaxed on a couch which she insisted on having installed there, a narrow couch upholstered with black velour that always made her think of a coffin. Then the theater would come to life, assembling players would stop for letters in the mail slots under the call board, make-up would be spread out before mirrors, the call boy would announce "Half-hour" and "Fifteen minutes," the familiar gong strokes would sound, and the familiar old routine would begin in the familiar old way.

If there were times when she felt habit was closing too closely around her she made an effort now and then to fight free of the strait jacket. This impulse came to her one clear and opalescent afternoon, when her midweek matinee was over, and she decided to escape her many-odored dressing room and walk to her hotel.

As she stepped out through the stage door she was startled to find William Ruthven waiting for her there. She was even more startled to find that the mere sight of him could bring a quickened beat to her heart.

"I meant this as a surprise," he said as he confronted her, hat in hand. "But the surprise is all on my side. That doorman of yours wouldn't let me in."

She told him, with a flutter in her voice, that all stage doormen were mental ghosts who had died on their feet.

Ruthven's warm big hand clung lingeringly to hers as he gazed down into her face. She was afraid he was going to tell her she was looking tired,

disturbed by the afterglow of compassion in his eyes.

But his tone was light as he explained that he had never expected to be a stage-door Johnnie.

"I've just seen your performance," he went on. "And you were wonderful, simply wonderful. I'm afraid it's left me just a little afraid of you."

"That," said Una, "is the one thing I don't want you to be."

"Then I'm going to be bold enough to ask if you won't have dinner with me. I'm here for a convention, but I side-stepped my first committee meeting to see you do your part. And now I know nobody in all the world could have done it better."

It may not have been phrased as the urban sophisticates would phrase it, but it was sweet to her ears.

"I'd love to dine with you," she told him, "if you'll let me make it light and early."

"Of course," he was prompt to agree. "I'm at the Commodore. It's rather commercial and not your kind, I'm afraid, but I feel sort of homelike there. Do you mind?"

She found herself bold enough, in an odd new mood of relaxed nerves, to tell him she'd be satisfied with an automat so long as she had him next to her. That, as he sat beside her in the taxicab, brought his quick glance about to her face.

"It means so much," she qualified, "to see an old friend."

"I can still be that, I hope," he said without undue enthusiasm.

"Haven't we a compact to that effect?" she reminded him.

"I'm glad you haven't forgotten it," he said, "now you're so famous. Oh, Chesterville isn't New York, of course. But we see the papers now and then. And I've clipped enough about you to fill a scrapbook."

She asked him about Chesterville, and the Great Dane, and the stock farm, and the home on Elmwood Avenue.

"You love New York of course?" he ventured as they threaded their way through the evening tumult of traffic.

"Not always," Una answered. "But it's the center of things."

"It's too big for me," confessed the man from Chesterville. "I've always felt you can digest just so much city, about the same as you can digest just so much beef. And in a place as big as this you're just a number."

Una told him that was precisely why the city was such a spur to effort; it made you fight to rise above the deadly anonymity of the mass; it made you want to be something more than a number.

"And you've done that, of course," he acknowledged. "And I'm beginning to see it's about the only thing that could make you happy."

"Not too happy," Una demurred.

Still again he searched her face.

"I'm not sorry to hear you say that. It brings you a little closer to me in some way. I don't want to be classed as a rube. But I like to know who my neighbor is, and get a look at a green field now and then. And take time out from the fight to sit back and make sure what all the shooting's about. It doesn't make you famous, and I suppose it sounds provincial. But it has a comfortable sort of feeling I don't seem to get in this maelstrom."

"We can't always afford to be comfortable."

"But what's the use of it all, if we can't get a little happiness out of it as we go along?"

Una proffered no response to that, disturbed by a passing conviction they belonged to different worlds. For she was not unconscious of her Chesterville friend's heightened pride as a briskly obsequious headwaiter took them in tow and paraded them through the crowded and murmurous dining room where Ruthven seemed to have a business friend or two.

It troubled him that she ate so little.

"You're not in love?" he questioned with a levity that had a background of solemnity.

"That's one of the comforts I haven't time for," was her half-laughing reply. But it was a reply from which he seemed to wring a vague comfort all his own.

He sat silent a moment, regarding her with grave eyes.

"I can't talk love the way your Phillip does in the play," he quietly affirmed. "But there's just one thing I want you to know. I've always loved you. I'm afraid I always will. I can see there's no room in your life for me now. But if your feeling ever changes about this stage work of yours, if you

ever decide the game isn't worth the candle, I want you to know I'm out there waiting on the side lines."

