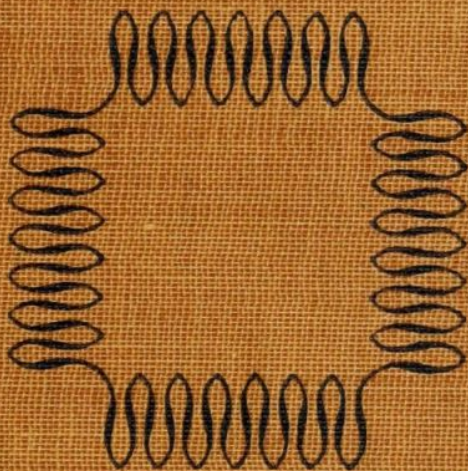


MILLIE



Donald Henderson Clarke

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MILLIE

By

DONALD HENDERSON CLARKE

Author of

Louis Beretti, In the Reign of Rothstein

The Autobiography of Frank Tarbeaux



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To
GLADYS

WHO THOUGHT ALL THAT AUTHORS WERE GOOD
FOR WAS WRITING — — UNTIL SHE MET ME

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Edward V. Ireland drew the jacket for this book

Betty Dietz read the proofs

*Evelyn Evans selected the pleasant Scotch
Roman type and the cover.*

*With friends like these—and Gladys for inspiration—who
couldn't enjoy being an author.*

D. H. C.

MILLIE

CHAPTER ONE

SIX hours after Millie Blake was born her father rolled into the big, mahogany-veneered bed, and tousled her mother. And after that, Millie sucked her mother dry, first one breast, and then the other.

Josie Blake related both incidents to Bridget Strong, cook for the Peases, next door, when they both were hanging out clothes the following morning, which was Monday.

Josie's brother, Jim Le Duke, told the boys at Parsons's Store, Monday night.

"Doc Blodgett was mad as a wet hen at Mike," Jim said. "He says to Mike, finally:

"'You ain't a hooman bean; you're an animal!'"

"What did Mike say?" asked Al Baker.

"You know Mike," Jim Le Duke said. "He grinned at the Doc, and says:

"'Honest, Doc, I wasn't plannin' it at all. I just went in there; and there was Josie lookin' hooman again. I kissed her once, and then I tossed the kid over in the crib. You didn't hear Josie kickin', did you, Doc?'

"And that's the truth," Jim Le Duke said. "Josie didn't kick. She told me about it, as if it was something to be proud of in the family; that, and the fact that that new brat of hers sucks her dry on both sides at every meal."

"Well," Al Baker said. "If Josie did kick, I guess she could handle Mike better'n anybody else. Mike's a powerful man, and there ain't no man around Willowfield that ain't afraid of him."

When Millie was older, she thought she remembered her father taking her from her mother and putting her in the crib. She even pictured in her mind the gesture with which Mike hauled off his boiled church-going shirt, and stepped out of his blue trousers.

The blinds were drawn in this picture and there was a smell of soap and medicine. A soiled towel was hanging half out of the crockery wash-basin, with blue windmills on it, companion piece to the pot and slop jar, which also had blue windmills on it.

Besides the medicine was the odor of leather, and hot iron, and burning hoofs and sweat, which she always associated with her father. He was the town blacksmith, and a hairy man, renowned for his feats of physical strength. Millie's recollection also included a hazy vision of her father donning his trousers, but omitting his shirt, and strolling out of the house and leaping the empty well, without even bothering to take his black clay pipe from his mouth.

This abandoned well, which was between the house and the smithy in the rear, was covered over with loose planks. When she was older Millie saw many men try to jump it from a standing start, but she never saw any one but her father succeed. Her own brother, Dan, broke his leg trying it.

Once her father had an infected hand, and Dr. Blodgett cut it open with a knife, and washed it all out in a bowl of water, into which he had first put some tablets that made the water bluish. Her father just sat and smoked his pipe, and talked with the doctor about Nellie, the doctor's roan mare, and about the likelihood of the new horseless trolley-cars ever taking the place of the stage line between Willowfield and Easton. She always could see, whenever this scene came up in her memory, the beads of sweat that had gathered on her father's forehead, so white in contrast to his weather-beaten cheeks. But there never was a wince of pain, nor even a blink of his clear blue eyes to indicate that the hand upon which the doctor was working was his own and not some one else's.

With this occasion Millie always associated the smell of aromatic spirits of ammonia. She had waked up to find herself lying on the horse-hair sofa, with the doctor bending over her, and her father grinning down at her.

"I should have known enough not to let her see all that blood," the doctor said.

"Pshaw! Doc," Mike Blake said, "a little blood never bothered a Blake one way or the other. I guess Millie must be hungry, and got a little faint."

Millie had red hair, and green eyes, and skin whiter and softer than any fabric ever devised by man. Aaron James, the town dullard, paying his customary call at the blacksmith shop, said to Mike Blake one day:

"Red is a danger signal when it's on a girl's head. The boys'll all be after her when she's to school, and the men'll all be after her after that."

Mike was gently rocking the bellows lever up and down with his left hand, as he thumbed down the tobacco in the black clay pipe in his right hand. He was in his undershirt as was his custom, and a fascinating ripple of

the great muscles which made his strength a byword in that part of the state followed his leisurely motions. His hair was thick and red. His moustache was thick and red and wide, sweeping like an old-time Sergeant Major's. And red hair lay like moss over the white skin of his vast chest. His eyes were blue and hot, but they rested in easy tolerance on the vacant features of Aaron James.

"Millie'll have nothing to worry about as long as Mike Blake is alive," he asserted in a matter-of-fact voice. Then, from the cavernous depths of his lungs, issued the only expletive of a simple giant, who had heard Doc Blodgett say that the Bible and Shakespeare contained all a man needed to know and who, since then, had devoted his spare time to those two fountains of wisdom.

"Lay on, MacDuff!" he boomed, and made his hammer bounce, and the hot iron ring, and the sparks fly.

Nearly every one who had had the privilege enjoyed watching Mike Blake at his task. Mike's boys loved better than anything else to help him fashion the shoes and shrink the iron tires and do the other odd jobs in hot metal which came to his shop.

The shop, with its glowing forge, and its smell of hot iron, and hot steam, and burning hoofs, was Millie's favorite playground from earliest childhood. And when she had watched her father work, and that great man suddenly tossed her up on his shoulders, which almost touched the clouds and were a million miles away from the earth, and strode with her up the road to the kitchen door, she dug her fingers into his hair, and kicked and screamed with joy.

Millie was four years old when she first came to the attention of the undergraduates of Willow College, after which the town was named, and from which it gained its fame abroad and most of its wealth at home.

Her mother, Josie Blake, was giving her a bath in a washtub in the kitchen one Saturday afternoon in June, when Mrs. Josephine Treadwell Pease, who lived in the big house next door, called to talk about child rearing and home-making. Mrs. Pease's son, Freddie, had green teeth, and the seat usually was out of his trousers. His mother was so busy addressing mothers' meetings, and talking at church gatherings, or collecting clothes for the heathen, that Freddie fell into the class of self-governed dependencies.

Josie left Millie with a towel draped around her, and hurried, drying her hands on her suddenly discarded apron, to open the rarely used front door and escort the stately, kindly, and loquacious Mrs. Pease into the still-more-

seldom-used front parlor, with its flowered carpet, enlarged daguerreotypes, family Bible, conch shell, stereopticon, bowl of dried rose leaves, plaster group of a family in a church pew, and musty smell.

Millie stepped out of the towel, and gave Dinah, her colored Mammy doll, a bath. Then, toting Dinah in her arms, she walked into the hall. In the hatrack at the front door was a green parasol, just left there by Mrs. Pease.

The green parasol hypnotized Millie. She laid Dinah down on the floor, and took the parasol. After something of a struggle she opened it. Then she picked up Dinah again, and tried to go through the door, which had been left ajar. As the parasol was small, she finally got outside.

It was a luxuriously warm June day, and Millie gave no evidence of noticing that she wasn't wearing any clothes—not even a hair ribbon. After looking up, and then down, the main street of Willowfield, she began to toddle up the street, which in that day was a dusty country road.

Her route led to the center of the town, about two hundred yards ahead. She was on the side of the road on which was the college, sitting sedately in groups of buildings of various architectural periods dating back to Revolutionary days: a glimpse of tidy lawns on which plump robins hopped and gray squirrels scampered, of trim hedges and clumps of landscaped trees musical with the voices of birds, and of the shining surface of College Pond where swans sailed as on a magic mirror.

On the opposite side of the road was Ridgefield's General Store, Booker's Tea Room, the College Pharmacy, the Post Office, the Willowfield Memorial Library, Hooker's Meat Market, Little's Barber Shop, Handy's Tavern, Stebbins's Livery Stable, and the Stage Station.

First human eyes to spy Millie belonged to an undergraduate. He stared for a moment; then stepped through a gate of the campus, and doffed his blue skull cap, embellished with the year of his class in white, " '96".

"How do you do, Princess?" he said.

Millie stopped, tilted the parasol back wabblingly, and looked up at him, big green eyes shining through moist red curls.

"I just had a baff," she said.

A dozen more boys, in caps, or bare-headed, had gathered in the instant.

"Good Lord!" said a voice, "she's the prettiest little thing I ever saw."

"I just had a baff," Millie explained to the new arrivals. "An' I just gived Dinah a baff too," she added, looking down at the bedraggled doll.

"Where are you going?" a voice asked.

"Is it far to the big woods where the fairies live in the trees?" Millie inquired, hugging Dinah. "My papa tells me about them," she added.

"Just wait till she grows up."

"Why, she's the best looking kid I ever saw."

"You'll never get nearer to a fairy than you are right now."

"Here, little girl, let me take the parasol and the doll for just a minute. That's right. Now just slide into this."

A boy pulled a big blue-and-white jersey over her head, and three pairs of hands were helping roll back the sleeves when Aaron James, who always was among the first at a fire, or a wedding, or a hog killing, or a funeral, joined the sizeable throng, and said:

"I told Mike Blake that he would have to keep his eye on a red-headed daughter. Nothin' but trouble ever came from a red-headed woman."

"That's right," said a boy. "She's the blacksmith's little girl."

"It itches," Millie said, squirming under the jersey.

"Land's sakes!" exclaimed Josie Blake, arriving, breathless, and scooping up Millie with practised hands and hugging her to her plump, corseted mother's bosom.

"Look at her makin' eyes at the boys," Aaron James said.

Next to her father, and in an entirely different way, Millie was fascinated by Aaron James. She used to go out in the potato patch with him, when he was picking bugs from the plants.

"Look, Millie," Aaron said one day. And he held up a potato bug.

"Look, Millie," he said again. And he put the bug on his tongue, and held his mouth open for a minute, and then closed it on the bug.

"I live on potato bugs," he informed the wide-eyed Millie.

Aaron gave her a hair from a horse's tail, which she put in a bottle of water.

"Keep it twenty-one days," Aaron told her, "and it will turn into a snake."

Aaron's hands were covered with warts.

"I got 'em from hop-toads," Aaron explained. "Don't you ever dast play with a hop-toad 'less you want warts too."

Aaron showed with crooked forefinger the exact spot in College Pond where there was no bottom.

"It goes right down to China," Aaron said. "You want to keep away from Chinamen," he continued. "If they get mad at you they put you on a board and iron you out like they do a sheet.

"You got red hair, Millie," Aaron said. "That'll make the boys go after you. Look out for the boys. They are devils.

"The reason city girls ain't got good complexions is because they don't have any cisterns in the cities. They get water out of pipes. Cistern water is rain water, and rain water makes girls have rosy cheeks. But the best thing for you to wash your face in is the dew off'n the roses in the morning.

"Don't you ever let the sun shine on your face," Aaron James cautioned Millie. "Red-heads are liable to freckle like your brothers. You allus wear hats. You hear?"

Aaron gave Millie a collection of birds' eggs; and he carved her initials on a snapping turtle.

"These turtles live to be more'n a thousand years old," he told her.

"Don't it hurt when you cut him?" Millie asked.

"Naw," replied Aaron. "It don't hurt animals to be cut."

"What makes a chicken squawk when you cut off his head, Aaron?"

"Don't the fool chickens run around after their heads is off?" Aaron wanted to know. "They can't know much when they don't know enough to lay quiet after they lost their heads."

Aaron was the most satisfactory companion Millie ever found. There was no question which he couldn't answer. He was the only human being Millie ever met in her life who knew everything.

"The sun is a ball of liquid brass, heated hot in the Lord's oven," he told her. "The moon is made of green cheese, and is run by the Old Man and the Old Woman."

Aaron was the only person who ever showed Millie both Old Folks of the moon.

"Lightning is God's thunderbolts, and thunder is Him roarin' and rantin'," Aaron said.

"Babies come from inside of their mothers," Aaron said. "There's some as'll tell you the storks bring 'em. But a baby lives right in its mother's heart till the time comes for it to be born. And little girls have to grow up and get married to have babies."

"I want to have two thousand babies," Millie said. "I love babies. And I'll have a million dolls, and keep a store, with licorish sticks, and licorish balls, and all kinds of candy."

"I'm going to have a store myself some day," Aaron James said. "I will have the candy for you for nothin' when you come in, but the ham and bacon and tobacker and sech will be for me."

"I love the smell of a store," Millie said. "Ooh! It makes my mouth water to think of it. I'd have a soda fountain too, and ice cream."

"I'm goin' to have them too," Aaron agreed.

Mike Blake used to lie down with Millie until she went to sleep. When Josie went in sometimes to get Mike while Millie was still awake, she clung to Mike.

"Please stay with me all night," she cried. "Why should mama have you all the time?"

"A body'd think the child was jealous," Josie said, scratching her sturdy sides in relief after taking off her corset.

"She likes me to be with her," Mike said.

"Sometimes I think she loves you best, Michael," Josie said, just before Mike blew out the lamp. "But she's a comfort after all the boys," Josie continued. "She is a loving little tyke, and a willing worker. You ought to see her cook, and her only eight years old. And she can sweep and sew and darn. And she's as neat as a new pin."

"And she's prettier'n any picture," Mike said. "And she's growin' up," he added. "She's gettin' to be a big girl."

"She'll soon be nine years old," Josie sighed. "I'm losing my baby."

In the morning, the Blakes had a pillow fight. Millie always was on her father's side. Dan, the oldest son, was married now, and lived over in Canterbury. And Pat, the next in line, who was twenty-four, and Tim, who

was twenty-one, had gone to the city. But Sam and Bill, the sixteen-year-old twins, and Jack, twelve, made it a good battle.

When Josie pitched in with the three boys, as she did sometimes, there was an extra hot time. Josie was on the plumpish side, but she was surprisingly strong and vital; and her contralto war-whoops represented a great deal more to her army than martial music. When every one was tired, except Mike, and it looked as if Mike, a great walrus in his cotton nightshirt, would win handily, Josie made a flank attack and started tickling him.

"Tickle his feet, Jack," she called, her black eyes flashing, and her black hair flying. "Tickle him, Sam. Tickle him, Bill."

Mike rolled and tossed and roared in helpless laughter, yelling, "I surrender. Quit it, Josie. Stop it, you little devils. You win. I give up. Ouch. Wow! Wow!"

"If you'd only leave papa and me alone, ma, we'd always win," Millie said. "Tickling isn't fair."

"Now, all of you get out of here. Scat!" Josie said good naturedly.

As she left the room last, Millie saw her father put a big arm around her mother's waist, and pull her topsy-turvy into the bed. When Josie went down stairs half an hour later, flushed of cheek and bright of eye, and saw Millie pouting at her, she said heartily:

"Jealous of your mommie, dearie? Now, don't you be silly. You'll have a man of your own some day."

Millie didn't go near the blacksmith shop all day.

Mike loved to box. He had taught all his sons to punch and sidestep and duck—but mostly to punch. And he had more fun teaching Millie than any of the rest. He taught her to breathe from her abdomen. And he taught her to hit like a man. Her skill tickled his fancy.

"She can hit like the kick of a mule, the sweet little girl," he said to Josie. "Look at her, the skinny little mite. You wouldn't think she could lick boys bigger than she is, but she can."

And Mike made quite a ceremony of giving his daughter rub-downs in the approved athletic fashion. Big Bat Curry, trainer at the college, and Mike's closest friend, was in on the secret. He joined Mike and Millie in learned discussions, and gave Millie even better rub-downs than did her father.

“It’s too bad Millie wasn’t a boy,” said Bat.

“God forbid,” Mike said piously. “I had six boys, an’ they’re all fine lads, but Millie is something else. She’s my little girl, and the prettiest little girl in the world and the sweetest.”

“She’s got the built of a champeen,” said Bat. “But she’ll never be one,” he added. “She’ll just be somebody’s wife and cook and raise kids.”

“There’s plenty of time for that,” Mike said.

“Millie has red hair and none of us don’t know what’s going to happen to her,” said Aaron James, who, unnoticed, had been listening to the conversation.

CHAPTER TWO

MILLIE and Freddie Pease agreed, when she was ten and he was twelve, that they would get married when they grew up. They fell in love when Millie gave Freddie a note in school to pass to Myra Bartlett, and Granny Smith, the teacher, asked Freddie for the bit of paper and used her rattan on him when he swallowed it.

They always had known each other, but Freddie, till then, never had done anything to prove his knightly worth. And Millie merely had been a skinny little girl with red hair and green eyes until she waited for Freddie after school that day, and on the way home, said:

“Do you love me more’n anybody in the world?”

“Yes,” Freddie said. “Do you love me more’n anybody?”

Millie put her arms around Freddie’s neck and kissed him. When she got home she said to Mike:

“When I grow up I’m going to marry Freddie Pease.”

“That’ll be fine,” Mike said, grinning.

In the summer Freddie took Millie riding in his mother’s buggy with the hard rubber tires, and in the winter he took her riding in the cutter. It was cold, but there were hot bricks in the bed of the cutter, and a buffalo robe wrapping them close, and there was the jingle of the bells, the thuds against the dash of the snowballs tossed back by the mare’s beating hoofs, a pale moon overhead, and the smooth rush through the twilight. And that wasn’t counting the mysterious contact of two chilled pairs of lips at Millie’s gate when the ride was over, or the thawing out in front of the kitchen stove, red with blazing hard wood sticks, and aromatic with steaming coffee.

The Peases’s barn was a favorite playground, and the haymows the favorite spots in it. Myron Trent and Lucy Jones, and some of the other boys and girls, did their best to imitate grown ups when they played house in the hay.

“Why don’t you inspect each other—you two?” Lucy wanted to know.

“You don’t even know you’re built different, I’ll bet,” Myron said. “Come on and let’s all go up in the top mow and have a party.”

“I won’t,” Millie said. “And Freddie wouldn’t either. It isn’t nice for a girl to see a boy or a boy to see a girl till they get married. And then they can have babies.”

Millie and Freddie went on straw rides, and they had husking bees in some one’s barn, where there were small piles of corn on the floor for the boys to husk.

“The boy what gets to find the red ear gets to kiss the purtiest girl on the barn floor,” Aaron James announced.

There was a red ear in every pile, and every boy sooner or later got to kiss the girl he was escorting.

Millie and Freddie were in the top mow of the Pease barn one July afternoon, just after it had been packed with freshly cut white clover hay. A sudden thunderstorm had rolled off the near-by hills, and burst in jagged lightning streaks and slashing torrents of rain over the town. The water roared on the roof and gurgled off in the gutters, but it was warm and cosy, and infinitely sweet inside.

Millie put up her face, and Freddie placed his lips on hers. They drew closer. Suddenly, Millie pushed him violently away.

“What’s the matter?” Freddie asked.

Millie’s cheeks were red, and her eyes were suffused with moisture, and her breath was coming fast.

“We mustn’t do that any more; I felt funny,” she said.

“Don’t you love me?” Freddie wanted to know.

“You know I love you, Freddie,” Millie said, “but we mustn’t do anything any more like that.”

When Millie was twelve, Old Ben Pettigrew called her into his house.

“Come here a minute, Millie Blake,” he said.

“What is it, Mr. Pettigrew?” Millie said, turning in at the gate, and mounting the worn front porch, one step above the grass.

“Come in a minute,” urged Old Ben, “I got suthin’ nice for ye.”

Millie entered the door rather hesitantly.

“Don’t you be afeared, Millie,” the old one said. “Don’t you be afeared. Come right into the parlor. I got suthin’ nice for such a pretty little girl.”

He took a blue-and-red-and-green-striped bag from the drawer of an old desk, and handed it to her.

“Hard candy,” he said, chuckling. “Nice, hard candy. You let Uncle Ben pet you, Millie—just let him pet you a little bit—an’ you can have plenty of nice hard candy, and mebbe five cents now and then. Come here and sit on my lap.”

He reached out a skinny hand and touched Millie on her breasts, which were like apples. Millie turned and ran, and didn’t stop running until she got home.

“What’s the matter?” asked Mike, who was just coming out of the house.

“Nothing,” Millie said.

“What’s that you got there?” he said, indicating the blue-and-red-and-green-striped bag.

“Hard candy,” Millie replied, and threw the bag down, and dashed into the house.

“Women are funny critters,” Mike said, looking after her. “Millie ain’t as funny as most, but she has her streaks.”

“I’ve got to have some corsets and a corset cover,” Millie told Josie.

“What do you want corsets for all of a sudden?” Josie asked. “You’re only a girl yet, Millie.”

“Well, I want corsets,” Millie said. “Other girls have them.”

“What’s the matter, Millie?” Josie said. “What makes you want to tie yourself up in corsets for? Your waist is enough.”

“No, it isn’t, Mama,” Millie replied. “The college boys all look at me here,” she explained, touching her waist, “and it makes me embarrassed.”

“I snum!” exclaimed Millie’s mother. “Of all things! The boys should be ashamed of themselves. I hadn’t noticed, Millie, that you are getting to be such a big girl. It seems only yesterday that I was nursing you. And what a hungry little baby you were. You used to drink all the milk from my left breast, and then drink my right breast dry, and then go to sleep. And now it won’t be long before you’re having babies of your own to nurse.”

“Will you get me some corsets?” Millie repeated.

“We’ll get them tomorrow, Millie,” said Josie. “And we’ll let your skirts down, too, while we’re at it. If you’re getting the body of a young lady I

guess we can't hide it by dressing you like a little girl. Come, sit in mama's lap."

When Mike came in a little later he found Josie sitting in the old rocker in the kitchen, with Millie sitting in her lap.

"Rockin' the baby?" he asked, grinning.

"It's a young woman I'm rocking," Josie replied. "Millie's going to have her first corsets and long dresses tomorrow."

"Lay on, MacDuff!" exclaimed Mike. "Am I being robbed of my daughter?"

In the ninth, and last, grade of the Willowfield School, Millie was taught by Lucius J. Hoskins, the principal. Mr. Hoskins wasn't the type one usually thought of when one thought of a pedagogue. He was an athletic chap of about thirty, with tawny hair and moustache, gray eyes, and a high coloring, enhanced by his love of the out-of-doors. He smoked innumerable five-cent cigars, and spent his spare time fishing, hunting and hiking. He had taken the post at Willowfield because his wife, who had been Deborah Hadhurst, had wanted to be with her mother in her last years. After Mrs. Hadhurst died, Mr. Hoskins accepted one of several offers to join the staff of a preparatory boys' school.

When Mr. Hoskins told the class one morning that he was leaving, tears gathered in Millie's eyes. When one dropped on her copy of *The Lady of the Lake*, which the class was studying, Millie applied her handkerchief. Then she began to sob.

In the fourth grade, Millie had been one of a dozen boys and girls who had sat silently looking at Myron Peck on the day that Myron suddenly had been discovered, with red, sweat-dampened cheeks, and a pool of water around his cowhide boots. Now every one was looking at Millie.

The air smelt of chalk dust, ink, and unwashed bodies. On the blackboard behind the principal's desk was written in flowing white script, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic":

"Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."

Mr. Hoskins looked at Millie for a moment, and said in his pleasing baritone:

"We've all been working rather hard lately, and this is such a nice spring day that I feel it would do us all good to be out enjoying it. All those who

would like to have a holiday, please raise their hands.”

Every one elevated at least one hand, and Mr. Hoskins dismissed the class for the day. He went to Millie, who was blindly groping for her hat and coat on the hook, and said:

“If you haven’t anything else in mind, Millie, I’d like very much to have you come up to the house and meet my wife, and then perhaps you’d like to drive over to Little Falls with us.”

Millie said to her father that night:

“I had a wonderful time riding with Mr. Hoskins and his wife. She is awfully nice.”

She didn’t say anything about weeping over news of Mr. Hoskins’s departure, but her letters to Freddie Pease, who had been away at school since the previous fall, grew even more tepid than they had been for two or three months. When her father, laughing, asked her when she and Freddie were going to get married, she said:

“Don’t be silly.”

Freddie went abroad that summer, and Millie went riding with Edward Carpenter. Edward was slim and pale and studious looking, an appearance increased by the fact that he wore steel-bowed spectacles over mild blue eyes. Edward put his arm around Millie in what appeared to be a purely perfunctory manner. She let him kiss her goodnight because that was the custom.

One evening, however, when they were sitting on the front porch, Edward laid his left hand gently on her knee, and moved it slowly upward under her skirt. Millie smacked him with what Edward may have thought was a flatiron, but what really was nothing except her balled little fist at the business end of what is known to the fighting profession as a short right uppercut to the point of the jaw.

Millie had never hit any one except Mike and Bat, and when Edward leaned back and went to sleep, she said:

“Edward, what’s the matter?”

After a moment, she added, half-horrified, half-delighted:

“I knocked him out.”

Edward regained his senses an instant later and, with a startled look at Millie, got up, grabbed his cap, and departed in haste. Edward had been the

first member of the masculine sex to discover that Millie was a little girl, who not only hit like a man, but who had been trained to hit with professional precision. He never bothered Millie any more.

After she graduated from the ninth grade, Millie went to High School on the Flats. The first year she made the four-mile round-trip by stage. After that trolley tracks were laid. She and the other High School students liked to ride on the front seat.

Willow College boys rode on the trolleys, too, and there were always several of them on the car on which Millie rode home in the afternoon. Millie never had spoken to them, although plenty of them spoke to her in Willowfield, but she easily fell into the habit of flirting with them on the trolley to the Flats.