"Waiting for what?" was her low-toned query.

"For you," was his equally quiet-noted reply.

Her impulse was to reach out and clasp the hand that could feel so warm and strong, so comfortably sustaining. But that surrender to the emotional seemed a luxury that must be denied her.

"You're too good," she said, trying to keep the quaver out of her voice. "Too good to me," she amended, "and to good for me."

"I'll take my chance on that," was his quick and honest protest. And it was his warm hand that reached over and covered her small one.

"And it would be a terribly long wait," she compelled herself to proclaim. "There's a saying along Broadway that when Tadesco has a success he milks it to the last drop." She glanced at her wrist watch and found that her time was up. "And I've got to be getting back to the treadmill."

"How many weeks will your run be?" he asked on their way back to the theater. He was holding her hand, a little hungrily, and she made no effort to release it. She found something consoling in the strength of the big body that swayed against her with the swaying of the taxicab.

"Weeks?" she cried. "It will be months and months. It will be all year anyway, and perhaps two years."

"And then?"

"Then another year on the road."

She could see the anxiety that crept into his eyes.

"It won't be easy," he finally observed. "For you, I mean. A part like that must take something out of you. And I hate to think of you flung to the lions for a Roman holiday."

She wrung happiness from his concern, even though she laughed a little at his phrasing.

"The lions will discover I'm tougher than I look," she said as their taxicab drew in at the curb. "And here's where we have to say good-by."

She had thought, she had even hoped, that he would kiss her. But he merely stood, hat in hand, with his other big hand extended. She would have

to be good to him, she told herself as she felt the strong fingers possess hers, always and in every way she would have to be good to him. Yet it would have to be in a guarded way, for the adoration that came from this misguided friend of hers was, she knew, as much born of delusion as would be the adoration of the audience she was about to face.

"Thank you for being so good to me," he startled her by saying.

"No, I must thank you," she protested. "You may not know it, but this has been the happiest evening I've ever had in New York."

That confession made him breathe deeper.

"Then I'm going to ask for something more," he said as he bent over her. "May I write to you, write say once a week?"

"I'd love nothing better," she answered, swallowing a second ghostly disappointment. Still again, as she waved good-by to him from the stage door, she told herself that his response to her was a romantic one, as romantic as her own girlhood passion to be a great actress. It was not founded on reason. It was, in a way, almost foolish. But a loyalty like that was something to keep alive. It was like a light at the end of a dark road; it was like an open fire in the cold waiting room of Time.

It came as a surprise to Una, with her make-up utensils duly spread out before her, that she should be humming as she rubbed in her foundation cream. It was equally surprising to Azalea, her mulatto maid.

"That's the fust time I've heard you sing, Mis' Carberry, since this show opened!" exclaimed the mystified Azalea.

XXX

The star of *Eden in the Afternoon* swung back into the routine of her eight weekly performances with the inner contentment of a child who remembers that she has a chocolate bar hidden away. But it was only a chocolate bar, she kept reminding herself. It was a sweetmeat and nothing more, a sweetmeat that might melt away with too much handling. It would be a mistake, she argued, to confound it with the sterner issues of life.

Yet she was glad to get her weekly letter from Ruthven. They were companionable and personal and lighter in tone than she had expected, and she made it a point to see that none of them remained unanswered for long. When he spoke of his sister's serious illness Una ordered flowers to be delivered at the Elmwood Avenue home. When he mentioned the milk record of his new Holsteins on the stock farm she wrote back that the world couldn't have too much milk, since she herself was drinking three pints a day and had gained a pound and a half in three weeks' time. She thanked him for the florist's box that came with fortnightly regularity. And on her birthday—which she had thought was well concealed—she had to thank him for a baroque pearl pendant that came along with his roses, though she did not confess that, as she held the small jeweler's case in her hand, she had half feared and half hoped it might contain a ring.

But these, she knew, were only eddies in the sterner current of life. That current went on, with monotonous regularity. Autumn merged into winter, and winter softened into spring, and except for renewing complaints from Tadesco that the whole company was going stale in its tracks the wheels of Una's success went mechanically on. She remained immured in her work. It left her with the feeling, at times, that the world was moving on and that she herself was in some way remaining static. It brought her a vague but slowly accruing sense of restlessness.

It was this restlessness that turned her thoughts more and more to the country. She even ventured out on a Sunday excursion into New Jersey, where she looked over a number of Morris County farmhouses that were on the market. The craving for a home, for something with an air of permanency, was growing stronger in her, nourished by the thought that most of her restless life had been spent in rooming houses and hotels, good

and bad, in sleeping cars and day coaches, in gipsylike wandering from town to town.

But she found nothing that suited her, though she felt, now that she was a woman of means, she might afford the luxury of a suburban retreat where she could grow ruffled petunias and snapdragon and drink the sunlight between her own herbaceous borders. For she was, by this time, a woman of means. Early penury had imposed a habit of frugality on her. She remembered the days when she had sought out those drugstore luncheonettes where soup-crackers were served free with a cup of bouillon and she had added sorely needed calories to her meager diet by surreptitiously thickening her five-cent cup of coffee with half a dozen spoonfuls of sugar from the counter bowl. Unlike the improvident fellow workers of the stage all about her, she saved her money, intent on building up a backlog for the future, the unknown future of the merchant in romance that could prove so unpredictable.

She permitted few intrusions into her personal affairs. She had no desire to be known as "a mixer." But, since she now belonged to the public, her life was far from a solitary one. And with the gradual widening of her circle of acquaintances she made it a point to be agreeable with persons of importance. When pulchritude was found to be a stimulus to patriotism and Broadway actresses were conscripted for the sale of war bonds she not only stood ready to make a noonday appearance before the Sub-Treasury Building in Wall Street but she also made contacts with divers men of finance who were not averse to passing on a friendly tip or two as to stocks and market movements. All such information she verified, as best she could, before taking advantage of the tip. She kept telling herself that she was not mercenary, and she refused to be miserly. And any pleasure she took in contemplating her accruing cache of stocks and bonds, she inwardly insisted, was based on a human enough hunger for something stable in a world of change.

When Tadesco suggested a cut in her salary, which he contended was now a ruinous one, she startled him with the quiet claim that at the end of their first year's run it would have to be increased.

This brought an explosion from the Caliph that lasted half an hour and a new strain in their relations that lasted for weeks. She was a robber and an ingrate, he shouted with his plump hands in the air. There were a dozen women who could fill the role as well as any Carberry vampire, and before he'd be bled to death he'd get a Christina who'd listen to reason.

Una endured that explosive tirade, just as she endured his later sullen silence, with an untroubled brow. The play went on, the box office continued to clear the rack, and night by night the same third-act finalé brought the same roar of applause.

Then the even tenor of life was disrupted by an echo out of a world that had grown mistily remote. It was broken by a phone call that took Una to the receiver with a hairbrush in her hand. And over the wire came the voice of Ida Matthewson.

"Have you seen today's paper?" that anxious voice was asking.

"Yes, of course," Una answered, without explaining that her inspection had as usual been restricted to the theatrical columns.

"Then you know about it," said the oddly agitated Ida.

"About what?" questioned Una, her brush no longer weaving through the glinting tresses that cascaded over her bare shoulders. Her voice was not light, for in those tresses, that morning, she had discovered her first gray hair.

"About Frank Frendel," was the slightly delayed answer. "How he died of enteric fever in that Algiers hospital yesterday."

"I didn't know," gasped Una, slow to absorb her shock. A wave of remorse swept through her as she remembered how little this man, to whom she owed so much, had been in her thoughts of late.

"But you knew he had a wife?" Ida suggested with purely pretended casualness.

"Yes, I knew," Una admitted. Then realizing that admission carried an apparent note of inadequacy, she added: "She will have to be found."

"She *has* been found, my dear. Our bureau got busy and dug her up in Buffalo, soda-jerking in a corner drugstore."

This did not add to Una's happiness.

"She'll not need to do that much longer," announced the star of *Eden in the Afternoon*. "The Frendel royalties have been held in escrow here. And they will, of course, go to her. They must. No, they are not in my control. I insisted on that from the first, as Tadesco very well knows. And I'll see that he doesn't forget it."

When the star of Frank Frendel's drama sank into a chair and stared into space her heart was heavy with remorse. Yet it was not she who had been

unfair to that vanished friend, she contended; it was Fate. He had been close to her, in a way, but he had asked for the impossible. He had opened the door to her success, but of his own volition he had passed out through that door and put a world between them. Yet it struck her as odd, as she sat remembering things he had said, clever things that sometimes puzzled her, that his death should seem to bring him closer than he had been during the earlier months of his absence. As the memory of that accepted remoteness weighed on her more and more she even argued with herself that their silence had not been based on selfishness. The giving, it was true, had all been on his part. And now it was too late to make amends. He was dead.

Una was not happy that morning.