The first time she had any conversation with them was a cold fall afternoon. She was carrying school books in a strap, and a lunch box, and there was no seat in the car, closed at that time of year. As soon as she entered, two college boys rose. Both were tall, and above the average in good looks. One was blond, with waving yellow hair, and blue eyes, and a cheerful quirk in his lips; the other was dark, and slim, with a long horse's face, distinguished in its way. This one wore exaggerated clothes. His waistcoat was of brown mixed cloth, cut double breasted, and the shoulders of his jacket were cut square, giving him something of a foreign appearance. Both raised their hats, with a little extra flourish, and bowed gallantly.

"May I offer you my seat, Miss?" said Blond.

"Mademoiselle, we beg of you to take them both—and if they aren't enough we'll get more," said Dark.

"Thank you," said Millie, "but one is enough." And she sank down and leaned back.

"Which one of us will have the privilege of sitting beside you, Miss Blake?" asked Blond.

"It doesn't make any difference to me," Millie said. "How did you know my name?"

"Ah," said Dark, looking around as if he were afraid that some one might hear. "That is a secret."

Millie looked straight across the aisle, as if the conversation were closed. Two classmates were giggling at her. Millie made obvious efforts to keep her face straight, but finally laughed, and looked up at the two boys.

“Ssh, don’t tell any one,” Dark whispered confidentially, “but the first girl any Freshman hears about at Willow is Millie Blake, the Titian-haired beauty who looks down on college men.”

“And Demosthenes and I made a bet about you,” said Blond.

“Demosthenes?” Millie exclaimed. “That’s a funny name. What does he do—talk with stones in his mouth?”

“No,” said Blond. “His name is Henry Clay O’Byrne. Henry Clay is too hard to remember, so we call him Demosthenes for short. Both those guys were orators, you know.”

“And what do they call you?” Millie asked Blond.

“Ha! Ha!” Demosthenes laughed. “Look at Sally blush.”

“Sally?” Millie repeated. “That’s a girl’s name.”

“That’s Charles Peabody Thayer,” Demosthenes said. “But he’s a fire-eater, Sally is. He’s end on the football team. And he’s always where its hottest—regular salamander. So we call him Sally for short.”

“I think you’re silly,” Millie said, and laughed, crinkling her straight little nose, and looking up with big green eyes under black lashes.

“Silly about you,” Demosthenes said.

“I guess you both were born that way—silly,” Millie said.

“Ouch!” Demosthenes exclaimed. “You hit us in our tenderest spot.”

“Your brains?” said Millie.

“We don’t need any brains to appreciate you; all we need is eyes,” Sally said, in a voice which was curiously soft for such a hulking lad.

“Potatoes have eyes too,” Millie said.

“Look,” Demosthenes interrupted. “Let’s be serious for a minute. Sally and I really and honestly would like to call on you some evening.”

“And I would like to take you for a ride,” Sally said.

“Sally’s got a new automobile,” Demosthenes explained. “He’d like you to go along to help him put new links in the pump chain, and help him fix the driving chain, and change tires every mile or so.”

“If you were riding with me, Miss Blake, I wouldn’t ever care to fix anything,” Sally asserted. “I’d have scenery with me that was permanently satisfactory.”

“Ooh, I’d love to ride in an automobile,” Millie said. “But even if I wanted to, or if I wanted to have you call on me, I don’t know what my father would say about it. He wouldn’t think it was the right thing for college boys to be calling on me. I’m only fourteen.”

“You look older than that, Miss Blake,” Sally said.

“Oh, do you really think so?” Millie asked, beaming. “I often am taken for sixteen or seventeen,” she added.

“Some day you won’t be so glad to look older than you are,” Demosthenes warned. “But really, don’t you think it would be all right for us to call on you? We don’t bite.”

“I’m not afraid of you,” Millie exclaimed, “but I know my father wouldn’t like it. He has always told me not to have anything to do with any students.”

“They are so wild,” Demosthenes said.

“They drink and smoke cigarettes,” Millie explained. “My father thinks cigarettes are terrible.”

Two right hands were raised solemnly, as the boys said in unison:

“Never again.”

“We’ll be around tonight,” urged Demosthenes.

“It won’t do any good for you to come either tonight, or any night,” Millie said firmly.

“You might as well give in now as later,” Sally said in his soft voice. “We’re two desperate men.”

“Maybe if your mothers knew you were flirting with a little country girl they would take you home from college,” Millie said. “I’ve got to get off here,” she added.

Millie was singing around the house before dinner.

“What makes you so happy today?” Josie asked.

“Nothing,” Millie said.

When she was getting ready for bed she stood for a few minutes looking at herself in the mirror over her bureau. She had placed an oil lamp on each side so that she could see better.

The mirror reflected back a piquant face, framed in red-gold curls, big green eyes under long lashes, a soft red mouth, a firm little chin, a smooth round neck and shoulders, and firm, faintly blue-veined breasts, with rosy nipples.

“I’m a little doll,” she whispered ecstatically.

Then she turned down the wicks, blew out the flames, and climbed into her featherbed.

Several days later, Millie and Angie Wickersham were drinking chocolate ice cream sodas in the College Pharmacy, when Sally and Demosthenes entered. They dropped freshly lighted cigarettes as if their fingers were scorched, raised their hats, and bowed deeply.

“How do you do, Miss Blake?” they said.

Millie flushed, and Angie giggled.

“Oh, aren’t they swell fellows?” Angie whispered. “Introduce me.”

“Aren’t you going to introduce us, so that we all can be friends together?” asked Demosthenes.

“This is Miss Wickersham, Mr. Sally and Mr. Demosthenes,” Millie said. “And now will you go away? Everybody is looking.”

“What do you say we all go for a ride?” Sally inquired. “I have the hay wagon outside.”

He nodded to the door, outside of which was parked a red touring car. The tonneau was entered by a rear door.

“Oh, let’s go, Millie!” Angie whispered.

Millie shook her head.

“No,” she said. “I’m not going riding with any college boys, and you hadn’t better either, Angie. What do you think your father and mother would say?”

“I don’t care what they’d say,” Angie said. “I’d love to go. And so would you. Let’s. Come on! Let’s!”

“I’m not going,” Millie repeated. “You can go if you want to, but I wouldn’t go for a million dollars.”

Millie was fingering in her tiny leather pocketbook when Sally tossed a five-dollar bill on the counter.

“Take it out of that,” he said.

“I don’t want you to pay for our sodas,” Millie said. “You’re too fresh.”

Demosthenes reached over to the candy counter and plucked off two five-pound boxes of bonbons. He handed one to Millie, and the other to Angie.

“I don’t want it,” Millie said, putting her box on the soda counter.

“Oh, why don’t you take it?” Angie said. “It’s perfectly wonderful candy. I think the boys are too sweet for anything to give it to us.”

Millie pushed aside the five-dollar bill, and handed Frank, the pimply-faced soda clerk, two nickels. Frank hesitated, and looked at Sally, and at the bill.

“You take my money,” Millie said firmly.

“You take it out of that bill,” Sally ordered.

Frank took the two nickels, with a sickly grin, and rang them up in the cash drawer.

“Frank will do anything Millie tells him to,” Angie explained, disgust in her tones.

Frank turned crimson to his ears.

“So will I,” said Demosthenes and Sally in one voice.

“Then take back your candy, and leave me alone,” Millie said, her eyes snapping. “Come on, Angie. Let’s leave these fresh things.”

“What’s the matter with you, Millie?” Angie asked after they had left the store and were walking rapidly down the street towards Millie’s home. “You must be crazy. Those are wonderful boys. That took your whole week’s allowance, and they wouldn’t have noticed it. They’re rich. And you did me out of a five-pound box of bonbons,” she added in a wail of distress.

“I didn’t do you out of anything, Angie Wickersham,” Millie cried, turning on her suddenly, with shining eyes and flaming cheeks. “You could have had the old candy, and could have gone to ride in that automobile if you wanted to. I didn’t stop you.”

“But, Millie—,” Angie began.

“Shut up,” Millie exclaimed.

They walked in silence for a minute, when Angie said:

“Aha. You’d’ve liked the candy and the ride yourself. Aha! Aha!”

“I would not,” Millie said.

Millie encountered Sally and Demosthenes many times on the street, the Flats trolley, and in the College Pharmacy, but she always refused to go riding, and later to go to football games, or to let them pay for sodas, or buy her candy.

Most of the other college boys smiled when they passed her on the street, and many of them bowed and raised their hats and said:

“Hello, Miss Blake.”

“It makes me mad the way those college boys speak to me,” she said to Mike. “I can’t stop them.”

“You couldn’t stop me, if I was a young lad, and you was around,” Mike observed. “Sure, I think I’d be kidnapping you, you’re that pretty. Give me a kiss.”

“Do you think I ought to box any more with you, papa?” Millie asked. “It isn’t very lady-like, is it?”

“Ha! Ha! Lady-like!” Mike echoed. “It’s a fine healthy exercise for you, Millie. Look at the shape you’ve got now. And it makes you sure on your feet, and puts a sparkle in your eye. And if a boy should ever get fresh with you, he might get surprised.”

Millie blushed. “It wouldn’t be nice for me to hit any one,” she said.

“A nice clean hit, straight from the shoulder, is one of the prettiest sights in the world,” Mike said. “And perhaps you don’t know how to do it.”

“I’d like to hit some of the boys that are always rubber-necking at me,” Millie said.

Mrs. Frederick Bateson Pease was a friend of dumb animals. No animals on the Pease place could be killed. A Pease hen that suffered with fallen arches, or auto-intoxication, or whatever disease hens suffer of and die with, could stagger around for a week with no one to put it out of misery—unless young Ferdinand Pease, younger brother of Freddie Pease, who also had green teeth and a skylight in his breeches, happened to decide it would make a good target for a slingshot, or an air rifle. Ferdinand suffered from none of his mother’s complexes about suffering animals. There was nothing that

gave him deeper pleasure, for instance, than sticking a straw into the rear end of a frog, and blowing it up so that it couldn't sink.

Mrs. Pease never ate meat, nor wore furs. The Pease housekeeper, Sarah Jenson, who had been with the Pease family for twenty-seven years, discharged a cook who had told friends that she was tired of cleaning lamb chop bones out of Mrs. Pease's bedroom.

"And well gnawed they was too," the cook always added in telling the story.

That's why Oscar, the eight-year-old bull, continued to live in a red fury of hate in the Pease barn. Mrs. Pease said:

"Oscar has as much right to live out his life as any other soul. When the right time comes Oscar will go back to the great reservoir from which all life comes."

"But Oscar is liable to kill some one—maybe me," Albert, the hired man, told Mrs. Pease.

"Oscar must be made comfortable, and fed well," Mrs. Pease announced emphatically. "The poor animal might have a better disposition if he had been treated more kindly."

"Oscar ought to be bologna long ago," Albert muttered.

"What did you say?" Mrs. Pease asked.

"I said, 'Oscar ought to be bedded down,'" Albert said.

"Yes, he must have a nice, sweet, clean bed," Mrs. Pease said. "Oscar was the dearest little calf, the very cutest little fellow you ever saw, wasn't he, Albert?"

Nothing would be gained by repeating Albert's reply, which was unintelligible to Mrs. Pease anyhow.

On a May afternoon of the year that Millie was fifteen years old, Ferdinand Pease and Pudge McElwain, a young playmate of his, were playing in the barn.

"Gee!" Pudge said. "Oscar's a whopper, ain't he? I'll bet he could kill about everybody in this town if he got loose. I'll bet you wouldn't dast leave him loose."

"I dast do anything," Ferdinand said.

"I double dare you," Pudge said.

"I ain't afraid of any old bull," Ferdinand said; and he walked over to the head stalls, and started fiddling with them, while Oscar glared at him out of bloodshot eyes.

"Hey, Ferdie, don't," Pudge called excitedly. "Leave him be. I was on'y foolin'. I'll take your word."

"Gee, he's loose," Ferdinand said in an awed voice, his face pale. "Cheese it! Look out! Oscar's loose!"

Oscar swung his head, and a thick plank fell out of the side of the barn. The boys dashed for the haymow. Ferdinand put his foot on Pudge's knee for a rest; and Pudge put his foot on Ferdinand's neck. They were insane with fear.

When they gained the mow, neither of them knowing just how, Oscar was tossing grain sacks, each one weighing a hundred pounds, as if they were stuffed with chaff.

"This is awful," Pudge said.

"There he goes towards the door," Ferdinand said and, making a dive for the side of the barn, he screamed frantically through a crack in the boarding:

"Oscar's loose! Oscar's loose!"

Pudge added his yells to Ferdinand's.

Mrs. Pease appeared from the rose garden, where she had been working, just as Oscar stuck his head out of the barn door. She started walking towards him. She said:

"Oscar, you be a good boy and get right straight back into your stall."

Oscar looked at her with red eyes.

"I'm not going to have that poor bull hurt," Mrs. Pease said to no one in particular.

"Look out, Mama! Run!" Ferdinand screamed. "Run!"

Oscar started for Mrs. Pease, just as Mike Blake started for Oscar from his side of the dividing fence. Mike left his forge without stopping to think, and the only weapon he had was a small shoeing hammer. He cleared the fence easily and landed about ten feet in front of the bull, and about the same distance from Mrs. Pease, who had stopped walking, frozen in her tracks.

“Lay on, MacDuff!” Mike shouted, and smacked the hammer down on the bull’s forehead. The hammer missed Oscar’s horn, but hit his eye, ripping it from the socket.

“Get in the house,” Mike called to Mrs. Pease. “Get in the house.” And he stepped away from Oscar’s rush, and picked up a pitchfork, just as Oscar turned and charged again, with awful agility.

“Take this, damn you,” Mike said, and stabbed the pitchfork into the bull’s face.

The first thrust blinded the bull in one eye. With his second, Mike stabbed hard into the bull’s shoulder. If he could keep him off with the pitchfork until help came he was all right. He was ducking the bull’s rushes, and stabbing with the fork, and grinning with excitement and zest of the fight.

Millie and her mother had heard the noise, and had run out the back door.

“Mike will be killed!” Josie screamed.

Millie ran back into the kitchen, and got her father’s shotgun. She had sufficient presence of mind to see that it was loaded, though only with birdshot. She ran towards the Pease place.

Mike still was fighting the bull, his hammer against the bull’s horns. Mike’s breath was beginning to come a bit fast, but he was grinning cheerfully. He avoided another rush, and his voice rose triumphantly, as he lunged with the fork.

“Lay on, MacDuff!”

As the barn still was giving back echoes of his lighting call, Mike stepped on a stone fresh-splotched with cow manure. His foot slipped; he was off balance only an instant, but in that instant two tons of bovine dynamite were on him.

Millie swung the gun against the bull’s heart, and pulled both triggers. Then the world was full of roaring.

After the sod began to fall on the coffin that contained the flesh-and-bones abiding place of Mike Blake, some of the men lingered at the cemetery gate.

“Mike Blake was a great man,” some one said.

“He was a great man,” said Aaron James, “and he ain’t got anythin’ to be worried about any more. But now that he’s gone, you see how those college boys’ll get Mike Blake’s Millie. She’s got red hair,” he added.

CHAPTER THREE

LUKE SMALL, proprietor of Luke's Lunch Wagon, tossed a sputtering egg upside down on his griddle, and said:

"Yes, sir. What thet gel needs is a father. I was just tellin' Lem Cook that there wasn't none of these goin's on until Mike Blake was killed by the Peases' old bull. Josie Blake is the sweetest natured female that ever walked this earth. But she's also the sweetest female that the people of this earth ever walked up and down on."

"What's the matter with you, Luke?" Jack Maitland asked. "Millie Blake isn't doing anything except have a good time. She knows how to take care of herself."

"She may know how to take care of herself, and again she mayn't," Luke said, slapping the fried egg between two slabs of thinly buttered bread, and skidding the resultant sandwich up the counter to the place where Maitland was waiting. "Coffee?" he asked.

"Yes, half-milk," Jack said. "But—"

"Don't 'but' me, Jack." Luke Small interrupted. "You was goin' to tell me that Millie is a good girl, and that no harm can come to her from bein' the village cut-up with you college boys—or men, excuse me—as you call yourselves."

"Well, let me tell you somethin'. You boys come here to college, and you don't know nothin' about the life in this town, and you don't want to know nothin' about it, for which I ain't blamin' you. But it's mighty important to the people of this town what the people in it think of each other. And right now they don't think much of Millie Blake. She may not be ruined in the common meanin' of that word, but she is ruined so far as her chances of marryin' a fine upstandin' farm boy or clerk around here is concerned, or my name ain't Luke Small."

"Think of that," Jack Maitland said, laying down his half-eaten sandwich and picking up his coffee cup. "It must be tough for a young lady to have the farm hands and clerks down on her."

"And don't think you can change the situation by bein' sarcastic, Jack," Luke said, re-lighting what was left of his after-supper cigar. "All these

questions are relative. And as fur as I'm concerned, I'd rather have a farmer's boy, or a good hard-working young clerk, whose family had lived here for years, callin' on my daughter steady, than I would to have the hull college load of you boys—excuse me, men—drivin' up in your automobiles."

"Hooray!" Jack exclaimed, waving his coffee cup.

"I'd be sure," Luke continued, "that the local boys had paid for the shoes they was using to walk in, an' I wouldn't be so durned sure that the college boys had paid for the automobiles they was ridin' in. From my thirty-five years' experience right here in this lunch wagon I'd be willin' to lay odds that precious little the college boys had on, as well as precious little they had in their bellies in the way of victuals, was paid for—and if it was paid for, it wasn't paid in cash—and if it was paid in cash their fathers paid for it for 'em."

"And you've got old bills totalling \$4,869.50 to prove it," Jack suggested.

"Those are the figgers up to the beginning of this school year," Luke admitted. "That's what I'm owed on my books for coffee and doughnuts and pies and sandwiches by many future presidents and governors and statesmen and lawyers and doctors, who have et my grub at this very counter. You have the figgers correct."

"I should have," Jack said. "I've heard 'em often enough."

"Look here, Jack," Luke said, finally throwing his worn-out cigar end out of a window. "I like you boys. You know that. I understand you. In most of you there ain't the slightest desire to harm anybody. Some of you is here to work like hell, and others of you is here to play like hell as long as it lasts; and still others is here to work as much as necessary to get through, and play as much as is left over. But just as much harm can be done by carelessness as can be done by malice aforethought. A lot of the boys look up to you, Jack, because you're older and are a partner in a broker's office in New York, and I thought if I spoke to you about Millie you might think of some way of getting that cute little tyke out of the hole she seems hell-bent on gettin' herself into."

"I might marry her myself," Jack said. "That might solve the problem."

"I'm not foolin'," Luke Small insisted. "I'm in dead earnest. The boys she's playin' with—Demosthenes and Sally and that crowd—have got more money than is good for 'em, and if they haven't got the money, they're

spendin' a lot more money than is good for 'em, which is worse. They drink, and they gamble, and they drive all over the country like hell-on-wheels, scarin' horses up trees, and killin' chickens, and makin' themselves conspicuous.

"They was in here early tonight, and they were headin' for a party over to Bennett's Inn in Mountain View. And Millie and that Angie Wickersham, who ain't got sense enough to go in when it rains, was in Sally's automobile."

"What do you want me to do—make up a rescue party and save the ladies from the villains?"

"I guess I've gotten to be an ole woman, worryin' about you boys all these years," Luke said. "I've seen lots of sad things happen out of carelessness in my life, and I made up my mind none of 'em would happen if a word from me could prevent it. I done you the compliment, Jack, of thinkin' you was the most serious-minded of the crowd that has been giving little Millie Blake the rush. Sometimes you acted to me as if you might really think a little somethin' of her. It wouldn't do no good for me to talk to Millie, although I've known her all her life, and it would do less good for me to talk to her mother. I figgered the best I could do was talk to you about it, and now it's done. But I guess it's no good. What Millie needs is a father."

"That's the second time you've said that," Jack Maitland said, laying some silver on the counter, "and it sounds good."

"What sounds good?" Luke asked.

"The father business," Jack said. "So long, Luke." And he jumped to the ground, and was gone.

"Now what did he mean by that?" Luke Small inquired of the coffee urn, in whose shiny surface was discernible, in grotesque exaggeration, his seamed bald forehead on which rested gold spectacles, his faded blue eyes, his generous beak of a nose, and his undecided chin shrouded in an unevenly shaved bunch of white whiskers.

When John Maitland Maitland arrived in his runabout at Bennett's a half-hour later, he went into the bar. Steve Bennett, son of Old Man Bennett, was behind the bar.

"Hello, Steve," Jack said.

"Hello, Mr. Maitland. What'll you have?"

"I'll have an Old Crow bourbon, straight, with plain water on the side, I guess. I see Mr. Thayer's car's outside. I suppose Mr. O'Byrne's with him?"

Steve grinned, as he pushed the bottle out on the bar.

"They're in Number 2," he said. "All you men from Willow seem to like that room. Maybe it's because they's a piano in it."

"Maybe it's because there are a couple of couches in it," Jack said. "That's the best sort of furniture to make a private dining room popular. Have one yourself?"

"I don't care if I do," Steve said, picking up the bottle. He covered the bottom of a whiskey glass with a thin coating of liquid, and held it up between forefinger and thumb. "Here's how," he said, and tossed two or three drops of the whiskey into his mouth, and quickly soused the glass in the water tank behind the bar. "Have another on me," he offered, pushing the bottle out again.

Jack Maitland poured about the same size drink that Steve had given himself.

"You don't drink 'em very large, do you, Mr. Maitland?" Steve asked.

"Neither do you," Jack said.

"Well, I'm in the business," Steve explained. "If I drink big drinks back here all day I wouldn't be any good. But the customers never notice that I take little ones. I've seen none of yours ever touch the top of the church windows."

"I like to know what I'm doing myself," John said. "I like the ladies too much to gum myself up with booze."

"Speakin' of the ladies," Steve said, "that little Millie Blake is the prettiest piece I've seen in my day. But, Christ! Wouldn't her old man be on the warpath if he was alive. How is it you ain't with her tonight, Mr. Maitland?"

"You know damned well why I'm not with her, Steve. She's upstairs right now with Mr. O'Byrne, Mr. Thayer, and Miss Wickersham. Give me another drink, and have another with yourself."

"Well," Steve said, "since you seem to know everything—we never tell anything about our business, but when any one knows our business there's no need of tellin' 'em."

He rearranged the drinks on the bar, and continued, holding his glass up to the light between thumb and forefinger, as was his habit:

“Between you and me, Mr. Maitland, I’ve always wondered what that Millie Blake sees in these kind of parties. She must have been born wild. She’s the life of the party, and yet she never drinks anything but ginger ale and lemonade, and Apollinaris, and sarsaparilla, and birch beer. I’ll be God-damned if I know where she holds it all.”

A buzzer sounded back of the bar.

“That’s them now,” Steve explained. “They’ll be wanting another round of drinks—three rye highballs and a bottle of soft stuff.”

“Miss Wickersham can’t hold much, can she?” Jack asked.

“She’s stewed to the gills,” Steve said, picking up a tray, and hustling towards the stairs. “I hope she doesn’t put her lunch on that green sofa, or on the rug. They’re new. I’ll be back in a minute.”

Jack Maitland stood looking at himself in the mirror in back of the bar. A door opened upstairs and let a burst of laughter escape before its closing. A minute later the door opened and closed again, releasing a second puff of hilarity.

“Three rye highs, and a ginger ale was right,” Steve said, dropping ice into glasses on a tray.

“When you take that stuff up there, tell ’em Mr. Maitland is down here,” Jack said.

“Sure,” Steve said. “But don’t be surprised if you don’t get any engraved invites to join the party.”

“You never can tell,” Jack said.

Steve went upstairs again, and Jack popped a nickel into a music box, which began playing “In the Good Old Summer Time.”

“Millie Blake says for you to come up,” Steve said, running downstairs. “The gents were all against it, but Millie said she’d come down if you didn’t go up.”

“I’ll order gin rickeys,” Jack said. “And don’t you put anything in ’em except lime and charged water.”

“It’s all right by me,” Steve said.

“Well, give me one of ’em right now for me to carry up with me,” Jack said. “I want to be dressed for the occasion.”

“Hello, everybody,” Jack said, closing the door of Number 2 private dining room behind him.

“Who invited you to this party?” asked Demosthenes, dark cheeks pale and dark eyes heavy with alcohol.

“I invited him,” said Millie Blake. “The more the merrier. I guess I’ll tell Steve to send up any of the boys who come in.”

“Why don’t you telephone ’em?” Sally suggested wryly. “There’s a telephone in the hall.”

“Hello, Jack,” Angie Wickersham said, tottering forward, a cigarette drooping from her mouth, and a half-consumed highball in her hand.

“Gimme kish,” she said, pouting her half-open lips.

“You sit down, Angie,” Millie commanded. “And give me that drink. You’ve had too much. You never can go home this way.”

“Who wantsh t’ go home?” Angie inquired.

“Let’s have another drink,” Sally suggested. “Let’s all have a little drink.”

“Angie doesn’t want another drink,” Millie said.

“Aw, you’re always shpoilin’ my partish,” Angie exclaimed. “Just becuz you don’t drink, nobody can drink. Why’n’t you go home?”

Angie pushed Millie away, and took hold of John’s arm with her hands, and pouted her lips again.

“Gimme kish, Jack.”

“Oh, hell!” Demosthenes said. “This party’s ruined. Angie’ll kish anybody, and Millie won’t kiss anybody. What the devil did you have to come parading in here tonight for anyway?” he asked Jack, who was leading Angie to a sofa.

Jack sat Angie down on the sofa, and straightened up. They were all tall young chaps, but he was taller and broader than any of them.

“Steve told me I was invited by Millie,” he said.

“And that is right,” Millie said.

“But you should have had more sense,” Demosthenes said. “Damn it. It isn’t fair to break in on a little party like this. We were having a good time until you came. And now it’s all gone to pot.”

There was a knock at the door, which opened to admit Steve.

“Did some one ring?” Steve asked.

“I did,” Sally answered. “What we need is some pep. Bring up a couple of bottles of Piper Heidsieck, and freeze ’em good and cold.”

“That’s better,” Demosthenes said. “There’s nothing like the juice of the grape to liven up a party. You’ll drink a little champagne, won’t you, Millie?”