She was so immersed in a mood of despondency as she dressed that she disregarded the sound of a tentative tap on her door. When the tapping became a knocking, and almost an impatient knocking, she turned from her dressing table and saw that the door had been opened and a strange figure was coming unannounced through it.

It was an aged and tremulous figure, oddly suggestive of both inward and outward dilapidation. It was the figure of a cronelike old woman, decked out in faded and factitious finery that accentuated her decrepitude. The wrinkled face, so plastered with make-up that it looked like a painted mask, wore an expression of audacity touched with slyness. When the flaccid mouth smiled and the smear of lipstick widened until it looked like a wound it showed pale and toothless gums strangely suggestive of infancy.

"You'll have to pardon me, dearie," cackled the intruder. "But I just had to see you."

Una looked at the ridiculously dyed hair, that must have been white a quarter of a century ago, at the bony fingers that clawed at the soiled fichu half covering the scrawny throat, at the mocking sweep of ostrich feathers that must have done duty on the footlight *grandes dames* when Union Square was still the center of theaterdom.

"Who are you?" demanded the younger woman.

The sternness of that challenge brought an indignant stiffening of the creaking old figure.

"I am Verlyn Loubelle," she said with a back-throw of her unsteady old head.

"I never heard of you," protested Una, knowing only too well what was ahead of her. She had seen too many of those reliques of an earlier day

wheedling at dressing-room doors and panhandling along the Great White Way.

"That, dearie, is because you never knew the theater when it was still the theater. Otherwise Verlyn Loubelle would mean something to you, as it did to London and Gotham in the good old days."

The charge of youth left Una untouched.

"How did you get up here?"

A leer of craftiness crossed the painted old face.

"I told them, dearie, that I was your aunt, and that you were awaiting me. Verlyn Loubelle your aunt! Ha, that ought to step you up a bit!"

"Why should it?" asked Una, detecting an odor of gin from the flaccid old mouth.

The intruder took three strides into the room and turned, with her withered shoulders back as far as they would go.

"Because a prince of the royal blood once asked for my garter," she cackled. "Because I once played with Willard and Tree and Irving and Mansfield. Because for eleven years I starred in Shakespeare and was the idol of the provinces. And, what's more, I was reckoned the best Cleopatra who ever trod the boards. Ha, you ask me who I am? Me, who once played Electra and Antigone and here in your own country once faced ten thousand people in the Berkeley Greek Theater. And not only that, young lady. For when I was important enough to be taken to Athens and when I stood on their ancient stage at Epidorus, stood on that empty stage and gave my favorite speech from *Iphigenia in Aulis*, my friends high up in their hillside seats said they caught every word of it. Every syllable came up to them." She must have detected derision in the quiet smile of the woman being barricaded by that mumbling and toothless oration. "You're thinking, of course, it was because those old Athenians knew something about acoustics. But I knew, and my good friends knew, it was because I had learned how to give wings to words."

As the star of other days planted herself in an armchair and mumbled on about her triumphs at the Old Vic, Una turned wearily away and continued with her dressing.

"What is it you want?" she finally asked over her shoulder.

That query brought from the other a long and somewhat incoherent story about how a new part was waiting for her, if only she could get hold of a few

dollars for a denture, a new denture that would bring her voice back. She wasn't as young, she confessed, as she used to be.

"I wouldn't dispute that," said Una, beginning to wonder why her visitor was hanging a weight of lead about her heart. Yet this wraith out of the past still wanted to strut her stuff, still carried the brand of the old mad fever.

"You're young, dearie, and you wouldn't understand," Verlyn Loubelle whimpered. "You've got them at your feet. You're a Tadesco star. You're at the top of the ladder. But you won't always be there, remember. There'll be others crowding up all around you. There'll be others crowding up and you'll wake up and see there's no place left for you to go. You don't and won't want to go down. You'd try not to go down. But it's Time takes you down. And when you're still up there, my beauty, you ought to be kind to the fallen."

Una crossed to the desk drawer that held her pocketbook. Her tired face remained expressionless as she counted out three bills and turned back to the expectantly poised old demi-rep.

"This, I imagine, will go for gin," she said as she held out the bank notes. "But I hope it'll make you happier than you've made me."

The clawlike fingers closed on the bills. And Verlyn Loubelle with her haul in her hand, had no qualms about hastening her departure.

Una stood watching her as she went creaking and mumbling to the elevator.

"So that's what Time will do to me?" she said with a faint chilling of the blood as she closed the door. But she could not shut out the memory of the faded and foreboding figure that had thrown a shadow across her day.

XXXI

Ruthven's weekly letter usually came to Una on a Saturday morning. If she smiled at the businesslike regularity with which those letters arrived she was also inwardly disturbed by the occasional impatience with which she awaited them. They seemed to open a door in the prison walls of her work and give her a glimpse into a new and sunnier world.

When a week end came and went without a letter with the familiar Chesterville postmark she tried to console herself with the claim that Ruthven was away on a business trip. But that hiatus left her wondering. She was tempted to send him a lightly worded telegram of inquiry, of inquiry tinged with reproof; but a newborn timidity not without a shadowing of fear kept her from taking that step. She disliked the thought of digging down for her hidden chocolate bar and finding it had melted away. It would be too much like exploring a treasure chest and discovering it to be empty.

She drew a breath of relief when, on the following Saturday, the familiar postmark on the familiar envelope presented itself. But instead of a letter that envelope held only a newspaper clipping. At the top of the clipping was a one-column picture of William Ruthven, a picture that looked so obituarial it brought her heart up in her throat. Her suspended breathing began again when her eyes fell on the inscription under the cut. For there she read:

> WILLIAM RUTHVEN, MANAGER OF THE CHESTERVILLE PLOW & TRACTOR WORKS, ANOTHER VICTIM OF THE IMPLEMENT TRUST. HE FOUGHT THE COMBINE AND IS FORCED OUT OF BUSINESS.

He wasn't dead, she realized. But calamity had overtaken him. She sat down and read, with knitted brow, the entire clipping. Yet she continued to stare down at the printed words as though the message they carried were something that could percolate only a little at a time into her consciousness. She could not follow the intricacies of the Trust movement which had awakened the ire of the local editor, which had resulted in the obliteration of Chesterville's ever-energetic manufacturer. But it meant that Ruthven had met with misfortune. He had been driven to the wall. And the one thing near and dear to him had been taken away from him.

Una, as she paced the room and from time to time stared out over the city that was shrouded in driving rain, realized she was not a woman of the business world, that the affairs of commerce had always been foreign to her. Nor was she a woman of impulse. But she had always prided herself on her practicality. She had always flattered herself with the claim that she could meet emergencies without crayfishing and quibbling. Yet, in the past, all her actions and interests had centered on herself, on her own personal advancement, on the long climb up the ladder Verlyn Loubelle had babbled about. To mount that ladder, rung by rung, one had to be self-centered and self-seeking. It was a grim sort of economy that grew out of the bitterness of the fight. As Frendel had said, one had to travel light. But it left one very much alone in the world.

Yet here, she told herself, was something more than an emergency. It was a final and forlorn chance at restitution. Instead of being helped, she could at last be a helper. She could sacrifice her own interests for those of another. She could go to Ruthven's rescue.

The more she thought over it, that rainswept day when the city seemed a wilderness of misted roofs and walls, the more she felt she was face to face with a great opportunity. A clear trail to her one goal of vindication seemed abruptly blazed through a thousand entangling timidities and hesitations. She was even possessed by a feeling of gratitude. For at last, she acknowledged, all her sordid life of self-advancement could be redeemed; all her years of self-seeking could be put to a purpose and be given a meaning. That loyal friend's compact with her could be made something more than one of mere sentiment. She could go to him, at last, without any thought of imposing on his own generous impulses.

"I'll show him," she murmured as she stared at the photographed figure standing beside its adoring Great Dane.

For this new turn of events, she claimed, was taking them both down to bedrock. And it had been an illusion, a trick of the theater itself, that had first brought them together and exacted from him the promise that was merely a promise. But now she could meet his wave of generosity with a wave of her own. He had once crowned her with laurels that didn't belong to her; he had insisted on attributes which were of the stage and not of herself. And since he found happiness in an emotionalism of his own, since her glamor to him seemed to derive from the footlights, she could now confront him with the most appeasingly theatrical gesture that could be conjured up. She would be the Good Fairy of romance that no longer lived in a world of everyday work. She would step in and save him from his enemies.

The thought of that rescue filled her with a joyous calm that left her unhurried as she made inquiries about trains and packed her overnight bag and dispatched a telegram to Ruthven. Her message read:

> CAN BE IN CHESTERVILLE MOST OF SUNDAY. WILL YOU MEET ME AT TRAIN ARRIVING TOMORROW MORNING AT NINE ELEVEN. AS ALWAYS
>
> UNA CARBERRY

Her next move was to make a painstaking appraisal of her available money. The largeness of the sum surprised her a little. But she found consolation in the thought that a well-feathered nest could sometimes take the sting out of life's coldest wind.