“I won’t drink anything,” Millie asserted.

“A little champagne won’t hurt you,” Sally said.

“And Angie isn’t going to drink any more, either,” Millie said.

“I’m goin’ drink all I want,” Angie retorted. “You ain’t my boss.”

Sally got up from the table and staggered slightly, knocking an empty glass and an ash tray to the floor.

“If you’ll take a tip from me, Sally, you won’t drink any more yourself, if you’re going to drive,” Jack Maitland said.

“Oh, shut up,” Demosthenes said.

“I c’n drive better drunk’n I can sober,” Sally stated. “Go and get that wine, Steve, and be quick about it.”

Jack shrugged his shoulders and looked at Millie Blake. Millie was just sixteen; and to the natural beauty of her healthy youth was added the unspoiled loveliness of her softly colored cheeks, her big, sea-green eyes, and her curling red hair. She was wearing a sailor hat, an inexpensive shirt waist, and a green skirt. She looked as out of place in this room filled with cigarette smoke and the fumes of alcohol and the smell of stale dust, as a wild rose bud in a funeral wreath. Millie caught Jack’s gaze, and smiled warmly.

“Wait a minute, Steve,” Millie said. Then turning to Sally, and Demosthenes, she said:

“Look! I’m not going to try to stop Angie from drinking, and I’m not going to try to stop any of you from drinking any more. But if there’s going

to be any more drinking, I'm going to go before it begins, and I'm going to go with Jack. He's sober."

"You can't go with Jack," Sally said, starting to his feet. "I'd like to see you do it."

Sally stepped quickly across the room to John, who rose from the couch.

"You're a smart feller, aren't you?" Sally said, his face pale. "Well, take that."

Sally was an athlete, and a football player, but he wasn't a boxer. Jack, who never had played football, except haphazardly as a youngster, had kept himself in trim in New York, boxing in the gymnasiums with professionals. Sally dropped his right shoulder to swing a right-hand punch at Jack's jaw. Jack blocked it easily and, with Sally off balance, just pushed slightly and Sally fell to the floor.

Demosthenes made a rush for Jack, but Millie and Steve jumped between them.

"That was a dirty trick, Jack," Demosthenes said.

"You keep still," Millie said. "What was Jack going to do? Get hit? He did perfectly right. I'm sick of all of you. And now I'm going with John. You all can do whatever you want to."

Sally was on his feet talking about going out-of-doors and settling it. Steve was quieting both Sally and Demosthenes.

"Beat it, quick," Steve said. "They'll be all right in the morning."

"And take Angie along with us," Millie said.

Jack picked up Angie and, preceded by Millie, stepped through the door, as Sally, Demosthenes and Steve milled around in an arguing circle.

"We can drive over to Easton," Jack said, "and get some aromatic spirits of ammonia for Angie. The air'll do her good. And in two or three hours she'll be all right to go home."

"I want a drink," Angie said. "I told my mother I was goin' to spend the night with my cousin Lulu."

Angie no sooner was in the automobile than she went to sleep.

"You're all right when you're asleep," Millie said to the unconscious Angie, while Jack was cranking his car.

“You’re a funny girl,” Jack said, stepping quickly back to retard the gas and slow down the racing engine.

“Ha! Ha!” Millie said, tipping her sailor hat over her left ear, and making an Eddie Foy face. “I’m a funny girl.”

“You’re funny,” Jack said, as he released the brake and went into first speed, “because you go out with us on parties where every one drinks, and you don’t drink, and where most of the other girls—well, let us say, where most of the other girls are willing to meet us half-way, you don’t even go quarter-way. And tonight is the first night I’ve ever seen you anything but happy to ride with a sosh at the wheel.”

“Listen, Jack,” Millie said. “I’ll tell you the secret. I won’t drink because I promised my father I wouldn’t take a drink until I was married, and I don’t let the boys get fresh—you or any of the rest of ’em—because I promised myself I wouldn’t even kiss any more boys until I was married.”

They were roaring swiftly along through the smooth white lane cut through the night by their searchlights. Trees banked green on both sides of the smooth dirt road. The smell of growing things was all around them, and a fat white moon was dripping silver overhead.

“I love this,” Millie cried, spreading out her arms. “I never rode fast enough. And when some one is driving who has had too much to drink, I feel great. I get a thrill out of it. Coming up from Edgefield night before last I found Sally was sleeping at the wheel, and we were going fifty miles an hour. I poked him to wake him up, and wondered if we would go through a fence. But he waked up all right, and said:

“‘Gosh! I must’ve been asleep.’”

“Then you have kissed boys?” Jack asked.

“Sure, I’ve kissed boys. And maybe the reason I don’t kiss boys any more is because I like to kiss too much.”

“Did you kiss many boys?”

“Not many,” Millie said, smiling at Jack with a flash of white teeth, and a crinkle in her eyes. “Not many, Jack.”

“How many?”

“Don’t you wish’t you knew?”

“Tell me how many.”

Millie tossed back her head and laughed, and the wind of their passage through the night caught at the merry sound and smothered it in her red lips. And the shine of the moon was in her eyes.

“Aaron James told me when I was just a little girl that boys and men never would leave a red-headed girl alone,” Millie said. “And Aaron James was right.”

“Who was he? Was he one of the boys that kissed you?”

“Oho! Don’t you wish’t you knew? But they all say the same things. ‘Your hair is so red, and your eyes are so green and your skin is so white I could kiss you and die. I could eat you up with kisses,’ they say. But kisses are cheap. They’ll kiss a scrubwoman.”

“I wouldn’t kiss any other girl in the world except you, Millie,” Jack said. “You don’t think I would kiss any one else, do you?”

“They all do,” Millie said.

“I’m older than they are,” Jack said.

“And you’ve kissed more,” Millie said.

“I know what I want, and I want you,” Jack said.

“Listen to the same old story,” Millie sang to the moon, in a husky contralto, which made up in feeling for what it lacked in finish.

“You need to be looked after, Millie. You want some one to love you to death, and take care of you.”

“I want excitement,” Millie said. “I want to live, to do everything, see everything, go everywhere.”

She reached over and twitched at the wheel.

“Look out,” Jack cried, twisting the car sharply back on its course. “What’s the matter with you, Millie? We’d’ve been in that hedge in a split-second more.”

“I’m wild,” Millie said.

“And I’m wild about you,” Jack said.

Millie sang in a sing-song:

“I’m a red-headed woman — —
Look out for me.”

“How would you like to go to New York, Millie?” Jack asked.

“I’d love it, but it’ll be a long time before I get there, I guess.”

“How would you like to go with me?”

Jack’s voice trembled a little as he spoke.

“I’ll do anything but that,” Millie said. “I thought we settled that question at Miller’s Farm.”

“But I mean get married, and go and live there,” Jack said.

“Married?” Millie asked, her voice changing quickly.

“Married,” Jack said.

“Oho!” Millie laughed, but a trifle feebly. “You can’t get married. If you did you would be fired out of college, and then you wouldn’t have any place to go.”

“I can get married,” Jack said. “I only came to Willow to please my brother Ed, who’s head of our firm. He thought one of us should have a college education, and I was the goat. I’d rather be back at the office. I’m a broker, not a student, and I’m older than the rest of these boys, anyhow.”

“You must be all of twenty-five,” Millie said.

“Twenty-nine, nearly thirty,” Jack said, “but I’m far from bald yet.”

“Almost old enough to be my father,” Millie said, and her face went suddenly serious at the words. “My father was the most wonderful man in the world,” she added after a pause.

“I’m old enough to look after you, Millie,” Jack said.

Jack was good to look upon as he sat bare-headed at the wheel. He didn’t look more than twenty-five. His forehead was high and white, his eyes were brown and direct, his nose and mouth and chin were good. His teeth were white and even, and his unusually splendid figure had been draped by an artist among tailors. His hands were delicately kept. His linen was exceptional.

Many men had backed Millie into a corner and tried to make love to her, while they kissed and mauled her. This was the first man who had just talked to her, and left her alone so far as physical contact was concerned.

“Am I getting proposed to, Jack?” Millie asked.

“You’re getting the news broken gently that you’re to be Mrs. Jack Maitland Maitland, and live in New York with a butler, a cook, two maids and a chauffeur.”

“You’re taking a lot for granted.”

“I am taking a lot for granted,” Jack replied. “I’m taking it for granted that you love me.”

Millie flushed a beautiful rose.

“I’d never marry you now,” she cried.

“And I’m taking it for granted that a beautiful girl like you, full of life and spirit, doesn’t want to spend your life in a dump like Willowfield,” Jack said.

“You can’t talk that way about my home,” Millie said.

“And I’m taking it for granted that you’re sick of it all, and sick of yourself, or you wouldn’t be going on spooning parties when you don’t spoon, and drinking parties when you don’t drink.”

“Oh,” Millie exclaimed. “You know a lot, don’t you?”

“And I’ve taken everything so much for granted,” John concluded, “that I sent to Tiffany’s the other day—and you’d be surprised what I’ve got with me right now in my pocket.”

“What’ve you got in your pocket, a drink?” Angie asked, suddenly struggling to a straighter position on the far side of Millie. “Where are we? Ooh! My head!”

“So you’ve come to, have you?” Millie inquired of Angie. “It would have been a good thing if we’d left you where you were.”

“O God! My head!” Angie said, pushing her hat off, and holding her forehead in her hands. “O God! I’m sick.”

“Are you going to throw up?” Millie asked. “Sure you are, and all over the car,” Millie answered her own question, basing her answer on the facts presented by Angie.

“I wish I was dead,” Angie moaned.

“I wish you were somewhere else,” Millie said. “This is a good time for a proposal,” she said over her shoulder to Jack. “Tell me something nice.”

“We’re coming into Easton now,” Jack said. “I’ll run in the drug store, and get her some aromatic spirits.”

“You will if the drug store is open,” Millie retorted. “And it isn’t,” she added, pointing.

“I sort of forgot I was in the country,” Jack said. “No, there’s a light in back,” he exclaimed. “I’ll just dash in and see.”

Jack left the engine running, and Millie used up one of her handkerchiefs on Angie before she got out, lifted the tool box cover, and found some waste.

“You’re a great help on a party, Angie,” she said.

“Where am I?” Angie asked.

“You’re in Easton,” Millie replied.

“I don’t care where I am. Let me die,” Angie said.

“Here, Angie,” Jack said briskly. “Lift up your head.”

He slipped an arm in back of her neck, and tilted her face back.

“It hurts,” Angie said. “Lemme alone.”

“Drink this; it’ll do you good,” Jack said, and with some difficulty persuaded her to swallow the liquid he had brought in a glass.

“You’re out having a lot of fun tonight,” Jack said.

“Where’s Cicero?” Angie asked in a slightly stronger voice. “How did I get here? I’m supposed to be with Cicero tonight, and I told ’em at home I was going to spend the night with Lulu.”

“Where’ll we take her?” Jack asked.

“Take her home,” Millie said.

“Damn everything,” Jack said, and got in the car again, and meshed the gears.

“O God, my head!” Angie said.

It was early in the morning, and quiet with the unearthly quietness of the country, when they stopped at the little yellow frame house under the apple trees in which Angie lived. Angie had moaned all the way to it, and now she moaned all the way up the walk.

“You better brace up,” Millie said. “Take a hold of yourself.”

“Nobody’ll be up, and the key’s always under the mat,” Angie said. “You find the key and open the door, and I’ll be all right.”

Millie unlocked the door of the silent house, and Angie tottered inside. Millie locked the door again, and put the key back under the mat. Then she went and got into the car. John quickly went into high speed, and kept advancing his throttle.

“My God!” Millie said, “I’m glad that’s over, but where do you think you’re going at sixty miles an hour?”

“Reach in my outside pocket there,” Jack said, without taking his gaze from the road ahead. “Careful,” he warned, as Millie’s groping hand slid into the pocket. “Handle with care, but have a look.”

Millie’s fingers closed over and drew out a box wrapped in tissue paper. She pulled off the paper and opened the box. In it were two rings. One of them was a narrow gold hoop, and the other was a narrower gold hoop on which clung the biggest diamond she ever had seen.

“Stop, Jack, wait a minute,” Millie said.

“I can’t stop,” Jack said. “We’re on our way to get married.”

Millie’s mouth opened, but she didn’t say anything. She was looking at the big diamond. There was silence for an appreciable space.

“How big is that stone, Jack?” Millie asked finally.

“Five carats,” Jack said.

“Is it real?”

“It’s so real, it’s what they call a gem,” Jack said.

“It’s beautiful,” Millie sighed. “I suppose you could buy our whole house and blacksmith shop and the land with that ring.”

“I suppose you could,” Jack agreed. “But that’s for you to wear, not to buy houses and lots and blacksmith shops with. And you’ll get more after we’re married. I’ll cover you with ’em.”

There was another silence. Then Millie said:

“You’re away past my house.”

“I hope you took a good look at it,” Jack said. “The next time you see it you’ll be Mrs. Jack Maitland Maitland, of New York.”

“I can’t get married like this,” Millie said. “I haven’t any clothes.”

“We’ll get you all the clothes you need,” Jack replied. “You couldn’t wear any of the clothes you’ve got in New York anyway.”

“I always wanted to go to New York,” Millie said, “but I didn’t think I’d be going there like this. I thought I’d have a chance to plan it. And I always thought after I knew I was going I couldn’t wait for the days to pass until I got there. And now I’m going too fast. Will you stop a minute, Jack, till I can think?”

“You don’t have to think, Millie,” Jack said. “You are the most beautiful girl in the world, and I’m the man to take care of you. That’s all you have to think about. And look at your engagement ring.”

“Jack,” Millie said, after a long silence.

“What is it, Beautiful?”

“Aren’t you going to put the ring on my engagement finger?”

“Sure.”

Jack slowed down, stopped and, turning to Millie, picked the ring out of the box, and slid it on her fourth finger. He smiled down at her, and then turned back to the wheel again.

“Jack.”

“What is it, Beautiful?”

“Aren’t you going to kiss me?”

Jack reached over and pulled her to him, looked into her eyes for a moment, and then pressed his lips to hers. It was the longest and most experienced kiss of Millie’s life. When John finally let her go, she sank back on the seat and pressed her hand to her left side.

“I’m glad you decided we had better get married,” Millie said.

Jack took her in his arms again.

“I love you more than anything or any one in the world, you Beautiful,” he said, and kissed her. “I worship you, and I worship the ground you walk on, you Beautiful,” he said, and kissed her. “I’d die sixteen deaths for you; I’d swim the Atlantic ocean for you; I’d kill a regiment for you; but better than that I will keep you always in my heart, and you will be an inspiration for me all my life—you beautiful, sweet, wonderful, adorable, marvelous—angel from heaven, little bunch of pure loveliness,” and he kissed her again.

“I love you, too, Jack,” Millie said in a tiny voice, quite unlike her own, every-day, hearty contralto.

“Say it again,” Jack urged.

“I love you, too,” she whispered.

“Say it all, ‘I love you, too, Jack.’”

“I love you, too, Jack.”

“I’m mad about you,” Jack whispered back.

“I wish we were married now,” Millie said. “Will it take long?”

CHAPTER FOUR

“THIS is Greenwich, Connecticut,” said Jack. “It’s a beautiful morning for us to get married. But I’d suggest that you say you’re eighteen, just for the sake of the record.”

“I’ll say I’m thirty if that’ll do any good.”

“We might as well stop in this hotel here for breakfast, and then I’ll scout around and see if I can dig up a license and some one to marry us. Do you want a minister, or will a Justice of the Peace do?”

“Get some one that has good handwriting for the marriage license.”

“Ha! Ha!” Jack laughed. “You’re a funny little thing. And I’ll see what can be done about finding a witness who writes a good hand, too. How would you like the local teacher of penmanship?”

“I’d like that,” Millie said. “I want something fancy about my wedding, and it might just as well be the writing on my lines.”

“You were brought up to think quite a lot of your lines, weren’t you, Sweetness?”

“Well, if I wasn’t you wouldn’t be wanting to marry me this morning. Would you?”

“Ha! Ha!” Jack laughed again. “Everything strikes me as funny this morning. I have to pinch myself to be sure that this is I.”

“When did you decide to marry me, Jack?”

“I fell in love with you when I first saw you, Beautiful, and I made up my mind to marry you when I found I couldn’t get along without you. Well, here we are. All out now for the big breakfast. I could eat a pound of bacon and a half-dozen eggs.”

“And some griddle cakes and doughnuts,” Millie said. “There’s nothing the matter with my appetite either.”

So Jack and Millie washed and ate breakfast, while a red-faced waiter, whom Nature had tonsured as if for the priesthood, limped between their table and the kitchen, lugging in food, and bearing away empty dishes, and beaming upon them between whites.

He was a sturdy old waiter of the old English school, and very apparently no one to trust with the key to the wine cellar. Towards the end of the breakfast, he bent over confidentially, and said in a hoarse whisper to Jack:

“I beg your pardon, sir, but I hope you will understand I am only speaking with an idea to be of service, sir. But am I wrong, sir, in gathering the idea that you are thinking of marriage? I hope you will excuse me, sir,” he continued in haste, as Jack looked up at him rather coldly, “but if that is the case, sir, it happens that I know the very man who may be able to simplify the entire proceedings for you, sir, and make everything easy, as it were, if you are a stranger in these parts.”

“Perhaps you could help,” Jack said, a frown that had gathered giving way to a pleasant smile.

“I certainly can, sir,” the old waiter said, fairly wiggling with enjoyment. “And the man I can recommend most highly, sir, is having his breakfast at that table over there in the corner. You can see him there with his *New York Sun* propped up against the water carafe. Judge Mortimer Martin, he is, sir, a Justice of the Peace as knows his business, and a rare hand for putting through a marriage without notice. Will I bring him over?”

“That might be a fine idea,” Jack said. “Go ahead.”

The old waiter started away, and then turned back again.

“If it is not too much to ask, sir, I would consider it a very great privilege to serve as a witness of the ceremony, Sir and Miss. It is very seldom indeed, if ever, that this town sees such a pretty bride—and such a handsome bridegroom, sir.”

“Can you write a good hand?” asked Jack, laughing.

“You should see the flourishes on my signature, sir. They’re better than Charles Dickens’.”

“You get the job,” Jack said.

The waiter was a good prophet. Steered by Judge Mortimer Martin, John and Millie quickly got their license, and within an hour were in the Judge’s office waiting for the ceremony.

The morning sun streamed through a tall east window, and struck red and gold radiance from Millie’s crown of red hair, found not a flaw in her fresh complexion, and made the big diamond on her finger scintillate like a live coal. The Judge was a sturdy, middle-aged man with a close-cropped

moustache and clear blue eyes and bronzed out-of-door cheeks. And he obviously took a deal of pleasure in making these two personable young persons one in the eyes of God and man. The waiter, who wore a frock coat for the occasion, looked even happier than the groom.

Millie laughed when Jack fumbled at putting on the wedding ring and then tried to slip it over her forefinger. She acted as if staying up all night and getting married in the morning were her regular routine.

"I don't believe it's real yet," she said to Jack, after the Judge and the witness had both been made even more happy-looking by yellow bills from Jack's fold.

"What'll we do?" Jack said. "Go to bed?"

"Why, Jack!" Millie said.

"Well, Millie, you've been up all night and you've traveled a couple of hundred miles, and you've been proposed to, and married, and I should think you'd need a rest."

"It would look awful for us to go to a bedroom at this time of day," Millie said. "Anyway, the first thing I want to do is send a telegram to my mother."

"You can do that from the hotel," Jack said. "I reserved a suite there this morning."

"We couldn't go to bed in the daytime," Millie said. "That's terrible."

"What's terrible about it?"

"You ought to know."

"I don't know. What's terrible about getting some rest?"

"It isn't rest you're thinking about."

"Well, what'll we do?" Jack asked, pleasantly enough. "We certainly don't want to drive any more. We're both tired. Isn't it the most reasonable thing in the world for us to go to our rooms and lie down?"

"I haven't any clothes," Millie said, in a lower voice.

"Let's go get 'em right away," Jack said. "I need some pajamas too."

"I'd rather get them alone," Millie said.

"All right," Jack agreed. "All right. Go and get whatever you need, toothbrush, and everything. And you might pick up a complete change if you

see anything decent in one of the shops. Here's a couple of hundred. I guess that'll be enough."

"Enough?" Millie asked. "It's too much."

"Well, buy the best you can find, and if you spend any more than that have them send the stuff up to the hotel, C. O. D.," Jack said. "But make it snappy, will you?"

"It seems funny taking money from you," Millie said.

"Well, you'll be completely surprised how quickly you'll get used to it," Jack said. "Hurry up now."

"I feel queer," Millie said. "This looks like a store I want."

"I'll meet you at the hotel in half an hour," Jack said. "Make it snappy."

"Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

Jack was waiting in front of the hotel when Millie returned.

"You were gone long enough," he said.

"I had a lot to do," she said. "I got a shampoo and a manicure while I was about it. I never had a manicure before, but I always wanted one, and when I got the chance I took it."

"You'll have plenty more chances for manicures," Jack said.

"I bought an awfully cute dress, and some other things too," Millie said.

"Well, let's get along upstairs," Jack urged.

"I'm hungry," Millie said. "I want lunch first, don't you?"

"I don't care if I never see lunch again in my life," Jack said. "Aren't you tired, Millie?"

"I don't feel as if I ever could sleep again. I'm too excited," Millie said. "I love excitement, and I never had so much of it in my life before."

"We can have lunch upstairs," Jack said.

"I'd rather have it in the dining room," Millie said.

"Oh, all right."

They had the same waiter for lunch.

“I thought you said you were hungry,” Jack said. “But you’re not eating anything.”

“I feel nervous,” Millie whispered. “I feel terribly excited.”

“All you’re doing, you little minx, is stalling,” Jack said, gruffness coming into his voice. “Now you get right up from that table, and we’ll go upstairs without any more nonsense. Come on.”

“All right,” Millie said.

“Gosh!” Jack exclaimed, as soon as the door had closed behind a bellboy. “It took long enough to get you by myself.” And he kissed her hard.

“Let me get my breath,” Millie panted. “Aren’t the flowers beautiful!” she exclaimed, looking around the parlor, which was full of roses.

She ran over and buried her nose in a bunch of them.

“I love roses,” she said.

Jack went into the bedroom, and reappeared in a moment, minus his waistcoat and jacket. He sat down in an easy chair by the window, and lighted a cigarette.

“I always liked roses, too,” he said. “Which kind do you like best—American Beauties, like those over there, or Ophelias, like those over there, or Whozises, like these over here?”

“You’re making fun of me,” Millie exclaimed.

“No, you little devil,” Jack replied easily. “You’re making fun of us both. Now you march right over here and sit on my knee. We’ve got some things to talk about.”

Millie walked over as meek as a slave and sat on Jack’s knee.

“You know you can’t duck the fact that we’re married,” Jack said. “Not even by talking about everything that comes into your head.”

“I know it,” Millie said, and put her arms around her husband’s neck, and kissed him.

“Now I don’t know what ideas you have about marriage,” Jack said, “but I take it for granted that you aren’t one of these little girls I’ve read about in books, and heard about in talks by elderly females, who don’t know what marriage is all about.”

“I know what it’s about,” Millie said.

“Well,” Jack said, “I never planned myself to be carrying on a book discussion about marriage with any bride of mine, but it just came over me like a heap that I might not be so patient later as I can be right now, and that now was the time to look this thing over. It may seem like a funny thing to say to you, Millie, but if you’d rather for today, and tomorrow, or until you get used to the idea, I’ll get another room adjoining and sleep there.”

“Don’t be a silly, Jack,” Millie said.

“Well,” Jack said, “I might turn into an abysmal brute, and I don’t want to do anything to hurt you—when I’m still thinking right, and haven’t got you in my arms. And after all, you know, you’re only sixteen.”

“You wait here a minute,” Millie said, and just pecked Jack on the lips, and then ran into the bedroom and closed the door. In less than a minute, she called:

“Jack.”

“What is it?”

“Come in—Brute.”

CHAPTER FIVE

“WELL,” MILLIE said, “it was very simple. People seemed to be doing it all the time, so it couldn’t be very terrible. And it’s because I felt that way so hard that I wouldn’t kiss any boys any more.”

“You’re wonderful, Millie dear. More wonderful than I even thought.”

“I like to hear you talk like that, Jack. But as a matter of fact, I guess I’m just a healthy young animal in love—something like the cows and dogs and horses back home. Gosh all Hemlock! That reminds me. I wonder if there’s a telegram from my mother.”

“They’ll deliver any mail or telegrams right here,” Jack said. “You aren’t worried about your mother, are you?”

“Heavens, no!” Millie said. “I don’t think she’d worry about anything. She’d be sure I was all right if she didn’t hear from me for a month. She has divine faith and no nerves and a fine digestion, mother has.

“‘I’m a red-headed woman—
Look out for me.’”

She jumped up from her chair at the breakfast table in their parlor, and jumped on Jack’s lap. Her dressing gown fell away from her shoulders, and exposed her plump little breasts. Jack bent down and kissed first one and then the other.

“I love it when you do that,” Millie said. “And I like it when you kiss my ear too. It sends the chills all through me. That’s my passion, Jack.”

“What’s your passion, Sweetness?”

“Having my ear kissed.”

“Did any one else ever kiss you like that?”

“No, you silly. But how did you know about it?”

“A little bird told me.”

“I don’t care who told you. You’re all mine now, aren’t you, Jack?”

“All yours,” Jack said.

He got up out of the chair, holding Millie in his arms, and bumped against the table.

“There goes the coffee pot, Jack, all over the rug.”

“To hell with the coffee pot,” Jack said, walking across the room, and kicking open the bedroom door with his bare feet. He swung Millie up in the air and over on the disordered bed.

“Whoops!” Millie sang. “I’m glad you’re strong, Jack. I love a man to be strong.”

Two minutes later came a knock on the door. When there was no answer, a key rattled in the lock.

“Go away,” Jack called. Millie was silent, her eyes misty with emotion, looking into Jack’s.

When she was through with her bath, Millie walked into the bedroom naked. She looked a trifle embarrassed but quite pleased with herself.

“Don’t walk around like that,” John exclaimed. “Put something on, even if it’s only a nightgown.”