When she drove to the theater in a cab, for her matinee performance, she went through a city drenched in rain to which she remained oblivious. She made up with a preoccupation that was new to her. She faced the customary crowded house and went through the customary speeches and gestures and movements with half a mind on her work and half her mind on far-off things. It did not depress her when her third-act curtain response was a full minute shorter than usual. It did not greatly disturb her when she heard the company's blonde-headed ingénue observe to old Pop Warton: "What's wrong with Her Highness today? She sure let Phillip crab points enough in that curtain scene! And if trance work like that doesn't put ants in the Caliph's pants I'll eat my new summer bonnet!"

That prognostication was not wide of the mark. For Tadesco, pacing along the dressing rooms like a zoo manager in front of his cat cages, intercepted Una at the door with a star on it. He confronted her with fire in his eye and his stop watch in his hand.

"You saw what you lost on that curtain hand," he said with an accusatory parade of the timepiece.

Una's shrug was an abstracted one. It made the sultanic fury burn brighter.

"And another sample of sleep-walking like that," he stormed, "will take more than your following away from you. It'll take your part!"

"Not until my year is up," she quietly reminded him, remembering her contract. "And I don't care to be shouted at."

For she knew, even before her door swung shut between them, that she was beyond the periphery of his anger. She was to him, now, merely a machine, an orange to be squeezed dry and discarded when a new season brought new fruit to the ceaseless press.

But neither Tadesco nor all his carefully cogged machinery for amusing the ennuied could squeeze her dry. She even wondered, as she went automatically through her evening performance, if all the heroics on which she was wasting her days, if all the saccharine emotions and all the raging and storming about passion weren't merely a tawdry and tinsel imitation of actual life. For a night's journey away from their footlighted bombast, she remembered, was a brave and big-hearted man immersed in tragedy not born of make-up and painted flats.

That thought recurred to her as she caught her midnight sleeper and lay in her berth listening to the familiar *clickety-click* of hurrying car wheels pounding on rail joints. It took her back to old times, to her homeless and hectic years on the road. The thought that those years might repeat themselves, that Verlyn Loubelle's intimation of autumnal decline might come true, filled her with a vague misery. Her only escape, her only refuge, she felt, was Ruthven. Yet she had never confided to him how much she needed him, how essential he might be to her happiness. He might have found friendship in other quarters, consolation at other hands. He might, and this would be doubly tragic, have experienced some inner and personal change of feeling. She had done nothing to guard against that. She had made little effort to keep him from growing away from her, from climbing up out of his valley of illusion to the sanities and lucidities of everyday life.

That sense of uncertainty stayed with her even as she ate her hurried breakfast in the diner and had a last anxious look at herself in the mirror of the car when she heard the words: "Chesterville—Chesterville next stop!"

Her heart was beating faster than she approved of as she followed the porter out to the car steps. The rain had ceased falling during the night, and from this fact Una extracted a ghostly comfort, forlornly insisting that a symbol of clearing problems lay in the clearing weather.

Her pulse may have been rapid but her disciplined face was calm as she stepped down to the station platform and stood beside her bag, a little dazzled by the sunlight.

Then she saw Ruthven.

She saw him waiting there, with a waterproof hung over his arm, startlingly close to her, almost at her side. The tragic fortitude that comes

with last chances slipped away from her and a tear or two blurred her vision. Yet she discerned that his face was quite serious and vaguely altered.

It had lost a little of its ruddier look. It seemed leaner and longer, touched with anxieties and austerities that promptly sent a tremor of fear through her tired body.

"I'm so glad," she found herself saying, "so glad you're here."

"I'm glad *you're* here," he quietly responded as he shook hands with her.

Una's heart slowly sank. There was something so noncommittal in that handshake, something that was so fixed and sorrowful in his face. She stood blinking at him for a moment or two before she realized he was dressed entirely in black.

"Has—has anything happened?" she asked with a second tremor creeping through her.

His smile at her alarm was kindly and condoning.

"My sister died ten days ago," he said taking her bag.

"And you never told me!"

He was leading her to a small and mud-splashed open car that seemed emblematic of his lowered station in life.

"And you never told me!" she reprovingly repeated.

"I didn't want to burden you with things like that," he answered, "when you had so much on your mind. That's why I didn't write."

He saw her questioning gaze fixed on the low and travel-worn car as he swung open its splattered door, the car that seemed to stand a confession of collapsed hopes.

"I'm just back from the farm," he explained. "The rain did things to my side road." He waited until she had seated herself, still disappointingly remote. "You'll come up to the house, of course?"