Millie’s smile faded, and her lips trembled. She picked some clothing from a chair and went back into the bathroom. When she reappeared she was in corset and underskirts.

“What’s the matter, darling?” Jack asked.

“Nothing,” Millie said.

“Are you angry, just because I told you to cover yourself up a little?” Jack insisted.

Millie didn’t answer.

“I like to see you with something on—it’s more mysterious,” Jack said.

Millie smiled faintly, and let Jack kiss her. When Jack came out of the bathroom later, Millie was sitting at the window. Her head was in her hands, and she was staring out. She looked around when Jack appeared.

“We’ve got a few errands to do today,” Jack said. “I must call my mother up on the telephone. When will I tell her we’ll be home?”

“Are we going to live with your mother?”

“Sure,” Jack said. “My brother Ed and I always have lived with mother. We have a big house on Madison Avenue—big enough for three families, if

necessary. You'll find you're quite lost in it. You'll love my mother."

"Maybe she won't like me," Millie said.

"She can't help but like you."

"But I'm only a country girl, and I don't know much."

"You don't have to know much. All you have to do is just look natural, and you're so beautiful no one can help loving you; and just act natural, and you're so sweet, no one can help adoring you—just as I do."

Jack went over to Millie, and leaned over and kissed her. Millie put her arms around his neck, and said:

"I'll do whatever you want me to, Jack. I love you to pieces. But I thought we'd live alone—just you and me—in a little place all our own."

"Love in a cottage," Jack laughed. "Well, you'll find love in a big house is just as nice, and a whole lot more comfortable. Personally, I prefer love with all the modern improvements."

"I like the modern improvements myself," Millie said. "It's no fun going out to the backhouse on a cold night; and I've emptied plenty of slop jars in my time."

"You better forget about all that," Jack said. "I wonder if it wouldn't be a good plan to send you to a good finishing school."

"I'll go to no more school," Millie asserted, flaring up a bit. "That's one thing I won't do."

"All right, all right. I was just saying a thought that has come into my mind once or twice when your small talk seemed to savor a bit more of the barn than the parlor."

"It was good enough for you till now."

"Give me a kiss," Jack said. After they kissed, he said:

"Now I'll put the call in for mother."

As he was about to pick up the telephone, the telephone bell rang, and at the same time there was a knock on the door.

"Hello!" said Jack.

"What?"

"Well, I'll be damned."

He turned to Millie, holding his hand over the transmitter.

“The newspapers have the story of our marriage,” he said. “There are some reporters downstairs waiting to see us now; and some photographers—I suppose from the *World* and the *Journal*.”

“Ooh! Isn’t that wonderful!” Millie exclaimed.

“There’s a story in the papers this morning,” Jack added. “But they want an interview now. ‘Rich student elopes with village beauty.’ What the hell!”

“I don’t think it’s so wonderful,” Jack continued testily. “I think it’s a God-damned nuisance, but I guess the best way out of it is to see them, and have it over with.

“All right,” he growled into the transmitter. “Come on up.”

CHAPTER SIX

DEAR MOTHER: (*Millie wrote*)

As you know from my telegram and from the papers I am now married, and my name is Mrs. Jack Maitland Maitland. It all seems like a dream, as I did not know when I left the house last Tuesday that I would not see you again until I was a Mrs.

My husband and I came to his home here to live yesterday, and I met his mother and brother for the first time. His brother, whose name is Edward Maitland, is the head of the firm which sells stocks and bonds, and he does not look a bit like Jack. He is older and fatter, and his hair is gray and he has a bald spot on top which he tries to hide by brushing his hair over it.

My mother-in-law is a nice lady. She is slim, and tall, and has gray hair, and gray eyes, and a long face, and she looks and talks so aristocratic. I am kind of afraid of her, though she is most sweet to me. I think she thinks that I am a country girl who does not know much, which is the truth.

She told me that I was a pretty girl, with a sweet face, and that she always wanted a daughter, and that I was to call her Mother. But she talks about subjects that I don't know anything about, and I know she expects me to sit and do embroidery at night. She said it would make her evenings pleasanter to have a daughter to sit home with her. I don't intend to sit at home and sew. I always hated sewing anyway.

I would love to go out in the kitchen and cook a meal for my husband, but will not mention anything to him about it again, as when I said something about cooking he said they had a cook for the cooking. Well, I said, it would probably please the cook if I took some of the work off her hands, and he told me that if I went in the kitchen the cook probably would give notice. And she is a good cook, Jack said.

I always thought I would like to cook for my husband, and I would like to too, but guess I am not going to. Also, they have two maids, and a chauffeur, because they have two automobiles, which are kept in a garage somewhere away from the house, which I have not seen. The chauffeur is a Frenchman, and a good-looking one, and wears a uniform, just like the Pratt's chauffeur up on the hill. I guess I have as much money now as Mrs. Pratt. But I don't know.

The house has four stories and a basement on the street level, and Jack and I have the whole third floor for ourselves. The top floor is for the servants. I could clean the house better than the two maids, but when I asked Jack where they kept the dust rag and the broom, he told me not to think of such a thing. But there is dust on the furniture, and in the corners. I would just love it, Mother, to get into an apron, and give this place a cleaning. The furniture is beautiful. And there are oil paintings and everything.

Jack wants me to get lots of clothes, and my mother-in-law is going to take me out shopping this afternoon. They don't call the stores stores, but they call them shops instead.

I feel now as if I was taking part in a play at school, and that before long the curtain would come down, and everybody would clap their hands, and I would bow, and then be Millie Blake again. I miss my featherbed.

I wish you could see the bathrooms here. I have my own bathroom right next to my bedroom, and Edward has his bathroom, and my mother-in-law has her bathroom, and there are more bathrooms, John told me. There is one downstairs in the library, if you get short taken, so you don't want to walk upstairs, which is some different than we have it at home, isn't it Mother? I think of you going out to the privy, when all I have to do is get out of bed. As soon as I can I am going to ask Jack to have a bathroom put in our house for you. They have got a sewer in Willowfield now, and you should have a bathroom. They are very handy.

To tell you the truth, I would rather have started married life in a little house, even with a privy, than in this big house, which I am not used to, and my husband's mother, who is a nice woman. But after all, she is my mother-in-law, and not my mother.

I would not dare say privy even to Jack. I have to try and be elegant though I don't like it very well.

I would write more, only I have to go out shopping with my mother-in-law, and I want you to know that I am happier than I ever expected to be.

Your loving daughter,

MILLIE

(Mrs. Jack Maitland Maitland).

P.S. That is the first time I ever wrote my new name, and I think it is swell, don't you? I would have told you about the tall buildings, and about Broadway, only I have not seen them yet—only five or six story buildings,

which are big enough for me. But I am going to see the Flatiron Building, and the Pulitzer Building soon.

Lots of hugs and kisses,

MILLIE.

N.B. I wish you would write and tell me what everybody in Willowfield said when they heard that I got married like I did. I'll bet I made their old tongues wag.

As ever,

MILLIE.

P.S.N.B. I have an engagement ring which is five carats, not ten like the papers said.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“AREN’T you going to kiss me this morning, Jack?”

“Sure,” Jack said. “Here!”

“That’s not much of a kiss,” Millie said.

“Well, I’m trying to get dressed to get down to the office. I’ll be late as it is.”

“You get me sore sometimes, Jack.”

“I wish you wouldn’t use those expressions.”

“Oh, hell! I get sick and tired trying to talk like an actress on the stage all of the time. I’d like to sit on the back doorstep and shuck peas right now. That’s the way I feel.”

“I wish you’d try to remember to be a lady. Remember, you’re Mrs. Maitland, and you have a place in the world to protect.”

“Bah! Bah! Bah! Jack.”

“And I wish you’d get over that habit of being familiar with the servants. My God! How many times must I tell you not to thank the servants for waiting on you? That’s what they’re paid for.”

“I was brought up to be polite to everybody, and servants are just as good as we are.”

“O God! Do we have to go all over that business again?”

“And if you want to know something, you’re not so hot yourself. You were nice as pie to me last night after you came home from the club until you got what you wanted, and then you turned over and snored. I lay there so mad I could’ve killed you. If you do that after six months, how will you be after six years?”

“For heaven’s sake, Millie, can’t you try to talk like a lady?”

“Oh, Plotz! This lady business gives me a pain. You knew what I was when I married you. You were crazy enough about me then.”

“I’m crazy about you now, Sweetness. But I do want you to talk and act like a lady.”

“I suppose when you get what you want from your wife, and then turn your back and snore, that’s being a gentleman.”

“Damn it, I was tired. I can’t stay awake all night billing and cooing. I have to work for a living.”

“Oho! Work! You call work going down to the office and sitting there while the money rolls in, and then playing golf, or going to the races in the afternoon, and going to the club at night. You call that work? If you had to shoe horses like my father did, you’d think you was working.”

“‘Were working,’ Millie.”

“O Jesus! Will you stop correcting me all the time! I’m going mad.”

Millie stamped her feet on the rug, and picked up a pillow from the chaise longue, and threw it viciously back again. Then she took hold of her red curls with both hands and pulled as though she would jerk handfuls from her head, and jumped up and down, glaring at Jack with eyes that were black with tears.

“And if you think I’m going to sit home every night learning to hemstitch, and embroider, and talk like a lady about a hell of a lot of dead writers and painters I don’t give a damn about, you’re crazy,” she stormed. “You’re crazy if you think I’m going to sit around like a bump on a log all day with your mother being so God-damned proper I want to yell, and then have you come home and get what you want out of me, and then turn over and SNORE.”

“My dear,” Jack said, as calm as Millie was excited, which only made Millie more excited. “I didn’t realize that you were so upset.”

Jack, who had been trying to knot a tie, let the ends of the tie hang, and took gentle but firm hold of Millie, and dropped to a chair, pulling her across his knee.

“What’s the trouble, Sweetness?” he asked.

“O Jack!” Millie cried, throwing her arms around his neck. “I’m going to have a baby, and you don’t care anything about me.”

“My God!” Jack said. “Think of me never dreaming of that.”

“You aren’t mad, are you, Jack?”

“Mad?” Jack repeated. “I’m tickled pink. We’ll have to be extra careful of you now.”

“Extra careful!” Millie exclaimed scornfully. “Gosh! What I’ve heard about my mother! She’d do all the work in a ten-room house right up to the last minute, and when it came time for her to have a baby, she had it. She told me that it was a job you had to do, and all the doctors in the world couldn’t help you as much as you could help yourself by just bearing down. ‘You’ll think it’s going to kill you, Millie,’ she told me, ‘but you just bear down as hard as you can, and you’ll be surprised how quick it’s all over, and you’ve forgotten all about it.’”

“A sturdy old Roman,” Jack said. “But let’s hope we can make it easier for you.”

“Easier for me! That’s the trouble. Let me take care of a few rooms in this house the way they ought to be taken care of, and let me cook the meals, and I’d be happier. Give me a dustpan and broom, and I’d show those lazy slobs of maids something that’d make their eyes open.”

“Slobs, Millie.”

“Oh, damn! Damn! Damn! How can I explain myself to a man?”

“Have you seen a doctor, Millie?”

“No, what do I have to see a doctor for? I got some common sense, haven’t I?”

“Well, you’d better see Dr. Dalrymple.”

“That old stick, with the eyes on him. I’ll bet he’d like to get me in his office and get a look at me. One look from him was enough.”

“Why, Millie! I think you’re imagining things. You’re a bit nervous. Dr. Dalrymple is a fine old chap. He’s been our family physician for years.”

“I’m not imagining anything, Jack. I wouldn’t have minded if old Dr. Blodgett turned me inside out. But this Dr. Dalrymple’s eyes went right to my breasts, and then to my hips, and then to my ankles. I wouldn’t want to go to him.”

“It would please me very much if you would. We all have great faith in Dr. Dalrymple. And anyhow, he won’t take care of you when your baby comes, we’ll have a specialist for that.”

“Well, why can’t I have the specialist in the first place?”

“I’d like to have you see Dr. Dalrymple first, if for nothing else than the courtesy of the thing.”

“Well, I won’t see him. So there.”

Millie’s eyes were getting moist again, and her voice was getting higher.

“All right, all right,” Jack conceded. “We’ll have you see Dr. Peady, I guess. He’s supposed to be the best obstetrician in town.”

“I hope he’s an old guy with whiskers,” Millie said, smiling again.

“He hasn’t ’em unless he’s grown ’em since I saw him last at the opera, a week or so ago,” Jack said. “What do you want with whiskers anyway? They’re full of germs.”

“I don’t insist,” Millie said, “but whiskers would sort of give me confidence.”

“Well, Millie, do you want me any longer? I’m just tickled to death, but I’m late for the office now, and I’ve an awfully busy day ahead of me.”

Jack kissed Millie on both eyes, on her mouth, and then on her left ear.

“I wish you never had to go to the office, and we could be together all the time,” Millie said. “And I wish you wouldn’t go out without me nights.”

“I’d like to be with you, too,” Jack said, getting up, and going to the mirror, and starting again to knot his cravat. “That’s an awful pretty kimono you have on this morning. Green certainly is becoming to you, and that’s as pretty a shade of green as I ever saw.”

“That’s the first time you’ve noticed anything I wore for weeks,” Millie said. “I’ve worn this several mornings.”

“Well, bye-bye,” Jack said, pulling on his waistcoat and jacket. “Be a good girl.”

“I’d like to be a bad one for a minute,” Millie said, going to the door with him.

“We’ll see about Dr. Peady for you,” Jack said cheerfully. “And we’ll be mighty careful of you from now on. Goodbye till dinner time.”

Millie was dressing when there was a knock at the door.

“Wait a minute,” Millie called, turning to get her dressing gown.

“It’s only I,” said her mother-in-law’s voice. “May I come in?”

“Of course,” Millie said. “Come in, Mother.”

“Good morning, Millicent,” Mrs. Maitland said, smiling in her most gracious manner. “Aren’t you sweet and pretty this morning?”

“You always look beautiful yourself, Mother,” Millie replied.

“Tush, child,” said Mrs. Maitland, glancing involuntarily into a cheval glass, and touching her immaculate transformation with a delicate, blue-veined white hand. “I am getting old. Jack just told me the wonderful news—that you are going to have a baby.”

“Yes, I’ve been that way for two months now,” Millie said. “But I didn’t want to say anything about it until I was sure. There was a woman up home, Mrs. Hooper, who always was complaining every month that she was in the family way, and she was taking on something awful about it. And then it always turned out that she wasn’t that way. And she hasn’t had a baby yet, so far as I know. And I’m sure my mother would have written a special letter about it if she had. I didn’t want to be a Mrs. Hooper.”

“I think you knew the quaintest persons out there in Willowfield,” Mrs. Maitland said, “and I enjoy so much your original way of telling about them. It really is refreshing. You are so unspoiled, my dear.”

“Jack is always telling me that my language is terrible, and he is always correcting my grammar, and he says I have to try to be a lady,” Millie said.

“Jack is young,” Mrs. Maitland said gently, “and he would like you to be perfect all at once. One cannot learn the customs and conversation of polite society in a day, and so far as being a lady is concerned, it is my opinion that you are a great deal more of a lady than many who talk perfect English, and know the etiquette for all occasions. Being a lady, I should say, is more of a state of mind, than of grammar, although it is true that a lady usually sees to it that everything she does and says is as nearly correct as possible.”

“You’re not kidding me, are you, Mother?” Millie asked.

“I beg pardon, Millicent?”

“You aren’t fooling me, are you? You do like me a little bit, don’t you?”

“Why, my dear child,” Mrs. Maitland exclaimed, putting her arms gently about her daughter-in-law. “I am extremely fond of you. In fact, I have grown to love you very much. I love you for just what you are, an honest, healthy, clean-minded little girl, of good healthy old New England stock, which probably has been in this country longer than our own, full of life and fun. Why, you’ve been like bright sunshine in this old house. And you don’t know how much it has meant to me to have a daughter to go with me to the shops, and to lectures, and to the theatre and the opera. Why, Millicent, my dear, I am proud of you.”

“Gee!” Millie sighed. “You don’t know how good that makes me feel. I began to think I was a complete misfit.”

“And it is delightful to have you sit sewing, or reading to me in the evenings. You are so pretty to see, and your voice is so sweet. I was thinking only this morning that if I had selected my daughter for myself, I would have chosen you.”

“Oh!” Millie said. “I could hug you to pieces for that.”

“Dear me!” Mrs. Maitland said. “But you are strong. Your young arms feel good. But what I came to see you about was this news of your condition, my dear. Don’t you think it would be advisable for me to arrange for an appointment with Dr. Peady at the earliest possible moment, and get everything settled?”

“I’ll do anything you want, Mother,” Millie said. “I’ll go jump in a lake if you say the word.”

“Well, I’ll never say it, you may be sure of that. Come down as soon as you’re dressed, won’t you, dear?”

“I’ll be down so fast it’ll make your head swim,” Millie replied.

Wilkins, the butler, closed the front door behind Mrs. Maitland, Senior, and Millie, and turned to see Frieda, the Swedish first maid, peeping through the drawing-room door.

“’Ullo there, Nosey,” Wilkins said. “’Aven’t you enough work to keep you busy?”

“Ay like that ‘Nosey’ from you, Mr. Wilkins,” Frieda replied. “I have caught you comin’ away from key-holes often enough. And you listenin’ down the stairwell in your pyjamas nights too. Nosey! Huh!”

Frieda looked in the mirror over the mantelpiece, and in that manner contrived to see both herself and the butler over her shoulder. She had straw-colored hair and light blue eyes. She wore mascara on her eyelashes and pencilled her eyebrows, which naturally were the same shade as her hair. With the rouge she added to her cheeks, and her natural regularity of feature, she looked something like a Dresden china doll.

“Hi never looked through a key-hole in me life,” Wilkins protested indignantly. “And if Hi was at the ’ead of the stairs listenin’ it was because Hi thought Hi ’eard some one movin’ about below. Hi ’ave the responsibility of this hestabishment on my shoulders—includin’ you. And you’re a rare ’andful.”

Frieda tipped her head back—but not so far back that she lost sight of herself in the mirror—and laughed, with an artistic display of white teeth, and gold fillings.

“You should have ban a detective, Mr. Wilkins. You don’t make no noise when you walk on those rubber heels, and Ay don’t care what you say because Ay’ve seen you with my own eyes peepin’ and listenin’.”

Wilkins, a man of medium height and weight and of sandy complexion, wore side-burns and had a trick of pulling at one of them with his fingers when he was embarrassed.

“Well,” he said, “you wouldn’t hunderstand but Hi keep a diary, and it is a plan Hi have to write a book one of these days. Hi don’t want you to think Hi’m always going to be in service.”

Frieda tilted back her head again, and laughed artistically. Wilkins stepped towards her, and tried to put his arm around her waist.

“None of that now,” Frieda said sharply. “None of your pullings and haulings with me. Save them for Maggie. Don’t think you can kiss everybody in this house just because you’re a nauthor.”

“When you saw me with Maggie I wasn’t really kissing ’er,” Wilkins said. “She said she was feeling lonesome and sad, and Hi just thought to cheer her up, in a manner of speaking.”

“Well, Ay’m not sad,” Frieda said. “And so you can save yourself the trouble.”

“But Hi’m sad when you’re not nice to me,” Wilkins said. “You know there is no other girl that can hold a candle to you. You are the most beautiful girl Hi hever have seen anywhere.”

“Ay will ask Maggie what you told her,” Frieda said.

“She would tell you stories,” Wilkins said. “Anyway, what Hi said to ’er was before you came ’ere to work.”

“Tell me,” Frieda said, changing her teasing attitude to a coaxing one. “What do you expect to hear when you are all the time listenin’ and peepin’ around?”

Wilkins looked upstairs, and down the hall, and looked at Frieda.

“If Hi tell you something hexciting, will you be nice to me?” he asked.

"It depends on if it is exciting enough, and what you want me to do to be nice," Frieda replied.

"Hif you just give me one kiss, that will be enough—for now," Wilkins said.

"That is a lot," Frieda said, looking at herself in the glass, turning her head first to the right, and then to the left.

"Hi won't tell you for less."

"All right," Frieda said. "Ay will give you one kiss, if you are not fooling me."

"Hi'm not foolin'," Wilkins insisted earnestly. "Hi'm deadly serious. But first you've got to promise, cross your 'eart and 'ope you die, that you won't say anything about what Hi tell you."

"I promise," Frieda said easily.

"What Hi'm worryin' about then," Wilkins said, "is what is the young Mistress going to do when she learns that Mister Jack isn't at the club when 'e goes out nights, but is skylarkin' around with Bobby Roberts, who used to be 'is old sweetheart before 'e was married."

"Ay bet she will raise merry hell," Frieda exclaimed, her eyes sparkling. "She has got a temper, that one."

"And there is more than that," Wilkins said. "Mister Jack is goin' on a business trip to Boston over this week-end, but 'e hisn't goin' there at all. 'E is goin' to Atlantic City with Bobby Roberts."

"I'd like to tell his wife on him. It would serve him right," Frieda exclaimed. "The bum!"

"Remember your promise, Frieda," Wilkins cried.

"Oh, Ay wouldn't say anything, no matter how much I might feel like it. Don't worry."

"And that isn't all," Wilkins said. "The old mistress knows all about it, and 'as been givin' Mr. Jack merry 'ell, and no mistake."

"Now Ay know what you've been listenin' at key-holes for," Frieda said.

"A family can look as if everything is all serene, Hi've found, but there can be hell a-poppin' underneath," Wilkins observed.

"I'm sorry for the young Mistress. I likes her an awful lot," Frieda said.

“And now she’s in a hinteresting condition,” Wilkins supplemented.

“You certainly are noseey, Mr. Wilkins.”

“Do Hi get my kiss now?” the butler demanded.

Frieda made a quick dash up to him, gave him a hasty peck with her lips before he had a chance to realize what was happening, and then ran down the hall laughing.

“Hi there! Come back ’ere,” Wilkins said in a loud whisper.

“No man’ll ever get the best of me,” she called back, as she disappeared through the door which led to the rear hall.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WHEN MILLIE heard Angie Wickersham's voice over the telephone she said:

"Why, hello, Angie. When did you come to New York?"

"I've been here about six weeks, Millie," Angie replied. "I didn't know whether you'd high-hat me or not, which is why I haven't called you up before."

"What are you doing?"

"That's a long story, Millie, which I would be glad to tell you if you want to listen whenever we can get together."

"Well, why don't you come and see me right away? I'll be awful glad to see some one from Willowfield."

"I walked by your house a couple of times, Millie, but I pass on butlers, and on your mother-in-law too."

"They're harmless, Angie. Come on."

"Nope, I won't. And there are more reasons than that. But why don't you meet me up here at Jack's?"

"Where is Jack's?"

"What! You've been in New York all this time and you don't know the best known restaurant in the place? Jack's restaurant in Sixth Avenue."

"I never heard of it," Millie said. "Honest, I didn't. I've been to J. B. Martin's, where they stick a little plate in front of you every time you have a drink, and to Delmonico's, and Sherry's, and the Knickerbocker, and Mouquin's, and the Claremont, and Rector's, and Shanley's, but I never even heard of Jack's. Where is it?"

"You're not kiddin' me, are you, Millie?"

"No, honest, I'm not."

"Well, I'll be darned. I thought everybody in New York knew about Jack's. Anyhow, it's on Sixth Avenue, just north of Forty-third Street, and that is where I am now. Can you come over?"

“Let’s see,” Millie said, “it’s half-past four now. Jack is out of town on business, and my mother-in-law is at a club meeting, and we don’t have dinner until 7:30. I tell you what I’ll do, Angie, I’ll get a cab, and be right over there.”

“O. K.,” Angie said. “I’ll be right here waiting.”

Millie was looking doubtfully at the entrance of Jack’s, when Angie came out and welcomed her.

“Gee! It’s good for sore eyes to see you, Millie,” Angie gurgled. “I heard the news that you were in the family way before I left home, but you certainly don’t look it.”

“I am,” Millie said, “six months.”

“It certainly agrees with you,” Angie exclaimed. “Come on in and let’s sit down. I guess I was gettin’ kind o’ homesick. I almost felt like cryin’ when you really showed up. I thought you might not come after all.”

Angie was wearing a good deal of rouge and lipstick, and her eyes were elaborately made up with mascara and with shadows under them. She was flamboyantly dressed. She couldn’t have advertised herself any better if she had carried a sandwich sign labeled Streetwalker.

She led Millie through the front room into the rear, and sat down at a table for four, on which was a highball glass, half empty.

“I was just finishing my breakfast,” she said with a nervous laugh. “I guess I’ve kind of gone to hell since I saw you last.”

“Bosh!” Millie said. “What’s the trouble?”

“You always said you wouldn’t drink till you were married. Do you drink now, Millie?” Angie inquired.

“Oh, I drink,” Millie said. “But I don’t drink much, and I’m not taking hardly anything now that I’m going to have a baby.”

“Well, what’ll you have?” Angie asked.

“I’ll have some tea and toast,” Millie said. “And you have whatever you want, Angie, and I want this to be my treat. And now tell me what’s the matter with you. You look funny. You’ve got an awful lot of rouge on for the daytime, haven’t you?”

“I’ll have another highball,” Angie said to the Irish waiter, who was standing beside them, with napkin over arm, “and this lady will have a pot

of tea and some buttered toast.”

“What kind of tea?” the waiter wanted to know.

“English breakfast,” Millie said. “There aren’t many people in here for tea, are there?” she asked Angie. “You should see the mob at the Manhattan, or the Holland House.”

“You should see this dump at dinner time, and after the theatre,” Angie boasted. “It’s crammed to the guards, and every now and then the flying wedge throws a drunk into the street. There is lots of excitement in here, and all the best known people in New York come here.”

“Yeah,” Millie said. “What’s a flying wedge?”

“I’m not kiddin’, I wouldn’t have asked you to go to Wolf’s, or Sweeney’s, or Tom Sharkey’s, or the Haymarket. They’re too tough for you. But this is a fine place, as you can see for yourself.”

“What’s a flying wedge?” Millie repeated.

“Imagine you livin’ in New York and not knowin’!” Angie exclaimed. “The flyin’ wedge is waiters that get together and give a customer the bum’s rush out of a place.”