But she declined, at the moment, to answer that question.

"Why didn't you tell me?" she demanded.

He seated himself beside her and closed the door.

"That would not have been generous," he contended.

"But surely——"

She stopped, faltering on the cry that surely she had a right to be told. But that claim, she remembered, might seem a foolish one.

"Wasn't the news about my being a down-and-outer enough?" he asked with a laugh that seemed more defensive than mirthful.

"You're not a down-and-outer," she cried back at him, "and they'll never make you one."

He sat studying her face, smiling a little at the embattled hazel eyes. Then his smile vanished.

"You look tired," he said. And the dawning warmth in his voice was sweet to her.

"I am tired," she acknowledged, "terribly tired. And I'd like nothing better than an hour of two in the open air."

He nodded his approval of that.

"I'll show you some of our country. It's just had its face washed by an all-night rain."

They were silent, for some reason, as they threaded and rocked their way out through the suburbs to the open country, splashing through the pooled water that still freckled the road.

Una waited, she scarcely knew for what. But as hills and orchards and fat farmlands flowed past them the stranger from the city, who should have known a sense of peace, sat fighting back a blur of tears which she felt welling to her eyes.

"The play, I suppose, still goes on?" Ruthven asked out of the silence.

"It still goes on," she answered in a tone that brought his quick glance about to her. "And tomorrow night I'll be back on the treadmill."

"Treadmill?" he echoed. "You can't call it a treadmill when it's carrying you where it is."

"Carrying me where?" she wearily questioned.

"Why forward, of course," was his inadequate answer.

His inability to fathom her sense of frustration touched her with an untimely spirit of perverseness. That passing impulse of withdrawal, she suspected, had its base in feminine pride, in the dignity of womanhood trying to preserve its self-respect. But she felt tired and lonely, and the cry of

the body was stronger than the muted voice of the will. She felt, of a sudden, unutterably in need of a sustaining hand.

"Yes, it takes you forward," she admitted. "But I'm beginning to feel I'd rather go backward."

"Backward? How?" he asked with a direct and candid literalness that persuaded her she would have to be honest with him.

"To the boneyard!" was the cry that was on the tip of her tongue. But she found herself without the courage to utter it.

"Because *I've* been going that way?" he questioned.

She felt he was trying to say it lightly. But his thin pretence at valor sent through her a surge of pity that swept away the last of her willfulness.

"That's what I came here to talk about," she announced.

He failed to understand her.

"I know what it means to you," she went determinedly on. "I know what it *must* mean, to lose your business and see your life work taken away from you. And I came here to see that you get it back."

A lunge of the car flung her swaying body against his. The arm with which she steadied herself still clung to his.

"I can't drive if you do that to me," he said with a laugh that took the lines out of his face.

"Then don't," she said, still clinging to him.

She did not speak until he had parked the car on a grassy slope at the roadside. Her face was the more serious of the two.

"I know what you've lost," she said with the final candor of a final determination. "And I'm going to save you."

"Save me from what?" he asked, still smiling.

"From ruin!" she cried with a deliberate and bell-like clearness of tone that she refused to accept as a heritage of footlight speeches in the past. Yet her voice as she went on grew husky with a mingled agitation and humility. "You don't know how rich I am. I mean rich in money. And how I've wondered what I'd ever do with all those foolish savings."

"What makes you think they're foolish?" he asked, still a little at sea.

"I know they're not, now," she contended, no longer ashamed of the tear or two that was trickling down her cheek. "For now I can help you and show you that— —"

"Wait a minute," he interrupted, drawing away, the better to study her face. "What's this black cloud that seems to be hanging over me?"

"You've lost your business," she tremulously announced, "and I'm going to see that you get it back."

His questioning eyes softened as light came to him. He even laughed a little.

"But, my dear, I'm not ruined. They took over my works, of course. But you don't suppose I let them do it without being damned well paid for it? I'm not in the boneyard yet. They've even decided to cultivate local good-will by making me factory manager."

Una blinked and sat back, stunned by the unexpected. She knew the same sense of calamity that had possessed her when a collapsed balcony railing had once so abruptly killed her love scene in *Romeo and Juliet*.

"Then it was all a mistake?" she asked beginning to see that what had been meant for a crusade was turning into a mockery. Her impulse of generosity had been more than wasted; it had been made grotesque. Her help was not needed. Her pity was uncalled for. And she, the child of the theater, stood the victim of a theatricality.

"It was all a mistake," she huskily repeated.