“What has happened to you anyway, Angie?” Millie asked.

Angie’s face hardened. She twisted her now empty highball glass around in her fingers for a moment, and then threw her head back with a gesture of defiance, and looked Millie squarely in the eye.

“I got the same way you are,” she said, “only I wasn’t cheerin’ about it.”

“Wouldn’t the boy who got you that way marry you?” Millie asked. “I’d like to see any one get away with anything like that with me.”

“I didn’t know which boy it was,” Angie said. “I tried to pin it on Cicero, but I didn’t have guts enough to make it stick. Or I guess that isn’t right, either. It didn’t seem like a fair thing to me.”

“Gee, I’m sorry.”

“Well, I did everything I’d ever heard of or anybody’d ever told me about, but nothing happened. Finally, I went to old Dr. Blodgett, and I got a lot of sympathy from him, but he wouldn’t do anything for me. He said that he truly sympathized with me, and didn’t blame me at all, that it was nature that was responsible, but that he would have nothing to do with helping me.”

"I always admired that old Dr. Blodgett," Millie said. "I wish he was my doctor now. But I can't see the sense of him not doing it for you."

"Well, I cried, and he said a lot more things to me, and finally I said I was going to run away, and he told me I was foolish. And I said that I couldn't stay up there any more. And the end of it all was that old Dr. Blodgett cried too, and then I borrowed two hundred dollars of him, and I came to New York as fast as I could get here.

"I had met a girl named Helen Riley at Bennett's one night, and she had given me her address here, and I went right to her place. And she knew a girl who was being kept by a doctor who did just the sort of thing I was after. His regular price is \$125, but he did it for me, as a favor to Helen, for \$50. And since then I have stayed in New York.

"Gee, I'm sorry," Millie said. "What're you doin'?' Do you need any money?"

"I'd hate you to think the only reason I called you up was to ask you for money," Angie said. "I'm makin' enough to live on, and I ain't kickin'."

"What are you doin'?" Millie asked again.

"Well, if you've got to know, why can't you guess?"

"I never did think you had much sense," Millie said. "If it was me I'd rather saw wood than go to bed with every Tom, Dick and Harry that came along. But everybody to his own taste, as the feller said that kissed the cow."

"I have a good time," Angie asserted. "I have lots of parties, and it's all part of life."

"Let me give you some money anyway," Millie said. "I never have to spend any cash, and I've got plenty. Why shouldn't I let you have some of it? It would make me feel a lot better."

"Well, ten dollars would help me some," Angie admitted. "I got a dress at the cleaner's, and the heels on my shoes are getting a bit run down. I walk a lot."

"I wouldn't give you ten dollars," Millie said, opening her bag.

Angie's mouth hardened a trifle.

"This is all I've got with me, except a five-dollar bill," Millie said, tossing over a little yellow roll. "I've been carrying it for a long time, and you might as well have it before it's worn out."

Angie picked up the tight little strip, and unfolded it.

“It’s a hundred-dollar bill!” she exclaimed.

“I wish it was a thousand-dollar bill,” Millie said. “But you see I never get any cash, as I never go anywhere except with Jack, or my mother-in-law, and everything I want is charged. And I’ve got charge accounts even at the restaurants where I’m supposed to go for lunch or tea, if I want to. Jack gave me that right after we were married, and I never spent it. I hope it’ll come in handy for you.”

“Gee, Millie!” Angie exclaimed. “You always was the most generous thing. I bet you’d give away your shirt. You don’t know how much I appreciate this.”

“Rats, Angie!” Millie replied. “You’d do the same for me, if you had plenty.”

“I hope you don’t think that’s what I called you up for.”

“Don’t talk about it any more,” Millie said. “Let’s get the check from the waiter, and I’ll be getting back home. I never go out, and my mother-in-law’ll be worried. And she’s a darned nice woman, if I do say it.”

“Let me pay the check, Millie.”

“Don’t be silly,” Millie said. “You try to hang on to your money.”

Millie signalled to the waiter, and got the check.

“Let’s see, highballs are fifteen cents here, aren’t they?” she said. “And you had four. I’m no preacher but I should think you’d cut out the drinking and get yourself a job.”

“I’d hate to work,” Angie said.

“I wish to God I had some work to do,” Millie said. “Give me your address and telephone number, Angie, in case I want to get hold of you. And you know where to get hold of me.”

“I’ll go out and see you into a cab,” Angie said. “Gee! It was swell seeing you again. And I can’t thank you enough.”

“Rats!” said Millie.

“And isn’t she regular, though?” Angie said to Helen Riley, in another dining room in Jack’s, five minutes after Millie had driven away.

“She came through all right?” Helen asked.

“Well, I didn’t have the heart to tell her about seeing Jack with another dame. What would you have done?”

Helen Riley’s hard blue eyes under an astonishing coiffure of peroxidized hair rested for a moment from their task of watching the room, and focussed on Angie’s tired brown ones.

“I don’t know,” Helen said. “I never know what I’m going to do till it’s time to do it. But if she’s as regular as you say she is and she acted this afternoon, I’d say it was a God-damned shame for any man to be making a horse’s tail out of her.”

“I thought I ought to tell her,” Angie said, “but when it came to doin’ it, I didn’t have the heart.”

“It wasn’t heart with you, dearie, it was guts,” Helen Riley said. “And guts are what you lack.”

CHAPTER NINE

“A DAUGHTER!” JACK MAITLAND MAITLAND repeated. “A daughter!”

“Yes. And the darlinest little girl baby that ever came into the world,” his mother said. “Instead of using that tone of voice you should be down on your knees thanking God for the blessing he has brought you.”

“I didn’t think I used any special tone of voice, Mater,” Jack said.

“Well, I didn’t like it,” Mrs. Maitland exclaimed. “You might just as well have expressed more plainly your disappointment in not having a son. I don’t mind telling you that I have prayed for a granddaughter every morning and every night.”

“I’m glad you are pleased,” Jack said.

“And you should be thankful for having such a brave little wife. If there ever was a Spartan it is that girl. She didn’t make a sound, but my arm is numb to the elbow where she clung to me. She told me between pains that her mother always had told her to bear down. And I can tell you, Millicent bore down.”

“Please, Mother, don’t tell me the details.”

“It is too bad that you don’t care to hear the details. But don’t concern yourself. You won’t hear any more of them from me. You aren’t worthy of hearing them. Dr. Peady told me that it was one of the severest confinements in his experience. Millicent has been tried in fire. I think she is glorious.”

“She always was a spunky little thing,” Jack admitted.

“You have tried my patience sorely for a long time, Jack. I have told you once in no uncertain terms what I think of your conduct with that woman. I am not going to discuss it with you again. But I wish you to remember that my sympathies are entirely with Millicent.”

Jack made no reply, but lighted a fresh cigarette from a burned-down end which he crushed out on a tray already piled with stubs at his elbow.

“It is all right for you to go in for a minute now,” Mrs. Maitland said. “But don’t stay for more than a minute.”

Mrs. Maitland opened the door and beckoned to Jack, who went in. Millie looked younger and more fragile than she had since she was a little girl, and she wore an unwonted pallor which brought into relief tiny freckles ordinarily overlooked. But her green eyes were bright, and there was a smile on her lips.

“They say it’s a bouncing girl,” she said in a small voice to Jack.

“They say you’ve been great, too,” Jack said, bending down and kissing her forehead.

A nurse showed him a tiny red, wrinkled object all swathed like a mummy, and he said:

“Oh, yes. Quite remarkable.”

Then he turned again to Millie, and said in a louder voice: “It’s fine!”

“Don’t you call my daughter an ‘it,’” Millie said.

And Jack kissed Millie again, and went out into the hall, taking with him an odor of disinfectants and medicine.

Millie nursed the baby.

“My mother always told me I used to drink first one side of her dry, and then the other,” she told Mrs. Maitland. “And I guess Honoria takes after me that way, although she has your name.”

“It was sweet of you to name the dear after me, Millicent,” Mrs. Maitland said. “But you know I would have loved her no matter what she was christened.”

“That’s all right,” Millie said. “You know when I heard you say that you always had wanted a daughter, and you were so white with me, I kind of felt that I was going to have a girl baby for you. And I made up my mind long ago that I was going to name her after you.”

“Naturally, I am tremendously flattered and pleased, but there is your own mother, and your own name. And after all, she is your daughter.”

“My mother had plenty of children, and she has plenty of grandchildren, and more on the way,” Millie said. “Children are just something that happen to her. They’re something that just come along and you can’t help, and you love because they are yours. You couldn’t make me believe she ever sat down and planned to have a baby.”

“But she was a good mother, Millie.”

“Oh, she was a good mother,” Millie said. “But you know I really am glad that she didn’t come down here when I told her that it wasn’t necessary. If my father had been alive, do you know I think you couldn’t have kept him away. He’d have been right in there holding my hand like you were. He was a wonderful man, my father, and strong. I used to think he was the strongest man in the world.”

“It is too bad he lost his life the way he did.”

“I don’t know about that, Mother. I can’t imagine Mike Blake dying in bed. And you know I like to think of him fighting with that bull. He was having the time of his life, and it was all over so quick.”

“The baby takes after the Blake side of the family, Millicent. She has your eyes and hair.”

“If she takes after me on the outside, Mother, I hope she takes after you on the inside.”

Millie and her mother-in-law never discussed the fact that Jack seldom was home evenings, and that his absences out of the city on business trips were numerous. But Millie wasn’t as silent with Jack.

“I’m getting sick of this life,” she told Jack one morning. “You’re tired of me. I guess you never loved me, and now I don’t know if I ever loved you.”

“I loved you when I married you, and I love you now. What are you always kicking about?”

“Kicking! Why wouldn’t I kick?”

“Haven’t you everything you want, a home, servants, automobiles, money? What more do you want?”

“My God!” Millie said, her voice rising, and a coarse note creeping into it, as happened under such circumstances. “What the hell do you think I care for a big house full of junk, when it isn’t mine, and I don’t have the care of it? It’s like living in a hotel. What the hell do I care for the servants? I’m not allowed to treat them like human beings.”

“I wish Mother could hear you talking in that tone, and using that language once, and then she might not think you were so perfect,” Jack exclaimed. “Just to let her hear you once is all I ask.”

“Why, you big stiff,” Millie said. “You big stiff! You moved yourself into another bedroom when I was in the family way, and you’ve stayed there

ever since.”

“Well, what’s wrong with that?”

“And whenever you feel like it, once in a week or so, you come into my bed, and after that you go back into your own room. That may be the way they live in society, but that isn’t the way I want to live.”

“For heaven’s sake, Millie, don’t scream.”

“God damn it! I will scream! I’ve got to scream. I’m rusting away. I’m full of hell. I’d like to go on trips. I’d like to go to business. I’d like to see things, and do things. Jesus Christ Almighty, help me!”

Millie raised her eyes to the ceiling as if she were praying when she uttered the last words. Then she picked up a perfume bottle from her dressing table and smashed it against the wall, threw herself on the bed, and began to wail.

Jack, pressing his lips together, and pale with suppressed emotions, slipped out of the room.

“That’s right. Run, you big coward,” Millie sobbed.

Then she hit the pillow, and kicked her feet futilely up and down until both of her slippers flew off, one hitting her on the back of her head.

Wilkins described this scene in detail to Frieda a few minutes later in the butler’s pantry.

“Hand the big scene,” he concluded, “will be when the young Mistress finds out about Bobby.”

“All men are snakes,” Frieda said.

CHAPTER TEN

MILLIE, ANGIE, and Helen Riley went into Wolf's about ten o'clock in the evening.

"Remember now," Angie whispered to Helen, "nothing doing with any men tonight."

"I told you I wouldn't, didn't I?" Helen whispered back.

"What's the matter with old Willowfield?" Millie asked, as they sat down at a table by the wall. "Willowfield's all right," she answered herself, laughing animatedly. "Gee!" she continued. "I feel like a kid on a holiday. Three beers," she said to the waiter.

"What's the matter with Wolf's?" she asked the waiter. "Wolf's is all right," she said. Then she put up her hands and twisted her hat sidewise on her red curls, and chanted:

"I'm a red-headed woman—
Look out for me."

"That's been Millie's song ever since she was a kid," Angie laughed. "When are you ever going to add some more lines, Millie?"

"Remember Aaron James, Angie?" Millie asked. "He is a cock-eyed old nit-wit back home," she explained, turning to Helen. "But he was my favorite playmate when I was a youngster, and he used to eat potato bugs—put 'em on his tongue and let 'em crawl down his throat—and he used to tell me that I was red-headed, and I had to look out for the boys, and I said the boys had better look out for me.

"Here's to Aaron James," Millie continued, raising her glass of beer.

"How did you come to drink beer?" Angie asked.

"After I got married I drank cocktails, or wine, or anything that was served," Millie said. "I didn't care much for the taste of it but I liked the feeling. I'll never forget the first drink I had. It was a cocktail. And the world looked brighter, and everybody looked wonderful, and I wanted to laugh and dance. Gee! I felt great. But I learned that if I drank too much I didn't feel so good the next day."

“Yeah,” Helen said, “we all learn that.”

“And then when I started nursing the baby, my doctor had me drink beer to make my milk rich. It tasted bitter to me at first, but I got to like it. Hey, waiter! Three more beers.”

“Beer is a fine temperance drink,” Helen said. “I always drink it when I want to keep sober.”

“It makes me feel fine,” Millie said. “My family should see me now. Jack would keel over in a fit if he heard me yelling ‘Hey, waiter.’ It feels good to be able to yell all the ‘Hey, waiters’ I want to. Hey, waiter!” she added, raising her voice. “Hurry up with the beer, and bring some cigarettes too.”

A cat suddenly spit under the table, and a dog barked.

Millie jumped to her feet, upsetting the glass of beer the waiter had just placed in front of her.

“Sic ’im!” Millie said. “Maybe they got some parrots and squirrels in this place too—I love animals.”

“There isn’t any cat or dog,” Helen Riley said, twitching at Millie’s sleeve. “Sit down, dearie. It’s the Great Dombey over there in the corner. He’s got a fine bun on, and he’s having a good time doing his time.”

The dog barked under a table further down the room, and the cat squalled as if it were being killed by inches.

Two score patrons of Wolf’s, more than half of them women, all waiting for some one to turn up, giggled, laughed, smiled, or scowled, according to their natures.

“Who’s the Great Dombey?” Millie asked.

“He’s the best ventriloquist in the world,” Helen explained. “See him over there in the corner, with a champagne freezer beside him on the floor, that pale, skinny-looking human fish, with the dirty collar and the wrinkled clothes. That’s the Great Dombey, and he’s on a drunk. And when he’s on a drunk, he is always fooling by throwing his voice around the room.”

When Millie looked around, the Great Dombey was smiling fatuously at her. Millie beamed back, and then crowed like a rooster at him. The Great Dombey promptly began a struggle to gain his feet, two men at his table and a waiter trying to keep him seated. But he insisted on getting up and tottering over to the table where the three girls were sitting.

“You’re th’ besht lookin’ li’l’ girl in Noo Yawk,” the Great Dombey said to Millie. “Isn’t she, Pete?” he said looking down at his pocket.

“She’s more’n that,” replied a high piping voice from his pocket. “She’s th’ mosh booful girl in the whole worl’.”

The Great Dombey put a hand in the pocket, and a faint shriek indicated something awful had happened to the owner of the piping voice, when a deep bass voice from the Great Dombey’s other side, boomed:

“Yuh big stiff, why don’t you invite the wonnerful li’l’ girl have some wine with us? You make me sick.”

“Thash a good idea, Ben,” the Great Dombey said, teetering a bit. “Will you have shome wine with Pete an’ Ben an’ me, Baby?”

The head waiter had come to the aid of a waiter, who was trying to persuade the great one to return to his own table.

“G’wan! Leave ush alone,” said Ben’s voice.

“You made a mistake tonight, Eddie,” Helen Riley said. “This little girl is married, and you better go back and sit down.”

“You send a beer over to our table, and we’ll drink it on you, Eddie,” Millie said sociably.

“’At’s the shweet li’l’ girl,” the Great Dombey said. “I shend over cashe champagne.”

“Wait till your wife gets hold of you, Eddie,” Helen cautioned, “and you’ll be lucky if you’re buying coffee in Child’s.”

The Great Dombey stopped his gentle but persistent struggle with the waiter and the head waiter, and looked at Helen with a long, stricken face.

“What d’you have to bring thash up for?” he asked.

He suffered himself to be led silently back to his table, where he slumped down, and stared hard at the wall for two or three minutes. After that he started up, and looked around the room as if he had forgotten something. He put his fingers to his forehead, and adopted an attitude of deep concentration, and in a moment began to snore.

“Let’s go to another place,” Millie said. “Gee! I didn’t know there was anything like this in New York. Where’s the Haymarket? That’s a hell-raising place, isn’t it?”

“It’s one of the dumps,” Helen Riley admitted.

“Let’s go,” Millie said, laughing. “I love it.”

Angie opened her mouth as if she were going to say something, and then closed it silently. Millie paid the check and they went out.

“How far is it?” Millie asked.

“Six blocks,” Helen said. “At Fortieth Street.”

“Are there any other places on the way?”

“The German Village,” Helen replied.

“Do girls pick up men in there, too?” Millie asked.

“It’s one of the dumps,” Helen said.

“Well, let’s stop in there on the way. Six blocks is nothing. I could walk sixty miles.”

They drank crème de menthe highballs in the German Village, which was quiet, and then they walked down to the Haymarket.

“Cream dee Mint highballs taste good and don’t make you tight,” Helen Riley said. “I guess we can stand one or two more of them.”

“I’m a red-headed woman—
Look out for me.”

Millie sang her little song as they sat down. She stood up suddenly, and sat down again as suddenly, grabbing Angie’s arm in a grip that made Angie scream.

“Oh!” Angie exclaimed. “Let go, Millie. What’s the matter. Jesus! That hurt like hell. Don’t do that.”

Millie was white. She was staring at the dance floor, her eyes moving very slowly, obviously following the movement of a couple on the floor. Angie followed her gaze.

“It’s Jack—and Bobby,” Angie whispered.

Angie took a firm hold on Millie’s sleeve.

“Don’t make a scene, Millie. For Christ’s sake! Keep hold of yourself.”

Millie turned to Angie a face distorted with rage. The green eyes were black.

“Shut up!” Millie said, and Angie sat back limply.

Millie's eyes were off her husband and Bobby for only a fraction of an instant. Following them intently as they wavered about the floor, she said to Angie through her teeth:

"The bastard! In Albany on business. And you knew about it, Angie."

Angie didn't say anything.

"You knew about it, and didn't tell me. A fine friend you are. Who is that blonde bitch?"

"Bobby Roberts is her name," Helen Riley said. "And she's been your husband's girl for a long time—before you ever knew him. His family tried to bust it up, but it was no go."

If Millie heard she gave no sign.

"Let's get out of here," Angie said. "Let's go before they see us. It won't do you any good to let Jack see you in this place."

"Now you know," Helen said, "you've got him right where you want him. There's an income for life by just catching him right. Get him in her apartment at the Godey, divorce, and big alimony. And he's begging for a good trimming. The big sucker."

"You shut up," Millie said, glaring at Helen for a moment. And there was something in Millie's eyes that made that hardened female subside.

When the music stopped, Millie half rose from her chair to see where Jack and Bobby were going.

"They'll be in a box upstairs," Helen ventured.

Millie opened her bag, and threw a twenty-dollar bill on the table.

"That'll pay for the drinks," she said.

"Where are you going?" Angie asked. "Please, Millie, don't do anything you'll be sorry for."

"Don't be a damned fool," Helen said. "You've got everything right in your hands now."

"You keep out of this," Millie snarled. "Both of you."

Helen and Angie watched while Millie arose and settled a big white fox fur around the shoulders of her blue tailored suit, and carefully straightened her wide-brimmed stiff sailor hat. And they remained silent as she started to walk with mincing steps across the polished floor, slim ankles and tiny feet just showing under the hem of her skirt.

“Oh, Helen, stop her,” Angie said. “Why doesn’t some one stop her?”

“Stop her?” Helen repeated. “Say, Angie, I’m so hard my spit bounces, but I wouldn’t any more try to stop that little girl tonight than I’d try to stop a wild buzz saw.”

“Oh, hell!” Angie said. “What did I ever let her come here for?”

“You know why you did—the same reason I did,” Helen said. “Because you was dyin’, simply dyin’, to see what would happen when Millie found out her husband was cheatin’. And now you’re finding out.”

“I wasn’t sure they’d be here,” Angie said.

“You wasn’t sure, but you hoped to God they’d drop in,” Helen said.

“And now what’ll happen?” Angie asked.

“I dunno, but I wisht I had a ringside seat,” Helen Riley said.

“And she had plenty of money,” Angie said.

“This was an expensive evening for us,” Helen said. “We might just as well sit right here, and have a beer, and maybe we can do some business.”

Millie walked up one flight of stairs, which ended in a gallery encircling the dance floor. The gallery was partitioned off into curtained boxes. Each box looked out on the dance floor, and contained a table and some chairs.

Millie looked through the curtains into the first box, and into the second, third and fourth without results. But when she parted the curtains of the fifth box, she saw John, with the blonde, Bobby Roberts, and another man and a girl, all in evening clothes. There were wine glasses on the table, and there was a wine cooler, with a napkin-covered bottle in it, on the floor.

Millie was inside the box and standing beside the table before the second man, who was directly opposite, looked up and saw her. John’s back was towards her, and Bobby was seated to his left. The moment he saw her, the man, who had been doing more than his share of the drinking, said:

“Hello, Beautiful. Anything we can do for you? Have a drink?”

The other girl looked up at Millie, and said:

“She is rather attractive for one of those Haymarket girls, isn’t she? Now run along, little girl,” she added to Millie. “There aren’t any men for you here.”

Bobby was gazing insolently at Millie now. She said to Jack: “Look at the poor little thing the cat brought in. How they do go in for henna,” she

exclaimed languidly, turning to the other girl.

Jack twisted in his chair then, and became motionless for a moment. In the instant, Millie exclaimed harshly, “Henna this, you bitch!” and struck viciously into Bobby’s mouth with her left hand.

The blow, solidly given, with hate adding power to good young muscles, toppled Bobby and the chair over backwards to the floor. Bobby shrieked piercingly twice, and then wailed:

“My teeth are gone! My teeth!”

The other girl added her voice to Bobby’s. She screamed:

“She’s knocked out Bobby’s teeth! Police!”

“Grab her! Grab her, Jack,” the second man yelled, lurching to his feet.

“Grab this,” said Millie, throwing a glass and the champagne it contained into Jack’s face.

“You young devil,” Jack exclaimed to Millie, wiping his bleeding face with one hand, and groping blindly with the other for his friend, and catching him by the coat lapel.

“Leave her alone, for God’s sake,” he implored. “And shut Bobby up. Shut her up! We can’t have any police in this. That’s my wife. My God, the scandal! My family would die. SHUT UP, Bobby!”

“O Lord!” the other man exclaimed. “O Lord!” and shoving the other girl to one side, he clapped a hand over Bobby’s mouth. Bobby was hysterical.

“Shut up, Bobby!” he said. “You’ve got to shut up. That is Jack’s wife—his wife, you understand, and it’ll be all off with you, if you don’t keep still.”

Millie started back through the curtains and met a breathless waiter. There was the sound of other hurrying feet behind him.

“What the hell happened?” the waiter asked.

“I don’t know, an accident, I guess,” Millie said. “One of the girls fainted.”

“You wait a minute,” the waiter said, but Millie kept on going.

She passed other men and women hurrying toward the source of the screams, but she walked steadily along the hall, and down the stairs, and across the floor to the table where Angie and Helen were still sitting. She sat

down abruptly and said, "Let's all have some whiskey." And then she began to cry.

Tears rolled down her cheeks, and sobs racked her chest.

"What's the matter, dearie?" Helen asked.

"Gee! I'm glad to see you, Millie," Angie exclaimed, "I thought you had committed a murder or something. What's the matter?"

"Don't cry," Helen said. "There ain't a man on earth that's worth it."

"I'm all right," Millie said. "Let's all—have some—whiskey."

"Three Old Crows, waiter," Helen ordered. "Do you want a highball, Millie?"

"P-P-Plain," Millie said, wiping her eyes with a handkerchief, and sniffing for all the world like a little girl who has been scolded.

"Straight, with water chasers," Helen said. "And make it snappy."

"Now, pull yourself together, dearie," she added to Millie. "Everything's all right. Every woman gets fooled at least once. The trick is to stop at once."

"Oh, dear!" Millie said, speaking more easily. "Oh, dear! If he hadn't said something that reminded me of my mother-in-law, I don't know what I'd have done—killed 'em both, I guess. I wanted to."

"What did you do?" Angie asked. "What happened, Millie?"

"And what's your mother-in-law got to do with it?" Helen asked. "Was it you screeching up there, or who?"

"My mother-in-law is regular," Millie said, "and it came over me all in a heap that the only person who'd really get hurt was her, so I skiddooed. I wasn't thinking of anything till then."

"Till when?" Helen urged.

"Till Jack said there'd be a scandal," Millie replied. "I knocked that Bobby Roberts over, and I threw a glass in Jack's face, and Jack said to look out for the scandal, and I just had a picture of his mother come in my mind, and I thought how she'd feel, and I was through. She's been square with me."

"F'r Gawd's sakes!" Angie exclaimed.

The waiter arrived, and put the glasses on the table.

“What happened, waiter?” Helen inquired. “What was all the screaming about? Somebody hit somebody with a brick?”

“Nobody knows,” the waiter said, “but a dame up in one of the boxes has got two teeth knocked out somehow, and a gent that’s with her has got his face all cut up, and wine all over his shirt front. But they say nothin’ happened, and believe me, that satisfies the boss an’ everybody.”

“A little family party,” Helen suggested.

“A pal of mine who was first to get there has got a theory it was a woman done it,” the waiter said, confidentially. “This guy—Hicks is his name—says when he got to the box a woman came out of it. He says she was about six feet tall, with shoulders on her like John L. Sullivan, and a look in her eye that reminded him of his wife when she’s on the warpath.”

“A big woman?” Helen asked, winking at the dainty appearing Millie.

“A whale of a big dame,” the waiter replied.

“Why didn’t he stop her?” Angie asked.

“Well,” the waiter said, “Hicks says that he told her to wait, and that when she didn’t wait he thought he’d let some one else do the stoppin’. He’s seen what happens to guys who stick their noses in other folks’s business before.”

“I guess it’s all over then?” Helen inquired.

“It’s all over, and we’re waitin’ for the next,” the waiter said genially.

“Let’s have another whiskey,” Millie said.

“Okay,” said the waiter, and stepped to another table, whose occupants had been signalling him vainly for minutes.

“Two teeth you knocked out,” Helen Riley said, looking at Millie with new respect. “The little girl must pack a wallop. It’s mostly scratching and hair-pulling when us dames mix it up.”

“My father boxed with me every day until he was killed,” Millie explained. “He wanted me to be scientific.”

“That’s true,” Angie said. “I’d forgotten about it, but they used to say at home that Millie could fight better than most men.”

And that’s how Millie came to be launched into the nightlife of Broadway, with a reputation as a fighter.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

“GEE!” ANGIE said, “this is the first decent dinner I had since I left home. Chicken fricassee and dumplin’s.”

“Father might not have eloped with a waitress in the Busy Bee if mother could’ve made biscuits like these,” Helen Riley said.

“I’ve got lemon meringue pie in the kitchen,” Millie said, her face flushed, her eyes sparkling, and a happy lilt in her voice. “My father always said I made better pies than his mother did, and that was the best thing he could say about anybody. Save room for the pie.”

“I don’t feel as if I could eat another thing,” Angie said, “but I’m going to make room for the pie.”

“I’ll give you both a batch of doughnuts when you go,” Millie said. “I haven’t got used to the darn gas stove yet, but I’m cookin’ all my spare time.”

“Did you ever see any one like Millie?” Angie asked. “Look at the food, and did you notice how clean the place is? My God! It looks as if she went over it with a chamois skin.”

“One room’s nothin’,” Millie said, “not when you were brought up with ten to clean. But it’s awful dirty in the city. Seems like I’ve no sooner cleaned, than the place is ready to clean again.”

“You could eat off the floor,” Helen Riley said.

Millie beamed as she refilled tumblers with bottled beer.

“I like my own cooking,” she said, “but I like it better when I see other people eating it. I hate this restaurant food.”

“It looks like you have a good time doin’ your own washin’ too,” Angie said. “The bathroom looks like a laundry.”

“Gosh, yes!” Millie agreed. “I’m always washing something. I hate laundries. They ruin your clothes.”

“Well,” Helen Riley said, “it’s all right for Millie, but not for me. I like my breakfast served in bed, and I don’t like to get up till noon, and I hate cleaning.”

"I like to get up at six," Millie said. "It makes me feel good. If I lay around in bed I'm dopey all day."

"My Gawd!" Helen exclaimed. "I think you're crazy. Here you are working your head off selling candy in a drug store, and living in a one-room-and-kitchen flat away uptown here, and doing all your own work, when you could just as well be living in a big house, with servants and everything."

"And the men are wild about her and her red hair," Angie said.

"I feel better," Millie said. "I don't blame you girls for anything you do. We all got to live the way we feel. I'd die if I was doing what both of you do. I haven't been able to scrub myself clean since I found I'd shared Jack with another woman."

"How's the baby?" Angie asked.

"She's fine," Millie said. "Fat as butter."

"I would have kept my baby, no matter what happened," Helen Riley said. "Damn it! I'd 'a' made 'em all sweat. I'd 'a' kept the baby, and gotten a lot of money out of my husband, and made 'em all dance. If I was in your boots I'd be in Paris right now, hitting the high spots. They wouldn't have gotten my baby on me. Over my dead body they wouldn't."

"I got some sense," Millie said. "The baby is better off with her grandmother; and her grandmother is better off with the baby. She was perfectly sweet to me, and she didn't want me to go. She thinks I'm fine, and she thinks Jack is a bum. Jack has moved to his club, and he's in awfully bad."

"What did she say when you told her you was clearing out, Millie?" Angie asked.

"She said she was sorry to see me go, but that she appreciated the fact that I was too much of a lady to make a scandal by going to law about it," Millie said. "She said she thought I was making a great mistake, but that she was not my judge, and that she'd always love me."

"What did she say about money?" Helen Riley asked. "It seems to me they got off of it damned cheap."

"Shut up, Helen," Millie said. "She'd give me all the money she could. She wanted me to have an allowance. But I wouldn't take it. I wouldn't take five cents from any member of the whole Maitland family."

"You're crazy, Millie," Helen exclaimed.

"She always was," Angie agreed.

"He'll catch you some time, and get a divorce from you," Helen said. "You watch."

"Edward came to see me," Millie said. "That's Jack's brother, you know. And he tried to fix it up, but I told him it was no use, that I was goin' to earn my own living. And to hell with everybody, him included."

"What did he say?" Angie inquired.

"He said I had spunk, and it was a damn shame that I hadn't had a fair start at living my life right, and told me if I ever needed anything to be sure and let him know. He said, 'The Maitlands owe you a lot, Millie.' And I said I'd rather have people owing me, than me be owing them."

"She only took the dress she was wearing when she walked out," Angie said to Helen. "Can you imagine that?"

"I took that diamond Jack gave me, and my wedding ring," Millie said. "I guess I'm a damn fool, but I'm always going to wear the wedding ring, and I hocked the diamond. I never felt so good in my life as when the pawnbroker got the diamond and I got the money. I kind of felt good about that."

"But, gee, Millie! You could live without working so easy in this burg," Helen said. "You wouldn't have to have but one man, and you could live easy."

"She's having 'em after her all the time to go on the stage," Angie said. "Aren't you, Millie?"

"I wouldn't go on the stage for a million dollars," Millie said. "I'm no monkey on a stick."

"Nice people are on the stage," Helen said.

"And a lot of bums," Millie said.

After dinner, Helen and Angie wanted to help wash and wipe the dishes. But Millie wouldn't have it.

"You girls are just offering to do it to be polite," she said. "I'm used to it, and I don't mind it. You just keep me company, or maybe you have dates."

"Not on a Sunday afternoon," Angie said. "Sunday's a dead day for men. They're all home with their families, or taking their wives and best girls

somewhere.”

“I should think traveling men would be just as lonesome on Sundays,” Millie laughed.

“They’re more lonesome maybe,” Helen said. “Probably right now in New York there are fifty thousand men who would like to meet me just as much as Angie and me would like to meet them, but we don’t know how to get together. That’s all. Sunday’s a rotten day.”

“It’s a fine day for me,” Millie exclaimed, sloshing dishes around in the sink, and piling them on a tray. “It gives me a chance to get caught up in my work. I can darn my stockings, and mend things, and really clean up.”

“Imagine darning stockings!” Helen said. “I’d forgotten it could be done.”

“Why don’t you turn on the phonograph?” Millie asked.

Millie’s room was arranged as a combination living and bedroom. Her bed, which had no head or foot, was a couch in the daytime. A chest of drawers served both as dresser and sideboard. There was an oak Morris chair, with green velvet upholstery, and a wicker rocker, with flowered upholstery in green, red and yellow. Over its two windows were white curtains, with flounces, and drapes made of cretonne, which matched the couch cover.

Two bored-looking geranium plants leaned from earthenware pots set in saucers on either window sill. Between the windows was a home-gilded steam radiator. Photographs of Millie’s family adorned the walls—Mike and Josie and the boys and some of their children. The first question asked by Helen and Angie when they saw Millie’s new home was why she didn’t have a photograph of her daughter in sight.

“I’ve got some pictures of her in the drawer over there,” Millie said. “But her pictures are for me, and for nobody else.”

Millie had gotten her job without looking for it. She was absorbing a chocolate soda in Karen’s Drug Store, adjoining the Myle Theatre, when old Isadore Karen walked over to her, and said:

“Excuse it, please, Miss, but I would kick myself later if I didn’t speak to you about it now. I own this store.”

“Well, what of it, Mr. Methusaleh?” said Millie freshly.

“Ha! Ha!” cackled old man Karen. “You have a tongue in your head too.”

“I ain’t dumb, if that’s what you mean.”

“Very good,” old man Karen said. “I see you ain’t.”

“So you can see,” Millie said.

“Look, Miss. What I was going to ask you is if you are working and wanted maybe to change your job, or you ain’t working, and would like a job, I would consider giving you a job in my store at the candy counter.”

“Sure, I’m from the country,” Millie said, “but I didn’t know there was any hay left in my hair.”

“I am serious,” old man Karen insisted. “I would offer you this job because you are so pretty, and on Broadway the men like to buy things of pretty girls. And especially they like red hair.”

“What’s the pay?” Millie asked suddenly.

Old man Karen spread out his hands, and shrugged his shoulders. At the same time he managed to elevate his bushy gray eyebrows over his gold-bowed spectacles, and to wag his gray chin whisker, all in a manner to suggest that he was a philanthropist in the midst of one of his greatest philanthropies.

“Twenty dollars a week,” he said, as if he were mentioning a sum previously considered only a dream.

“I’ll take it,” Millie said.

Old man Karen relaxed all over.

“With commissions to be figured out later, when I know something about the job,” Millie added.

“Commissions?” old man Karen echoed in crescendo.

Millie stuck to her guns, however, and won the battle. She went to work the next morning; and old man Karen did nothing but smile as he stood in the door of his shop and watched the men, of all ages and degrees, attracted to Millie’s department as flies are inveigled by sugar.

Millie had had her job six weeks when she entertained Helen and Angie at Sunday dinner. They both dropped into the store almost daily, usually about five o’clock in the afternoon, when Millie went with them next door to

Canavan's Café and had a cocktail. Millie already was making forty-five or fifty dollars a week, and that was a comparatively large income in 1905.

"But that's chicken feed," Helen Riley pointed out, "for a girl with your looks."

"It's in a business, and I want to be in a regular business," Millie replied.

"Oh, you'll fall for some guy, and want to get married again," Angie said. "And then all your independence that you're boasting about will be gone."

"Tra la," Millie exclaimed. "I wish you and Helen would both stop worrying about me. I'm not worrying about myself."

"You wait," Angie said.

CHAPTER TWELVE

AMONG the men and boys who became friends of Millie's in Karen's were several newspaper reporters. They called Karen "Doc." He mixed them a concoction which they referred to as dynamite, and which really was the Sun Cholera Cure, wiped out of existence later by anti-narcotic legislation.

"One shot of that Dynamite blows a hangover to hell-and-gone," Tommy Roche, of the *Press*, told Millie early one afternoon.

"So I've been told before," Millie said. "And one more is likely to blow you to hell-and-stay-there. Did you ever think of that?"

"Lots of times," said Tommy, grinning so that he showed his extra white teeth. "I thought of it today when I got up, and took an hour to make up my mind to tie my shoe laces but not to shave; and when I was on my way over here and an automobile horn tooted and I leaped eight feet in the air and died four times before I came down; and when I was waiting on the other side of Broadway afraid to step off the curb; and when — —"

"That's enough," Millie said. "What do you drink so much for?"

"I dunno," Tommy said. "I wish I could drink like you do. You always know when to stop."

"I feel rotten some mornings," Millie said. "But I take a drink of sarsaparilla and forget about it."

"I guess I'll call the office now," Tommy said. "I didn't have the nerve to talk to the desk before."

When Tommy came out of the telephone booth, he was grinning cheerfully.

"I feel almost good again, Millie," he laughed. "I've got Ships News today, and there's nothing doing down there except the shipping table, and the Ships News boy'll make that up for me for a quarter. I couldn't make it up myself, anyway. So I've got a day off. Will you have a drink?"

"It's too early for me, Tommy."

But Tommy was very persuasive. He was a little more than six feet tall, and he had black, crinkly hair, and wide gray eyes, and a merry mouth. He

had the sort of figure that lends an air even to cheap clothes, and he always gave the impression that he had been scrubbed and scoured from head to foot within the last few minutes. Tommy merely was born with an immaculate aura. He could go a week without a bath, as a matter of fact, without getting half as soiled as most men in a half-day. He had a flair for color and for knotting ties. He had the manners of a Chesterfield, which he tricked up with little exaggerations—such as sweeping off his hat a bit more grandly than was customary, bowing a little more deeply than was necessary and calling married women Madame, and unmarried ladies Mademoiselle—which might not have been so attractive in a less handsome human. Tommy was a devil with the ladies, and Millie finally grinned and walked around with him into Canavan's.

By six o'clock, both Tommy and Millie were feeling merry. Neither of them was drunk, but both of them were gayer than one ever becomes from drinking water.

"Let's eat," Tommy said.

"I'll tell you what," Millie countered. "Let's get a big steak and some onions, and go up to my place, and I'll cook dinner. I love to cook."

"I haven't had a home-cooked meal for a year," Tommy said. "You're on."

Millie made it a rule that she always paid her share of all expenses when she was out with either men or women friends. So she and Tommy paid their checks; Tommy called Ships News on the telephone as a last minute precaution suggested by Millie, and they got into the subway and went uptown.

At midnight, Millie said:

"Well, Tommy I don't like to throw you out, but I'm tired, and I want to get to bed."

"Gee whizz, Millie," Tommy said. "I never think of the time because I don't have to get to the office till one or two o'clock in the afternoon. I've had such a wonderful afternoon and evening that I can't begin to thank you for them. What began as one of the rottenest days of my life has ended up as one of the best. You're certainly a marvel, Millie, and here I am sober. I guess I'll hit the hay too."

"Got enough money left to get home and get your breakfast in the morning?" Millie asked.

“Sure,” Tommy replied confidently.

“Better take five dollars, Tommy,” Millie said, pushing a bill which she had ready for this emergency into his hand. “Pay me back any time.”

“I don’t need it, Millie,” Tommy insisted. “I couldn’t borrow money from you, anyway.”

“What’s the difference?” Millie asked. “Take the five. Go ahead,” and she stuffed it in the outside breast pocket of his jacket.

“Well, if you insist,” Tommy agreed, somewhat sheepishly.

“I didn’t want you to walk home,” Millie said. “Good night, Tommy.”

“Pleasant dreams,” Tommy said, bowed, and was gone.

“You’re stuck on Tommy Rocke, aren’t you, Millie?” Angie asked one day in Canavan’s.

“Tommy’s just a pal,” Millie said. “I like him because he’s different from the rest: he doesn’t get fresh. In all the time I’ve known him he hasn’t mauled me once.”

“It may be his system,” Helen Riley said. “The other boys are always kidding him about his women.”

“I like the system,” Millie said.

“Go on!” Helen cried. “You may kid yourself into thinking you do, but every girl wonders what’s the matter if a man doesn’t try to make love to her.”

“I do not,” Millie exclaimed.

Tommy came in and sat down, and was still sitting when Helen and Angie left.

“What do you see in those dames, Millie?” Tommy wanted to know. “They’re nothing but tarts.”

“What they do doesn’t bother me,” Millie said. “Angie comes from my home town, and I knew her since she was a little girl; and Helen has been all right to me.”

“It makes me sore to see you with ’em,” Tommy said. “People are likely to think you’re the same way.”

“Well, if they do,” Millie countered, “they find they’ve got another think coming.”

Henry Spring, who worked on the *World*, and John Holmes, who worked for the *Herald*, shared an apartment with Tommy. Henry was tall and blonde and wore spectacles and stuttered a trifle. He was two years out of Harvard, and was busy writing a play in his spare time. John Holmes was short and plump, with brown hair beginning to get thin at the temples. He already was selling poetry to newspapers and cheap magazines, and had had two short stories published. Millie knew them both.

“Hank and Jack and I are throwing a party Saturday night,” Tommy told Millie, “and we’d like it if you could come. There’ll be a few newspaper men, and some girls, and a lot of beer. We’ve got a piano.”

“I’d love it,” Millie replied.

The three boys had the top floor of a three-story frame house in East Twentieth Street. Sandwiched in between apartment houses, this survival of a former day boasted a front yard, an iron fence, a front porch, and an apology for a lawn.

Two dozen persons attended the party. There were newspaper men, some of them of middle age, but acting like boys, and some newspaper women, and some wives and sweethearts.

“After the shows let out, we’ve got some talent coming down to sing and do some high kicking,” Tommy explained to Millie. “Henry sleeps on the couch in this big front room,” he continued, “and Jack has the next room, and I have the back room. That’s the coatroom tonight.”

Millie was a trifle embarrassed at first, but she soon became the life of the party. She made every one comfortable, and served drinks and sandwiches. When Martin Roberts, star reporter of the *American*, arrived at one o’clock in the morning, so tight that he could barely articulate, it was Millie who propped him up in a corner, and made him beg for sardines.

“He’s my trained seal,” she cried. “Open your mouth.”

Martin, who was noted as the dude of Park Row, but who had been on a bender for several days, and was in a shocking state of dishevelment, opened his mouth stupidly, while every one howled.

“Catch!” Millie called, and tossed a sardine, which hit Martin in the eye.

“Gosh!” Hank exclaimed. “Martin’s the most dignified gent in the newspaper business, Millie. You’re certainly making a bum out of him.”

“He made it out of himself,” Millie said. “Ooh, look! He caught that one.”

About four o'clock in the morning the last of the visitors went home, leaving only Martin and Millie, besides Tommy, Hank, and Jack Holmes. Martin was asleep on Henry's bed in the front room. Millie was cleaning up.

“Don't do that, Millie,” Tommy said. “The woman'll be in Monday morning to clean.”

Hank and Jack came in with their hats in hand.

“We're feeling kind of gooey,” Jack said, “so we're going to *The World* Turkish baths. If you want to come down there after you see Millie home, come ahead, Tommy. So long.”

“So long,” Tommy said.

“Let's get Martin undressed and into bed,” Millie suggested. “He'll feel a lot better.”

After some argument, Tommy agreed.

“I feel nearly as tight as he is,” Tommy said, after they had gotten Martin between the covers of Hank's bed. “Jesus! I'm tired.”

“You go to bed, too,” Millie said. “You don't have to take me home.”

They had an argument about that, which Millie also won. She pushed Tommy into his room and shut the door.

“You get into bed, Tommy,” she said. “And I'll fix up this place a bit. I couldn't go away and leave it like this.”

Tommy was awakened later by Millie's voice.

“Move over,” Millie said. “You don't want the whole bed, do you?”

Tommy put out his hand, and felt Millie's skin. She didn't have anything on. He put his arm around her and pulled her close. They kissed for the first time.

When Tommy awakened in the morning he smelled coffee. Millie was standing beside his bed, and on a table which she had cleared of books and a lamp, and laid with a clean face towel, were two cups of coffee and toast and eggs. Millie, in a big faded bathrobe, which belonged to Jack, had her red curls caught up on top of her head. She looked fresh and child-like.

Tommy looked at her for a moment, and then he smiled. He reached over and pulled the bathrobe open and kissed her between her breasts.

“We’ll get married tomorrow, Baby,” he said.

“Eat your breakfast,” Millie said. “I’ve had mine.”

“Gimme my bathrobe in the closet there, till I go to the bathroom,” Tommy said.

When she tossed him the bathrobe he tried to pull her into bed. But she pulled away from him, laughing.

“You eat your breakfast while it’s hot,” she said. “A man needs his food regular. There’s plenty of time for fooling.”

“You’re a marvel,” Tommy said, jumping out of bed and kissing her. “You’re the eighth wonder of the world. I’ll be out in a jiffy.”

Tommy was eating his breakfast when Martin tottered in, a sheet wrapped around him.

“How d’you feel, Martin?” Tommy asked.

“Rotten,” Martin said. “That little girl, Millie, gave me some coffee with some whiskey in it, and then got me to take an egg fixed up with something. But I feel awful. I ought to get out right away, too. It’s after one o’clock, but my clothes are filthy, I suppose. I was on this bust three days.”

Millie had just come in the room.

“Hello, trained seal,” she said, grinning. “Your clothes are in the other bedroom. Go in and look at ’em.”

“I hate to.”

“Come on,” Millie said, and she dragged Martin away with her.

“There they are,” Millie said.

Martin’s suit was sponged and pressed, draped about a hanger on the inside of the door.

“For God’s sake!” he exclaimed. “Did you do that?”

“And look,” Millie said, proudly pointing to B. V. D.’s, shirt, collar, socks, tie and two handkerchiefs, all clean, and freshly ironed.

“I’m dreaming,” Martin said.

“And how do you like your shoes?” Millie inquired, bending down and picking up two neatly polished shoes, and turning them around for inspection.

“I can’t talk; get me a drink,” Martin said.

“No more drinks for you,” Millie said. “Maybe you can have one with an egg and milk, if I can get the milk, before you leave the house for the office. But you’ve got to keep sober for a while.”

“By gosh! You’re right,” Martin agreed. “And now that you’ve given me this start, I’ll see if I can get a bath, and get dressed. But I surely feel awful.”

“There’s a shower,” Millie said. “And I’ll help you all I can.”

The door in Tommy’s room was closed when Martin came out of the bathroom, and it remained closed while he painfully dressed. He smoked two or three cigarettes, and finally knocked.

“That you, Martin? Come in,” Tommy called.

Martin went in, and looked down at red head and black on the pillow.

“This is Mrs. Roche,” Tommy said.

“Well, all I got to say is you’re the luckiest guy in the world,” Martin said. “Mrs. Roche’s good looks go without saying, but did she tell you she cleaned and pressed my suit, and washed and ironed my B. V. D.’s, and shirt, and collar, and tie and socks, and on top of that, shined my shoes. Holy Smoke! I never saw a woman like her.”

“Well, I’ll be damned! Did you do that, Millie?” Tommy asked.

Millie bobbed her bright head.

“It wasn’t anything,” she said. “I’ve done it loads of times for my father and brothers.”

“But that isn’t all of it,” Martin continued. “I been lookin’ around this dump while you two have been loving in here, and she’s washed and ironed all the curtains in the front room, and scrubbed and polished the whole place. She’s got everything out of the ice box right now, and the ice box is moved across the kitchen. My God! What a woman!”

“You don’t know the half of it,” Tommy said. “Mrs. Roche is the most wonderful woman in the world in all respects.”

“Except that she isn’t Mrs. Roche,” Millie said.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

TOMMY and Millie took an apartment in One Hundred and Tenth Street, but they didn't get married. Milly told Tommy about Jack Maitland, and the baby, and Tommy said:

"Well, get a divorce and we'll get married."

"I won't get a divorce," Millie said. "And I wouldn't marry the best man living. I'm through."

"But you love me, don't you?" Tommy insisted.

"You know I love you, Tommy," Millie said. "But I won't marry you."

Tommy kept up the argument for several months. He always introduced Millie as Mrs. Rocke, and she was known as his wife along Broadway, in Greenwich Village, and on Park Row, not to mention the neighborhood in which they lived.

At Christmas time of the first year they lived together, Tommy took Millie to his home in Pittsburgh, and introduced Millie to his family as his wife. Tommy's mother was a prim, thin, angular female, deeply interested in the Epworth League, the Thursday Afternoon Book Club, and in the Y. W. C. A. Millie kissed her when they first met, and helped her with the housework the first afternoon, and ordered Tommy into his rubbers when he went out walking with his father.

"I never gave our Tom credit for picking out such a splendid, sensible girl for a wife," Mrs. Rocke told her husband when they retired that night. "Why, she's an old-fashioned girl like I was."

George Rocke was a moderately successful advertising man, who had settled down finally to an income that would keep him comfortably but not luxuriously. It had been five years since he even had looked at the novel, stuffed way in the desk in his den.

"I'm surprised that such a pretty girl would be satisfied with the salary our Tom is making," he said.

"I guess Thomas is good enough for any girl in the world," Mrs. Rocke replied tartly, taking off her transformation and laying it on the dresser, and proceeding to tie in a little string the remaining wisps of her thin hair.

"I hate to kid the old man and the old lady," Tommy told Millie, "but there's no other way out of it. I've got to see my family, and I can't leave you alone in New York. And they'll be coming to see me too. They had to know about us living together. It would kill the old lady if she knew we weren't married."

"It'd take more than that to kill her," Millie replied. "You'd be surprised what women can stand without dying. They're built to take punishment."

When they got back to New York, Millie gave Tommy a dozen expensive socks, a set of monogrammed silk underwear, and two dozen of the finest linen handkerchiefs. He had given her a gold watch.

"Gee!" Tommy said. "I love nice things, but I hate to have you spending your money on me. It makes me feel kind of cheap."

"Nonsense!" Millie said. "And you've got to go to a good tailor too—the best in town. That's Ball."

"Holy Moses!" Tommy exploded. "I can't afford to pay forty dollars for a suit now, buying it from Abe Meltzer on the installment plan. How the hell can I afford to pay a hundred and a quarter for a suit from Ball?"

"You got to," Millie said. "You've got to have nice clothes—not imitation nice, but the nicest you can buy. And I'm going to get you a cane. Martin carries a cane, and some of the other boys."

"I won't do it," Tommy asserted. "That's final. I won't carry a cane, and I won't wear spats, and I won't wear a buttonhole, and I won't rouge."

"You're going to do all of 'em except rouge," Millie said. "And, furthermore, you're going to get a raise."

"For God's sake!" Tommy exploded. "Here I am worrying about being fired, and you're talking about a raise. You're crazy. Don't I stay out two or three days ever so often because I'm drinking? Damn it. I'm lucky to have a job."

"They figure you figure that way," Millie said. "They're not keeping you because you're good-looking. They're just taking advantage of you because you're foolish. They don't know I work. That's where we fool 'em."

"I can't live on you," Tommy said. "And I won't."

"Don't worry," Millie said. "I don't want you to. But we could live on what I earn, if we had to, better than we live on what you earn, because I earn more than you do."

“That’s right. Rub it in,” Tommy said.

“Rub nothing,” Millie exclaimed. “Rub sense into you, if I can. You get forty-five dollars a week now. You tell them tomorrow that you want sixty.”

“The boss’ll give me the laugh,” Tommy said.

“You tell him you want sixty,” Millie said, “or you’ll resign.”

“Don’t butt into my business,” Tommy pleaded desperately. “You don’t understand the situation on the staff. They’re figuring on cutting down right now.”

“That’s what they were doing when the first newspaper opened for business, and it’s what I figure they’ll be doing when the last newspaper is going out of business,” Millie said. “Cutting down. I notice they always are cutting down, but that some guys get plenty of money for doing the cutting. And you’re going to be one of the guys that get the money.”