Ruthven leaned closer.

"No, my dear, it was a revelation."

"Why do you say that?" she demanded.

"Because it's uncovered something I knew was there, from the first. It's shown me the softer side I always felt was hidden away somewhere." He lifted his hand and quietly forced her face about to his. "But the thing I can't understand is why you should want to do all this for me. Why did you?"

She drew a deeper breath and looked into the brooding and Lincoln-like eyes that seemed so kindly and sad and unsatisfied. But it was less the ardor than the honesty in those eyes that sent a slow warmth through her body, a warmth as consoling as the sunlight that bathed the rain-washed world about them. And honesty like that demanded an answering honesty.

"It's because I love you," she answered, quite simply, as she continued to look up at the solemn face with the eyes of uncertainty that made her think of an ill-used dog still wistfully anxious for kindness.

It was taking time, apparently, for the man beside her to savor to the full the meaning of the words. His smile remained melancholy as he turned in the seat and took her two hands in his.

"Do you know what that means?" he exacted, almost sternly.

She nodded her head, lost in a rain-dropped smile. For she knew, too, that life was something more than "Hearts And Flowers" on a muted violin, that it was foolish to look for beanstalks that led up to castles in the clouds. But under the wide wing of his kindness, she felt, she would finally know peace.

"It means giving up your life work," he was warning her, "and going back to that boneyard we once talked about."

"Perhaps I'd have a new life work," she found the courage to suggest.

He took a deeper breath, as though some last doubt might be fading away, and smiled down at her. It was a wintry and hesitating smile, like that of a man who was afraid he might be hoping for too much.

"But are you free to go back?" he asked.

"I could be, in seven weeks," she told him, thinking how different was this love scene from the love scenes she had enacted so often on so many dusty stages. "But do you want me?"

He laughed at that, quite openly.

"I've always wanted you."

If there was no rhapsody about it, she told herself, there was something better than rhapsody, something deeper and more enduring. For she was thinking, at the moment, how a veteran of the stage had once said the best acting came when the heart was warm and the head was cool. And this new role of loving and being loved would be like that, understanding and lucid and reasoned. But something a little deeper than that, she contended as she caught at the man beside her with a small cry of hunger, something with its sustaining human core of warmth and want. She was going to see that he was happy. She would make it her life work to see that he was happy. The end and object of her stage work had been to make people happy. But after this, instead of being spread thin over orchestra seats and galleries, it would be concentrated on one man.

"You don't know how I need you," she confessed with an entirely new humility in her voice.

"And I need *you*," he affirmed as his arms tightened about her. Then he drew back a little. "But you're going to lose your *Eden in the Afternoon*," he warned her.

"We'll work out one of our own," she said as she smiled up at him.

He studied her upturned face, startled both by its look of surrender and by the quick beat of the heart held close to his. It may have been the look of pathos on that upturned face, or it may have been his own perceptive chivalry, but something prompted him to refrain from kissing the still tremulous lips. Instead, still holding her close, he bent down and kissed her wet eyelids.

Her sigh of contentment did not escape him.

"And now you know where your home's going to be," he said as he looked about at an oddly altered world, "we'd better swing back and look it over."

She sat possessively close to him as they motored back to the sedate Elmwood Avenue house with its parklike lawns and gardens and vine-covered pergola. It seemed very peaceful there. And she was not ungrateful, she told herself, for that promise of peace, of Indian Summer peace. She found something reassuring in the sun-bathed walls of field stone just as she found solace in the cooing of the pigeons as they strutted about the lawn in search of seeds.

Yet a small thing happened to disturb her a little. For when Ruthven's Great Dane bounded toward them the sudden flap of many wings reminded her of the clapping of hands. It was a sound that had been a part of her life, the reiterated hand clapping of an admiring audience. It was a reminder of the older world that lay behind her brave new world. And always, she remembered, she would know her secret periods of unrest, especially as evening came on and brought the hour that for so long had meant the getting ready for stage work.

But that, she contended as the Great Dane leaned a friendly head against her knees, would surely pass away with the passing of time. She had been known, in that older world, as a good manager. And she would direct her household as carefully as she had once directed her plays. She would fight for success in this new field as she had fought for success in the old one. She would study her new part, and watch her entrances and exits, and do her best

never to fail this team-mate who believed in her, who stood so proudly beside her as she stroked his subjugated Great Dane. Yes, her one aim in life would be to make this man who loved her happy. And after so many years of seeking her own ends she consoled herself with the twilight claim that happiness might come to one while campaigning to bring happiness to someone else.

THE END