“I couldn’t be an executive. I’m not that hard-hearted,” Tommy said.

“Whatever you have to be you’re going to come home tomorrow and tell me you’re earning sixty dollars a week, or else you and I bust up,” Millie said. “I’m not going to live with any forty-five dollar half-wit.”

“What if I’m out of a job?” Tommy asked.

“I’d rather have you out a job than afraid of losing the one you’ve got,” Millie retorted.

Tommy called Millie on the telephone the next day. “What do you think?” he said.

“You got the sixty,” Millie said.

“Gosh! I was scared,” he reported. “But Clarence Parks went to see Old Man Killing, the Managing Editor, and Old Man Killing sent for me. He tried to beat me down, but I stuck, and I got the sixty. We’ll have a party tonight.”

“Sixty’s chicken feed,” Millie said. “You got to get into the money.”

“Come down to Mouquin’s for dinner tonight, and we’ll have a party.”

Millie wakened Tommy for breakfast at eleven o’clock next morning.

“Oof!” Tommy exclaimed. “I feel rotten. Have we got anything to drink in the house?”

“No drinking before breakfast,” Millie said. “You get some hot coffee into you, and an egg or two, and you’ll feel better.”

“I couldn’t hold a thing,” Tommy complained. “A drink would fix me up. Gee—Suss! What I wouldn’t give right this minute for a Suisess, or an absinthe frappée!”

“You drink enough without starting before breakfast,” Millie insisted.

They argued about it for two or three minutes, and finally Millie compromised by making Tommy an eggnog, with two eggs and a stiff lashing of brandy.

“Wow!” Tommy caroled five minutes later. “I feel pretty good now.” And he left the bathroom where he had been preparing to shave, and went into the kitchen where she was washing dishes, and kissed her left ear.

Millie promptly dropped a dish and a dish rag, and put her arms around his neck, and gave him a hearty kiss on the lips. She had an apron on over nothing, and Tommy wasn’t even wearing an apron. Tommy evened matters by pulling off her apron.

“You’re a knockout with your clothes on,” Tommy said, “but you’re something to pray to with your clothes off.”

“I was glad to find you didn’t get mad when I was naked,” Millie said.

“Did you think I was crazy?” Tommy asked.

“My husband always was telling me to cover myself up,” Millie said.

“Why mention that damn fool?” Tommy said.

“Stop that,” Millie said, “or you’ll be late for the office. Get in the bathroom, and get dressed.”

“Ha! Ha!” Tommy laughed, and kissed her long and hard. After that he looked long into her moist eyes.

There was no more talk of Tommy being late for the office until an hour later, when Tommy yelled from the bathroom:

“Where’s our bath towel?”

Millie took him a towel.

“What would people say if they knew we only used one towel between us, Tommy?” she asked.

"If they weren't dumb they'd say we must be in love with each other," Tommy replied. "Love is hard to define, but I'd say when a feller and a girl drink out of the same cup, and dry themselves with the same bath towel, and don't worry when they find they have slipped in their calculations and are using the same toothbrush occasionally, that they have a natural affinity, at least."

"But what about germs?" Millie said.

"The only thing I could catch from you, I guess, would be good looks and health, and I hope I catch 'em."

"I'm stuck on you, Tommy," Millie said. "You're so big—big everywhere."

"You coot thing," Tommy said, and hoisted her over his head.

Then he went to the office.

That night Tommy met Millie at the store, and they went home and to bed early.

Millie was awakened by a mighty smack on her bare backside. She bounded out of bed, red curls flying, green eyes flashing, lashing at Tommy with a right swing. But Tommy had run into the dining room.

Millie, in her sheer green nightgown, ran screaming with laughter and rage after him, and had made a half-circuit of the table in his wake, before she saw the table was laid, and breakfast was on it.

"My God!" she exploded. "You got breakfast."

"Just to prove you ain't the only cook in the fambly," Tommy said.

They went through the same routine every few mornings, but always acted as if each time were the first. After she had her coffee, Millie slid around and hit Tommy solidly in the back.

"Take that, you woman beater," she said. And then they raced around the table and into the bedroom again, where they had a wrestling match on the bed, utterly disregarding that hygienic rule which prescribes rest after meals. In fact, they bathed after meals, and loved after meals, and between meals. They just did whatever they felt like whenever they felt like it.

"I wish we could have babies," Tommy said one day, for the hundredth time. "Why in hell don't you get a divorce, and let's get married, and do the thing right?"

“I’ll never get married,” Millie insisted, her face taking on a stubborn expression, and her firm jaw setting. “I wouldn’t marry the best man living.”

“But, my God!” Tommy complained. “I love you and you love me, and you would have wonderful babies, and we would have something to live for.”

“I got something to live for,” Millie said. “I love life.”

Then she changed the tone of her voice to a soft, velvety quality, and said:

“Kiss, Tommy?”

“Damn it,” Tommy said. “You talk like a wash-woman, and fight like a female wildcat when you’re mad, but you’re a queen between the sheets. I’ve got a new slant on some of these guys that are married to red-headed women, and stand for a lot of henpecking.”

“Who henpecks?” Millie demanded.

“Nobody,” Tommy replied. “But if you did, I’d stand for it. You’re that good.”

“I’m a red-headed woman,” Millie hummed, “Look out for me.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

“How’s the Dude of Park Row?” Eddie Carter, of the *Sun*, greeted Tommy Rocke, at the bar of Lipton’s café.

“What’ll you have, Tommy?” asked Ambrose Voight, of the *World*.

“A whiskey sour,” Tommy said. “I feel low.”

“You got a lot to feel low about,” Eddie observed, sipping a highball. “With this job you just got on the *American*. You certainly know how to get the dough.”

“Nuts!” Tommy said. “Dough isn’t everything. Look at Henry and John.”

“Well, they’ve been writing all their spare time,” said Ambrose.

“That’s what gets my goat,” Tommy asserted. “I always wanted to write. I had a play started seven years ago, but I’ve never done anything on it.”

“Whose fault is it?” Ambrose asked.

“Who could write in our ranch?” Tommy countered hotly. “Gee—Suss! It’s one party after another. Millie isn’t happy unless she’s got the place stuffed full of people, or unless we’re out raising hell. Give us another drink,” he added to the bartender.

“You got a lot to blame Millie for,” Eddie said. “When she took you in you didn’t have a thin dime. She dolled you up like a Christmas tree and has kept you that way for—how long is it now?”

“Seven years,” Tommy replied. “But, for Christ’s sake, I wish you fellers would lay off that stuff about her dressing me up. Sounds as if I was a pimp. I buy my own clothes, don’t I, and I pay the rent, don’t I?”

“Ha! Ha!” Ambrose ejaculated lazily. “When you first blossomed out in silk socks and tailor-made suits, I suppose that was your idea—and your dough.”

“And that fancy handkerchief sticking tastefully out of your coat pocket right now?” Eddie inquired. “I suppose you picked that out.”

"Oh, shut up," Tommy exclaimed. "I'm not saying Millie isn't a wonder. All the fellers know that. But she's nobody to inspire a man to write. Gee—Suss! She'd be great stuff for a man that wanted to get ahead in business, but she isn't much help to a writer. If I wanted to begin to pound a typewriter in the flat, I'd have to duck Victrolas, highballs, beers, and song."

"Before you met Millie you used to sit home and write nights—I remember," Ambrose said, grinning.

"Damn it!" Tommy exclaimed. "I may not have written anything in those days, but I was getting ready to. And now I'm not even getting ready to."

"But you're making three times as much salary," Eddie Carter said, "and it looks as if you were going to make more."

"But he isn't writing when he's home; that's what annoys him," Ambrose said.

"Nuts!" Tommy exploded. "I've got to get over to the City Hall. So long."

"It's funny how Tommy and Millie have stuck together so long," Eddie observed. "Seven years. Gee Whiz! It doesn't seem that long since Tommy was just a bum newspaper man. Millie certainly has done wonders for him."

"She's a great girl," Ambrose agreed.

"I had a terrible hangover up there one morning," Eddie said, "and I didn't want to get up. By Gad! She came in and lifted me right out of bed, and carried me into the bathroom to get my bath. And she did that stunt of hers, of having my clothes all washed, ironed and pressed for me. I never heard of a dame like her."

"It's too bad they can't be married," Ambrose commented, stepping to the free-lunch counter, and spearing a frankfurter with a fork.

"She says she won't marry the best man living," Eddie said. "I guess she had a hell of a time with that Jack Maitland. Some chaser, that guy."

"Funny thing," Ambrose said, "that when she bunks into Maitland at Sweeney's, or Healy's, or Reisenweber's, that she has a dance or two with him."

"He is always trying to get her to go back to live with him," Eddie said.

"Some fine rows she and Tommy have had over that," Ambrose said.

Ambrose was well over six feet and fat, with small, shrewd gray eyes, mouse-colored hair, a stubby nose, and a double chin. Traces of soup showed on his tie, which always was the same one; and the fact that his trousers were baggy and his shoes unpolished never marred his continual good nature. He was one of the shrewdest newspaper men on Park Row, and handled big, complicated news stories with amazing ease—he was a genius in his field. He had a wife and eight children at home, and was noted for his faithfulness to his wife. He'd sit in a flat with his hat on his head, and a never empty highball glass in his hand all night, while his friends flirted with the girls; but he'd never so much as look at the girls himself.

"What the deuce?" he used to ask. "That sort of thing doesn't interest me, but I like to be around with the boys."

Eddie Carter was an all-around, smart newspaper man with a flair for writing what were termed "light" stories. He was as careful of his clothes as Ambrose was careless. He was a bachelor, and a great woman's man—a chap with an athletic build, a quick, decisive manner, and an attractive combination of dark brown hair, blue eyes, straight nose, white teeth, and well-moulded chin.

"Say," Ambrose said after a few moments of silence.

"What?" said Eddie.

"I was wondering," Ambrose said, "after hearing about this writing stuff from Tommy, if there's another girl in the offing?"

"I saw him having dinner with a brunette up in the Hotel de Spain one night last week," Eddie said. "But I didn't think it was anything serious."

"It's too bad they couldn't be married," Ambrose repeated. "A few kids would have helped steady 'em down. I never saw a man and a woman get by with it when they were in a hell-raising crowd and didn't have kids. There are too many gents that would like to sleep with Millie, and too many girls that would be perfectly willing to sleep with Tommy, and plenty of booze to make the opportunity."

"O' course, you get so it doesn't seem any more than a spit in the ocean," Eddie agreed. "All a matter of custom."

"It'll be more than that if Millie ever gets wise," Ambrose said. "Have another drink?"

"I got one of those assignments I can cover with the *City News* and the *Evening Sun*," Eddie said. "I feel like staying right here for a while."

“And I’ve got an investigation,” Ambrose said. “And I guess I’ll do my work here with you.”

A woman came in taking up collections for the Anti-Saloon League, and they each gave her a quarter.

“The saloons ought to be closed,” Eddie said. “A saloon like this where only men are allowed, or booze in restaurants, is all right. But I’m against those Raines Law dumps.”

“Any sensible drinking man is,” Ambrose said.

“But we’ll never see the day when the saloons are gone,” Eddie said.

“I dunno,” Ambrose said. “I’ve found out there’s one thing nobody knows anything about, and that’s what’s going to happen next.”

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

MILLIE walked smiling into Healy's. The minute Leon Teller, the orchestra leader, saw her, he grinned at her, stopped the tune which was being played, and swung into another, an unfamiliar, but catchy air. The orchestra sang the refrain:

“I'm a red-headed woman—
Look out for me.”

“Why, it's my song!” Millie cried, eyes shining and teeth flashing in pleased excitement. “What do you know about that, Jimmie?”

“It's great,” ejaculated Jimmie Damier, a contractor reputed to have tremendous political pull. “It's a great song, about a great girl. Here,” he called to Leon, who was smiling and bowing at their party, seated within a few feet of the orchestra, and he tossed Leon a hundred-dollar bill. “Play it again, Leon,” he commanded.

Leon played it again, and he and his orchestra had a round of drinks on Jimmie. And then they played it again. Leon went to their table.

“I call it ‘Millie’,” he said to her. “I didn't think you'd mind.”

“Gosh!” Millie exclaimed. “I'm tickled to death. I never expected to have a song written about me.”

“You're the life of the party around here,” Leon said. “And I heard you sing those words about your being a red-headed woman and to look out for you so much that finally this whole number came to me one night.”

“She ought to have fifteen songs written about her,” Jimmie Damier said.

“Where's Tommy tonight?” Leon asked.

“He's working,” Millie smiled. “He's got a story that's keeping him late.”

“Meanwhile, let's have some wine,” Jimmie observed. “A little champagne is good for any one once in a while.”

Damier was a big, impressive-looking man, with a massive head covered with iron-gray hair, although he hadn't yet reached forty. He had a big nose,

a big chest, big shoulders, and big feet and hands. His clothes obviously were expensive. He wore a big pearl in his tie, and a huge diamond on the little finger of his hairy left hand. He was noted for his affairs with women, particularly of the stage, and he had been spending evenings on parties with Millie regularly for two years.

With them was Laura Demorest, an actress who played leading rôles; Sadie Thomas, who wrote signed articles for a newspaper syndicate, and George (Fat) Johnston, who lived on horse racing. Fat described himself as an owner, and occasionally he did own a horse or two. Sometimes he had a bale of yellow bills in every pocket, and rode in a limousine, and at other times he didn't have a nickel. He was a gambler.

Sadie Thomas wore her hair cut short and always dressed so that when she was seated at a table persons looked at her two or three times before they knew that she was a woman and not a man. She wore a stiff linen collar, with a tie, and a masculine jacket.

"Why don't you make it this week-end, Millie?" Jimmie Damier said in her ear while the orchestra was playing. "I've waited two years now."

"You'll wait a million, Jimmie," Millie replied, laughing. "But, outside of that, when are you going to get Tommy that job?"

"I told you he'd get it, and he will," Jimmy Damier asserted.

"I'll believe you when he gets it," Millie said.

"Nobody else could talk to me like you do, little girl," Jimmie Damier said impressively. "By God! I'm known as a man that keeps my word."

"That's what they all say," Millie said. "But you've got to show me."

"I wish you cared as much for me as you do for that lad," Jimmie said, a bit wistfully. "Well, you've kind of spoiled my surprise, Millie. But I've got him the job. The Merchants and Tailors Bank wants a newspaper man to take charge of a new department. Public Relations, or something like that, they're going to call it, and the head of the department will be a vice-president and get a salary of \$12,000 a year to start. And Tommy can have it. It's all fixed."

Millie jumped out of her chair, and kissed Jimmie Damier on his blue, glassy shaved cheek, and then on his big, broad mouth.

"Everybody have a drink on me," she said. "More wine for everybody."

"Here, where you going?" Jimmie Damier asked, as Millie turned away.

“To call up Tommy,” Millie replied, her eyes shining. “What’d you suppose?”

“Oh, hell!” Jimmie grunted.

“You don’t know love when you meet it, Jimmie,” said Laura Demorest in a deep contralto and with the perfect enunciation acquired by well-trained stage folk. Laura Demorest, as every one knew, had broken her heart over Leslie Young, the noted matinee idol, with whom she had played in *All the World*, and now was so busy drowning her heartache in alcohol that she had time for little else. She had black hair and black, tragic eyes and a dark skin. She usually wore maroon-colored clothes. She looked like a walking drama.

“You dramatize yourself, and you love it,” Sadie Thomas told her bluntly.

“You’re stuck on Millie and you can’t get her, but that’s no reason for you to take it out on me,” Laura had replied.

“I don’t revel in a broken heart,” Sadie said undaunted, “and get ginned up and sleep with whatever man happens to be handy.”

“You wouldn’t sleep with a man anyway,” Laura said.

“I never saw you fall so hard for a dame in my life, as you’ve fallen for Millie,” George Johnston said to Jimmie Damier. “My God! You’d think she was the only skirt in New York, and the town’s full of ’em.”

“You stay out of this, Fat,” Jimmie growled, scowling at him.

“He hates to start anything he can’t finish,” George said to Sadie and Laura.

An office boy answered Millie’s call. When she asked for Tommy, he replied:

“Mr. Rocke left at six o’clock.”

“You go ask the Night Desk,” Millie demanded. “This is Mrs. Rocke. He is working tonight, and I want to find him.”

“Wait a minute,” the boy said.

There was a wait, and then Millie heard the voice of Marvin Hunt, the night city editor. She knew Marvin well.

“Hello, Millie,” Marvin said. “I’m sorry, but that was a new boy, and he’s dumb besides. Tommy is out working on a special assignment for us.”

“What is it?” Millie asked.

"One of those office secrets," Marvin replied. "But I suppose Tommy'll tell you when he sees you. How's everything?"

"Fine," Millie said mechanically, and hung up the receiver.

"He's dumb," Millie said to the telephone instrument. "You're dumb," she said.

"God damn it!" she screamed, clenching her fists and kicking the wall.

She walked back to the table and sat down.

"Did you tell him?" Jimmie asked.

Millie looked up at him, her usually animated face curiously still. "He wasn't there," Millie said. "He's out on a special assignment," she added.

"Ha! Ha!" George Johnston laughed.

Millie jumped to her feet, her face white under its rouge, and her eyes blazing.

"You shut up, you fat slob," she screamed, "or I'll break a bottle over your head."

"I'm sorry, Millie," Fat said contritely. "It was all in fun."

"Special assignments are usually with blondes," Sadie Thomas whispered to Laura.

"What are you whispering about?" Millie asked shrilly, turning suddenly upon Sadie. "For two cents I'd knock you flat."

Nobody said anything for a moment, and then Jimmie said quietly: "Here's how."

He lifted his glass of champagne and took a drink, and the others mechanically followed his example. Millie picked up her glass, and drained it. She put it down, and the waiter filled it up again. She emptied it. Then she sat plucking at the table cloth with her fingers. Suddenly she arose and fitted her sable neckpiece around her shoulders.

"Here! Where you going, Millie?" Jimmie exclaimed, jumping up.

"None of your business," Millie snapped. "I'm going away from here, and I'm going alone."

"That's a hell of a way to treat me after what I told you tonight," Jimmie said. "Do you think that's on the level?"

"Look, Jimmie," Millie said. "You're a regular guy; I'll see you again."

The orchestra had started to play “Millie” again. Millie turned to Leon, and said:

“Oh, for Christ’s sake! Give it a rest.”

She turned and walked out of the restaurant, making her way swiftly to the door.

Jimmie sank back into his seat and looked at the others. Fat poured himself a fresh glass of champagne and busied himself looking at the bubbles rising to the surface. Laura put her hand on Jimmie’s arm, and looked at him soulfully with her big, black eyes.

“She’s having one of her tantrums, Jimmie,” she said. “And when she has one of those she’s wild. She can’t even get along with herself.”

Jimmie shook off her hand, and beckoned to the waiter.

“Bring some more wine,” he said.

Millie went down to Reisenweber’s, walked in, ignored greetings from manager, head waiter, and one or two acquaintances, looked around, and walked out. She started down Broadway, stopped, hailed a cab, and told him to drive to Joel’s.

She walked upstairs, where photographs of theatrical folk lined the way to the restaurant, where more photographs, most of them autographed, were the chief decoration.

“Hello, Millie,” said Joel, beaming at her through his glasses.

“Have you seen Tommy tonight?” Millie asked.

“Not tonight, Millie,” Joel said. “But some of the other newspaper boys are here. They’ll be glad to see you.”

Millie walked downstairs again, got into her cab, and went down to Wallie Sweeney’s. From Sweeney’s, she went back up to Jack’s, where she walked through the various rooms, without answering the hails which came from men and women.

Then she went into a cigar store and telephoned the Press Club. Nobody there had seen Tommy, so she walked through Forty-second Street, and went into Shanley’s, and then to Murray’s, and then up to Churchill’s. Jim Churchill said:

“Hello, Millie. Where’s Tommy?”

She said, "I don't know," and went right out again. She went up and down Broadway, and the side streets, until two o'clock in the morning. Then she telephoned her own flat, and got no answer. After that she went into the back room of a saloon in Sixth Avenue, and sat down at a table on which were week-old pieces of bread with stale slices of bologna sandwiched between them—a Raines Law place. Nobody ever ate the sandwiches, and nobody was expected to. They were merely part of the properties.

"Whiskey," Millie said. "With water on the side."

A fat, frowsy man sat down at her table, and Millie glared at him.

"Have a drink with me, little one," he said.

"I'll smash you," Millie snarled.

The man hesitated a moment.

"I've got money," he said.

"You get away from me or I'll smash you," Millie said venomously; and he said, "Gee, I didn't mean anything," and got up and went to another table.

Millie drank her whiskey, and ordered another one. Another man came to her table, and she swore at him. She got up and went out into Sixth Avenue, and a young chap, tottering slightly, put his arms around her and tried to kiss her. Millie hit him on the chin, and he staggered back ten feet and sat down, looking amazedly after her.

She arrived home at four o'clock. She switched on the electric lights in the living room, and went right into the bedroom. It was empty. It wasn't the first time Tommy had stayed out drinking, or working. Millie went to the bureau and stood looking at herself intently for an uncounted time. Suddenly she hit at the reflection of her own face.

"You're dumb," she said.

She picked up a hand mirror and threw it at the head of the bed. She upset a chair; she pulled the bed-clothes from the bed. She picked up a framed photograph of Tommy and smashed it against the wall. She wiped everything off the bureau, by jerking off the embroidered cover. She threw a bottle of perfume at the wall, and it went through a window pane and crashed in the court, four floors below.

The house telephone was ringing. She went back into the living room, and said:

"Hello."

“What’s the trouble, Mrs. Rocke?” the janitor wanted to know. “The tenants are complaining about the noise up there.”

“Go to hell!” Millie said, and pulled the receiver from its cord, and pounded the wall instrument with it.

Millie took a bar out of the Morris chair, and was using it to bludgeon the furniture and pictures in the living room when the janitor let himself in with a pass-key. He was an Irishman named Corcoran, and adored Millie.

“Who the hell let you in?” Millie asked in the coarse voice which was hers when she was in a rage.

“Sure, Mrs. Rocke,” Corcoran said. “I wanted to help you if I could.”

“Get the hell out,” Millie screamed, and threw the bar at him.

Corcoran, in his undershirt, trousers and bed slippers, ducked the bar. Millie suddenly subsided to the littered floor, and began to sob like a little girl.

The apartment bell rang, and there were knocks on the door. Corcoran left Millie, still sobbing, and opened the door. A group of men tenants was outside.

“It’s all right,” Corcoran said. “Everything’s all right. Just go to bed.”

They started to talk, but the janitor closed the door in their faces, and went back to Millie. Corcoran was thirty, about five feet six, with black hair and blue eyes, a good-looking Irishman. He drank and made love to the girls, and his wife, a big woman who would have made two of him, had him so nervous that he continually was looking over his shoulder, as if he feared pursuit. He usually talked in a hoarse whisper, as if he constantly were afraid of being overheard. Even the most casual sort of remark Corcoran whispered after a preliminary glance over his shoulder.

He usually had a scratch or a bruise or a black eye to exhibit, as evidence of his wife’s ability, and willingness, to beat him up. He always expressed great admiration for her.

“She’s a grand woman,” he used to say, “and smart. Once, when I had a date with a dame, I kep’ lookin’ back, an’ I was sure she wasn’t follerin’ me. But she slipped one over. She was walkin’ ahead of me. An’ be Jasus, you should’ve seen the way she cleaned me up and the dame.”

Corcoran wrote poems, and went to burlesque shows, and kept himself gently drunk all the time. He sang tender ballads in a high tenor voice, and

had a reputation as a great lover. His wife did all the real work of janitoring, cooked and washed for him and their two children, and cleaned apartments, and cooked and washed for the tenants on the side. She loved Corcoran.

Corcoran looked over his shoulder at the closed door, and whispered to Millie:

“Sure, it’s all right, Mrs. Rocke, just get into bed.”

“Oh, dear,” Millie sobbed. “Oh, dear!” and laid her head on Corcoran’s undershirt, and proceeded to dampen it with tears.

An authoritative thump on the door caused Corcoran to jump to his feet.

“It’s the wife,” he said, hurrying to the door and opening it.

Mrs. Corcoran, in sweater and skirt, her sparse brown hair knotted tightly in a little bun behind, was outside with Tommy, much the worse for wear. His face was unnaturally red, and he was teetering from an oversupply of alcohol. Corcoran ducked, but not in time to evade a smack on the ear that staggered him.

“I’ll tend to your case later,” Mrs. Corcoran told him. “Your husband is sick,” she said to Millie. “He says he et a bad clam, and he’s all turning pink. And he’s drunk besides. You’d think us women had trouble enough without the good God inflictin’ husbands on us.”

“We’ll get him to bed,” Millie said, scrambling to her feet. “He’s got ptomaine, and calomel is what he gets.”

Millie and Mrs. Corcoran undressed Tommy and put him to bed, and Millie fed him calomel, and rubbed his head and his back with alcohol for two hours until he went to sleep. When he awoke she was by the bedside with a glass of Epsom salts.

“O God!” Tommy pleaded. “Don’t give me that stuff. Get some citrate.”

“You’ll take this,” Millie said.

“I’ll throw it up.”

“Throw it up, and you’ll get another dose of the same, and you’ll keep getting it till you hold it. You get no citrate this morning.”

“O God!” Tommy groaned.

But he swallowed the solution, gulped, and held on.

An hour later, Millie took him a tray with coffee and buttered toast.

“Gee—Suss! But I was sick,” Tommy said, pale but comfortable.

“Where were you last night?” Millie asked, banking up the pillows, so that he could eat more easily.

“Working on re-write,” Tommy said. “Why?”

“I’m thinking of doing some re-writing myself,” Millie said, going out and slamming the door.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

“**H**ERE’S a hot one, Millie,” Tommy said, one night at dinner in Rector’s.

“What’s a hot one?” Millie asked.

“I was down seeing the president of the company off on the Mauretania this morning,” Tommy said. “And who do you think said ‘Hello,’ to me?”

“How do I know?” Millie demanded. “What do you think I am, a mind reader?”

“Angie,” Tommy said. “That bum friend of yours. She was standing beside me without me knowing it, and she said ‘Hello.’ And before I could say anything, she introduced me to an old gent with white hair, a distinguished-looking old guy. ‘This is my husband, Mr. Alexander,’ she said. ‘Meet my friend, Tommy Rocke.’ Before I could say anything except ‘How do y’ do?’, she said, ‘I see you haven’t changed any, Tommy, since you boys used to visit our home in old Willowfield. Your breath still smells of those nasty highballs. He’s one of the college boys that we used to entertain at my home as I told you,’ she explains to the old yap.

“Gee—Suss!” Tommy exclaimed. “That tramp! But that wasn’t all, either. Angie says, ‘Have you and Millicent any kiddies?’ I said we didn’t have any kiddies, and she started to shed tears.

“‘We just lost our oldest boy,’ she said, ‘and we’re going abroad for me to regain my health.’

“‘That’s too bad,’ I said. And she said, ‘We’ve got a little girl and a little boy that we’re leaving behind with the governess. I wanted to take them with me, but my husband thinks I need a complete rest,’ and she looked up at the old dodo, like a sick calf. My God! Ain’t life wonderful? If you’d asked me, I’d said Angie was headed for Potter’s Field, or the contagious ward on Blackwell’s Island.”

“Helen told me Angie had hooked an old man with money,” Millie said.

“Yes,” Tommy said. “But this old bird, Alexander, is the real goods. You should’ve seen the English bags they were herding.”

"I'm glad of it," Millie said. "Angie needed some one to take care of her. I'll bet she'll make him a good wife."

"But look what she was—a tramp," Tommy said. "Nothing but a pushover."

"Well," Millie said, "any kind of woman is too good for any kind of man I've met yet. I never met a man yet that wasn't looking for something."

"You're getting sour lately, Millie. What you need is a good vacation. Why don't you take one?"

"I guess I will," Millie said, looking at him with hard, metallic eyes.

She telephoned Helen Riley next morning to come up. When Helen arrived, Millie was in the midst of packing.

"Where you going?" Helen asked.

"On a trip," Millie said.

"Where are Tommy's things?" Helen asked.

"He isn't going," Millie replied. "I'm going alone."

"You're a damned fool, Millie," Helen said. "Haven't I heard you say often that a woman that leaves a man, even for over night, is running the risk of losing him? And it's the truth. I've consoled plenty of lonesome husbands myself."

"I know it's the truth," Millie said. "But listen, Helen."

"I'm listening."

"I'm supposed to be going back to Willowfield to visit the family, and have a nice rest in the country. Tommy is going to put me on the train at two o'clock this afternoon. And I'm going to get off at One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, and take a cab down to your apartment."

"Oh," Helen said, and looked at Millie questioningly.

"It's a brunette," Millie said. "A God-damned slut of an actress. I'll actress her."

"They all do it," Helen said. "The only thing is you've been dumb—"

"Dumb! That's the word," Millie said.

"Dumb not to divorce your husband and marry Tommy. You made that bird what he is, and you haven't any strings on him."

“Marry!” Millie snarled. “I wouldn’t marry the President of the United States, or the King of England, or the Prince of Wales, or the best man living.”

“It’s your business, Millie,” Helen said amicably. “I’ll expect you at my place about three o’clock then?”

“And take that bag with you, when you go,” Millie said. “It’ll save me lugging it.”

After Helen left, Millie called downstairs on the telephone. Corcoran answered.

“Where’s your wife?” Millie asked.

“She’s workin’ in Smith’s apartment,” Corcoran said.

“Come up right away,” Millie said.

When Corcoran knocked, Millie, in a kimono of her favorite green, opened the door.

“I’ve got something for you to do in the bedroom,” Millie said.

“O. K.” Corcoran said, glancing hastily over his shoulder. “I’d do anything for you, Mrs. Roche.”

“I’ll bet you’ll do this,” Millie said.

“Oh, goin’ away?” the janitor said, when he saw the bags.

Millie dropped off the kimono and got into bed. Corcoran looked at her, and then looked over his shoulder.

“You’re not dumb too, are you?” Millie asked.

“You’ll get a cab, and get the bags down, then?” Millie asked, a little later.

“Yes, ma’am,” Corcoran said.

“I feel better than I’ve felt in a long time,” Millie said.

“I didn’t know you cared that much for me,” Corcoran said.

Millie looked at him a minute, and then went over to her dresser and took a five-dollar bill from her bag, and held it toward him. He looked at the bill and then looked at her, bewilderment on his face.

“Take this, Corcoran,” Millie said. “You’ve earned it.”

“I can’t take it, ma’am,” Corcoran exclaimed.

“You’ll take it,” Millie said. “Being what you are—a married man. You’ll take it. If I have to call up your wife you’ll take it.”

Corcoran ended by taking the bill, and leaving the flat shaking his head dubiously. When it was time for Millie to go he was too drunk to be of any use, and his wife saw Millie off.

“I gave him another black eye,” she told Millie.

“He deserves two,” Millie said. “I pity you married women.”

“You shouldn’t have given him that five dollars,” Mrs. Corcoran said. “It was too much. He didn’t earn it.”

“He earned it,” Millie said.

Millie snapped on the electric light in her bedroom at three o’clock the next morning and disclosed two heads on the pillows, Tommy’s and a brunette’s. Then she pulled down the clothes and went to work with the butt end of a dog whip.

When a policeman arrived fifteen minutes later, he became the third person whom she had hit in the jaw, so he took her around to the police station. A doctor from downstairs had been waiting to put some arnica and bandages on Tommy and the brunette.

At the police station Millie heard herself charged with disorderly conduct, assaulting an officer, resisting arrest, and intoxication. She smiled at the old Desk Sergeant, and he let her have the customary two telephone calls to which every citizen in New York is entitled, when arrested, but which none gets unless the police happen to feel agreeable.

Millie telephoned Ambrose Voight at the *World* office. He said he would be up as quickly as he could.

“They’re pretty mad,” Millie said, “because I hit a big cop in the jaw. They want \$500 bail, and they’re going to make it hard to get. You phone Jimmie Damier and tell him to come and get me.”

“Okay,” Ambrose said. “But I’d better get busy, anyhow, and see about keeping this business out of the papers.”

“Why didn’t you mention that name before?” asked the big policeman who had arrested her.

“What name?” Millie asked.

“Damier,” the policeman said. “If I’d known you was a friend of his you could’ve hit me on the jaw again.”

“You’re a bum,” Millie said, “and for two cents I’d hit you again.”

“You certainly can hit,” the big policeman said, feeling of the right side of his jaw with a big hand. “You hit like no other woman I ever met.”

Jimmie Damier arrived at the police station in forty-five minutes. Five minutes later, Millie was free.

“You’ll have to be in Women’s Court, Jefferson Market, at nine o’clock tomorrow,” the Desk Sergeant warned her. “And you’re responsible, Mr. Damier,” he said to Jimmie.

“I’ll be responsible, Sergeant,” Jimmie said.

Millie sank back limply in the limousine and rode in silence until they stopped in a street in the West Seventies.

“The only way I can be sure of you,” Jimmie said, “is to be with you when you wake up.”

“I’m dying for a drink,” Millie said.

“We’ll have some wine,” Jimmie said.

Millie was invited into the Magistrate’s chambers as soon as court opened next morning. The Magistrate smiled pleasantly at her, and asked her how she felt.

“They tell me you had a rather exciting evening, Mrs. Rocke,” he said.

“Miss Blake,” Millie replied, “Millie Blake.”

The Magistrate glanced at her, and then bowed courteously.

“Well, Miss Blake,” he said, “you go home, but promise me not to beat up any more policemen,” and he looked humorously at the arresting officer, who was fidgeting uneasily, cap in hand.

Millie and Jimmie walked out of court together. The policeman went up to them, and said politely:

“I never would’ve arrested the lady if I’d known who she was, Mr. Damier.”

“Get to hell out of here,” Damier said roughly.

Later, when he and Millie were bound for the South Shore of Long Island, Jimmie said:

“Right in your own bed too—the skunk.”

“Oh, I had fixed the bed for him,” Millie said.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

“ALL the Johns are true to their wives—on Sundays and holidays,” Millie said to Helen in Helen’s apartment on Christmas afternoon, 1914.

“We’ve got plenty of champagne,” Millie said. “My banker sent me a case, and my lawyer sent me a case, and my doctor sent me a case. And Jimmie sent you a case,” she continued, “and Warren sent you a case. That’s five cases of wine. And then, there’s all the Scotch and rye that we’ve got. The place is like a saloon.”

“And they’re all home with their wives,” Millie said. “Ha! Ha!”

“They think they can buy their wives with Sundays and holidays,” Helen said, “and buy girls with money and clothes and booze. They’re not true to anybody, and nobody is faithful to them.”

“Ha! Ha!” Millie said, laying aside a piece of ice which, wrapped in a towel, she had been rubbing over her face. She picked up the telephone from the floor.

“Who you going to call?” Helen asked.

“Petey Wren,” Millie said.

“He’ll be having Christmas dinner with his wife, too.”

“I bet he’ll come up here,” Millie said.

“I won’t bet,” Helen said. “But why don’t you give his wife a chance at him. You have him all the time—whenever you want him.”

Millie got Petey at the *Times*. Petey said he would be right up.

“What’d I tell you?” Millie asked.

“What’s so wonderful about Petey?” Helen asked. “Is he your lover? He hasn’t any money, and about one and a half suits of clothes. And I’m sick of seeing that knitted tie he wears.”

“He’s wonderful,” Millie said, beaming.

When Petey arrived a half-hour later, Millie met him at the door with a kiss, and took his hat and coat. Petey walked into the living room and turned

on the lights. Even if it hadn't been the dying moment of a gray December day, the room would have been in twilight, because of the heavy drapes. The bulbs, behind their silken shades on the walls, leaped to life, and showed a room in amazingly good and even luxurious taste. One of Helen's lovers had been an artist, and she had known several millionaires. The artist had contributed some pieces, and had made the arrangements, and the millionaires had contributed—each his share—a bit of jade, a porcelain, a miniature.

"I always grabbed whatever was in sight," Helen explained.

"Have a drink," Helen said, handing Petey a glass of champagne.

"I don't care if I do," he said.

"You're going to have dinner with us, Petey," Millie said.

Petey hesitated a moment. He was a well-built, stocky chap, with unruly brown hair and glowing brown eyes and a fresh complexion. Millie ran her hand through his hair, and slid up against him and gave him a kiss.

"All right," he said. "I'd be tickled to death."

"You were thinking about your wife," Millie charged. "She's always leaving you. Why in hell should you be bothering about her? She's always giving you hell, isn't she?"

"I'll call the office," Petey said, "and get some one to tell her I've got an out-of-town assignment and can't get home for dinner."

"Atta-boy, Petey," Millie encouraged him. "Come on in the bedroom."

Millie and Petey stayed in the bedroom. After a while, Helen knocked on the door and went in. Petey was in a silk dressing gown, drinking champagne, and Millie was in her green kimono, talking on the telephone.

"Shh!" she said. "It's Warren. He's sneaked upstairs away from the family to wonder what I'm doing without him."

"I'm having a glass of your champagne now, darling," she said in a soft voice, and leaned quickly over and kissed Petey.

"Yes," she said, "I'm all alone. Helen has gone to dinner with her lover. I wish you could be here too. All right. All right. Yes. Goo'bye, Baby. Phwacz!" Millie kissed into the transmitter, and hung it up.

"I'm all alone, ain't I, Petey?" she asked, snuggling up to him. The telephone rang again. Millie put the receiver to her ear, and said "Hello" in

her dulcet voice.

“It’s Jimmie,” she whispered, a hand over the transmitter. “He’s sneaked away from his wife too.”

Millie chatted with Jimmie for fifteen minutes, meanwhile keeping an arm around Petey’s neck.

“I’ve got that picture of you right in front of me,” she said, in her best baby talk. “Goo’bye, Baby.”

They had a big turkey, cooked and served by Martha, the enormously fat negress, who had worked for Helen for years. They drank bottles of champagne, and got quite tight, and went to bed together.

Petey kept them company again on New Year’s Eve. Millie continually was hugging and kissing Petey, and sending Helen out of the bedroom.

“It’s scandalous the way you two carry on,” Helen said. “You must be in love.”

In the spring, Millie telephoned to Helen one day.

“Meet me at the Knickerbocker,” she said, a thrill in her voice. “I want you to go down to see Mrs. Petey Wren with me.”

“Are you crazy?” Helen asked.

“No,” Millie replied, and laughed. “I’m not crazy. She is. She has sent me a letter to come and see her this afternoon at four o’clock, and I’m going right down, after I’ve had a drink.”

“You better stay away,” Helen warned. “She’s likely to do something desperate.”

“Come on, Helen,” Millie wheedled. “I just want you to ride down with me. You don’t have to see her; you can wait downstairs.”

Millie was admitted by Mrs. Wren, who stood aside and said, “How do you do, Miss Blake?”

“How do you do, Mrs. Wren?” Millie answered elegantly. And then she saw Petey, who had just arisen from a chair.

“Hello, Petey,” she said. “How are you?”

“It’s not so simple as you might think, Millie,” Petey said. “Mary made me stay for this party by pointing a gun at me. She’s hysterical.”

“Yes,” Mrs. Wren said shrilly, turning to Petey, “I pointed a gun at you, and I would have shot you if you hadn’t stayed right here till we had this out.”

“Shoot straight, if you shoot at me,” Millie said. “I hate a lingering death.”

“What I want to know from you,” Mrs. Wren said, “is whether you love Petey and are willing to marry him and take care of him. He needs some one to take care of him, and I guess I’m not the woman.”

Mrs. Wren’s lips were trembling. She was trembling all over. Millie’s face softened a trifle, as she watched Mrs. Wren; her manner became confidential. She ignored Petey entirely.

“Mrs. Wren,” she said in her softest voice, “I don’t love any man, and I wouldn’t marry the best man living.”

Petey, out of the discussion, didn’t make a sound. He merely sat and watched them. He wasn’t even smoking.

Mrs. Wren, small, dark, nervous, with big shining eyes with black shadows under them, looked at Millie with her red curls peeping from beneath her small green hat, her fearless green eyes, and her red cheeks and deep bosom, as if fascinated.

“You don’t love Petey?” Mrs. Wren demanded, as if she couldn’t believe her ears.

“No, I don’t,” Millie said flatly. “I don’t love anybody, except my baby.”

“And you don’t want to marry him—you wouldn’t marry him?”

“Ha! Ha!” exclaimed Millie, tossing her head back, and laughing merrily. “Marry him! I should say not. He hasn’t money enough to support me for a day. But I wouldn’t marry him if he was as rich as old J. P. Morgan himself, or Rockefeller, or Carnegie.”

Mrs. Wren was nonplussed.

“Well,” she asked finally, “if you don’t love my husband, and you wouldn’t marry him, what do you take him away from me all the time for? Why have you had an affair with him that is wrecking my life?”

“I’m sorry for married women,” Millie said earnestly, honesty in voice and gesture. “I’m sorry for them. I tried that being married business once; and once was enough. I’m awfully sorry for you, Mrs. Wren. I only wish

you could feel like I do about it, and you wouldn't be bothered with a husband."

"But what have you been going with Petey all this time for then?" Mrs. Wren insisted. "Why?"

"That's different," Millie said, smiling and, for the first time since she entered the room, looking at Petey and nodding reassuringly at him. "The reason I liked Petey is that he is a wonderful lover."

Mrs. Wren gasped.

"He's wonderful," Millie said, warmly and honestly enthusiastic. "He's the best lover I ever met. And I didn't think I was doing any harm, to tell you the truth, because Petey, and Petey's friends, all told me that you don't even like to sleep with him, and that you go away and leave him."

"I never heard of anything like this!" Mrs. Wren exclaimed.

"When a woman overlooks a bet like Petey, there must be something the matter with her," Millie said with a kindly little nod. "But there's nothing the matter with me, and I would consider that I was a booby if I did anything else than I did."

"I can't believe my ears," Mrs. Wren breathed, looking dazed and clasping her hands to her face. "Do you mean that it is only the *animal* in Petey that attracted you?"

"It wasn't his spirit," Millie said brightly.

"How disgusting!" Mrs. Wren cried in a choked voice.

"You think I'm disgusting," Millie said equably, "and I think you're dumb, and I pity you just like I pity all married women. I'll be going if you haven't anything else to say to me," she added pleasantly, rising.

Mrs. Wren also arose, as did Petey in the background. He hadn't said a word. Millie turned to him and smiled, a magnetic sparkle in her green eyes.

"Goodbye, Petey," she said easily. To Mrs. Wren she said:

"I know how it is to be a married woman, and truly I'm sorry for you. Goodbye."

When the door closed, Mrs. Wren turned to Petey and said:

"Now you see the kind of woman she is. I feel as if I'd soiled myself coming in contact with such a low creature."

Petey still didn't say a word.

“You could see how low and vile she is, couldn’t you, Petey? She doesn’t love you, and she doesn’t want to marry you. All she stands for is the low things of life. Ugh!”

Mrs. Wren ran into her bedroom and threw herself on the bed.

“I’ve got to go to the office,” Petey said.

“Go on! Go on! Only leave me alone!” Mrs. Wren cried.

Petey went out, got in the elevator, rode to the street, and hustled out of the entrance. He looked east, and then west, and then hurried for the subway. He was waiting outside Helen’s apartment three hours later, when Helen arrived home, alone.

“Where’s Millie?” he asked.

Helen smiled.

“I don’t know,” she said, looking him straight in the eye.

Petey groaned.

“You do,” he cried. “She’s with that Warren, or Jimmie, or some one.”

“Well, if she is,” Helen said, “why don’t you forget about it? It seems to me she’s pretty decent to you.”

“O my God! I’ll go crazy!” Petey said.

“Go get drunk,” Helen said. “That’s the usual thing, and it’s pleasanter.”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

“MY wife has left me,” Petey said to Millie, when he met her at the Knickerbocker by appointment.

“It’s a good thing,” Millie said. “It’s good for you, and it’s good for her.”

“Now we can get married,” Petey said. “That is, after she gets the divorce.”

“Ha! Ha!” Millie laughed mirthlessly. “I’d like to know what gives men such swelled heads that they think all they’ve got to do is say the word ‘Marry,’ and a girl’ll jump through hoops. What do you expect me to do, fall on your neck?”

“I expect you’ll marry me,” Petey said patiently.

“Say, Petey,” Millie exploded, her green eyes flaming. “If you don’t stop pestering me I won’t see you any more at all. You’ve gotten so you think you own me now, and you don’t. Nobody owns me. I own myself. I’m myself, all alone, living my own life. And the hell with everybody.”

“But Millie—” Petey began.

“Don’t ‘but’ me any more,” Millie exclaimed impatiently. “I wish you could be a regular lover. There’d be some comfort in you. Just take me when you have the chance and be thankful.”

“That’s it,” Petey cried. “That’s what’s driving me crazy—knowing that you’re with other men.”

“Well, what of it?” Millie demanded. “I was with other men, wasn’t I, before I met you? And I’m going to be with other men whenever I want to. I like to be with you, but you make it damned hard for me. Why can’t you just be a lover?”

“I love you,” Petey said. “Can’t you understand? I worship you. You got to marry me. You got to. I can’t live without you. You’re in my blood. You’re part of me.”

They had walked outside the hotel, and now Millie hailed a cab.

“You keep away from me till you’ve calmed down,” she said. “You take a long walk, and cool off. Millie isn’t going to marry anybody, and Millie isn’t going to report to anybody. Goodbye.”

“Millie,” Petey pleaded desperately. “Millie, I’ll go crazy.”

“Go ahead,” Millie said, pushing Petey away vigorously, and slamming the cab door. She gave the driver Helen’s address, and after he had gone a half-block, she changed it.

“Drive me to the Cockatoo,” she said.

Helen, with her lawyer, a dipsomaniac, fat, fifty, bald and red-faced, and Warren Reading, was at a table in the Cockatoo. The orchestra began playing “Millie,” the moment Millie walked smiling in through the door. “Wine!” Millie said, glancing at the cooler on the floor, and the glasses on the table. “I can drink a case myself. My God!”

“Warren’s wife has left him, Millie,” Helen said. “She’s going to get a divorce.”

“And I’m going into bankruptcy,” Warren whispered, as he seated Millie beside him. “Papers’ll be filed tomorrow.”

“Hurrah!” Millie cried, twisting her hat sideways on her curls, a favorite gesture. “Three hurrahs! This is my lucky day.”

“I thought you might say you were sorry,” said Warren, a slim, sensitive chap, of medium height, with violet eyes under long silky lashes, and dark hair falling in waves over a white forehead.

“Of course I’m sorry, Warren,” Millie said in her honest, convincing manner. “How could I help but be sorry?”

“Well, you didn’t act it,” Warren said reproachfully.

“Act it! Act it! For God’s sake, what did you want me to do? Bust out crying? Throw a fit? I’m sorry you’re going into bankruptcy. You were a regular fellow when you had it, and when you haven’t got it, you’ll find it doesn’t make any difference to me.”

“Let’s all have some wine,” Helen said, “and forget about business for a while.”

Helen stayed out with her lawyer, who wanted to sit in an almost unconscious state in an all-night club away downtown and sign checks for drinks, one of his favorite amusements when he was on a spree. Millie and

Warren went to Helen's apartment. And they hadn't been there more than five minutes before the bell rang.

"Don't make any noise," Millie cautioned. "Shhh!"

She crept to the front door and listened. The bell rang again, a long, determined peal, and she kept listening. Then a fist pounded on the door, and a voice called:

"I know you're in there, Millie. You and another guy. You let me in."

"Sssh!" Millie whispered to Warren. "It's Tommy! Tommy Rocke."

"The hell with him," Warren said, belligerently.

"You can't say to hell with him, Warren," Millie said. "I lived with him for a long time until he got like all the rest of you. But I can say to hell with him, if I want to. He's drunk, and when he's drunk he doesn't care what he does."

"Let me in!" Tommy called, thumping again on the door.

Millie went to the house telephone and called downstairs.

"He's all right," she said softly over the telephone. "He's a friend, but he's drunk. Just get him out and put him in a cab."

The pounding and shouting at the door continued for a minute, and then there was the sound of argument, a slight noise of scuffling, and silence.

"He's gone," Millie said.

They were in bed, when a noise at the window startled Millie. She bounced from bed and got to the window just as Tommy Rocke, in dilapidated evening clothes, was about to slide into the room from the fire escape.

"Thought you could keep me out, didn't you, Millie? Who's the bum you got in bed?"

Warren started to get out of bed.

"You better stay in bed," Millie told him.

"I'm going to take that guy apart," Tommy asserted, trying to get past Millie.

"If anybody's taken apart it'll be you," Millie said, her voice coarsening. "I suppose you're tired of that tramp so you want to come back to me."

“Look, Millie,” Tommy said, “you got to come back. Gee whiz! I was a God-damn fool, an’ I know it. Everything’s going to hell without you. You’re the only woman I ever loved.”

“I hear that every day—too much,” Millie said. “Wouldn’t I’ve looked pretty marrying a bum like you? You get back down that fire escape.”

“I’m coming in,” Tommy said.

“I’ll break this vase over your head,” Millie said, lifting a heavy vase from a chest of drawers between two windows. “If you come in here you’ll know you’ve been somewhere. Get out of there.”

She swung the heavy object close to Tommy’s face, and he ducked back.

“Aw, Millie,” he pleaded. “Be reasonable, can’t you?”

“Reasonable!” Millie sneered. “I was reasonable with you for years, till you turned out to be a dog. Get out of there.”

She swung the vase past his nose.

“Get out of there.”

“That bum you got there,” Tommy said, switching the subject. “If he isn’t a bum now, he’ll be one when you get through with him. You’re a devil. That’s what you are—a devil. You won’t marry a man. You won’t have kids. But you get under a man’s skin, and in a man’s blood, and make him wild. You’re a wrecker, Millie. Damn it. You wrecked me. And you’ll wreck that guy. If he’ll take my advice he’ll get up and get out of here now. But he won’t—the damn fool.”

“Ha! Ha!” Millie mocked. “Ha! Ha! I don’t make bums out of men; they’re born that way. Get out of here!”

She nicked Tommy with the swinging vase.

“Ouch! Millie. Gee—Suss! That hurt.”

“Get out, you bum,” she insisted.

“Hey, you over there,” Tommy called to the silent Warren. “You don’t understand this woman, and you never will, not even after it’s too late. She won’t take your money, but you’ll spend it all on her. She won’t take much of your time, but you’ll spend all your time wanting to be with her. You take my tip, and give her up.”

“Why don’t you take the tip yourself?” Millie said, swinging the vase against his chin, a good vigorous thump. “Get out!”

“Ouch! Gee—Suss, Millie! What if I fell? I’m not too steady.”

Millie banged him harder.

“Go ahead and fall, but get out of here,” she said. “And stay out. Stay out with your brunettes.”

“All right,” Tommy said. “All right. I’m going. I don’t know why the hell I came in the first place.”

“And keep away from me,” Millie commanded hoarsely. “I don’t want you hanging whining around me. You bum!”

“I wish that guy would listen to what I said,” Tommy exclaimed. “I wish all the guys could understand you, and it would save ’em a lot of misery. My God, what a woman!”

“Goo’night, Baby,” Millie cooed, her voice softening for an instant, only to grow hard and coarse again as she added, “and keep away from me.”

Millie went back to the bed and kissed Warren lightly on the mouth. Then she did a little dance and sang:

“It was a red-headed woman made a bum out of me.”

“My God!” Warren exclaimed. “Don’t sing that.”

“Why not?” Millie asked, beaming cheerfully at him.

“If you’d only marry me,” Warren cried, reaching out his hands and grabbing her desperately. “Tell me you’ll marry me!”

“Look!” Millie exclaimed, suddenly hard again. “If you say anything more about marrying me, I won’t see you any more. I’ll get dressed and get out of here now, and I won’t see you any more. Anybody’d think to hear you men talk that marriage was all there was in life. How the hell have you acted with your own wife and kids?” she concluded brutally.

“Not very well,” Warren said. “But I never loved any one till I met you. I didn’t know what love could be like.”

“I suppose you’ll be saying I got you into bankruptcy,” Millie said.

“I spent an awful lot of money on you,” Warren said, “and I didn’t pay any attention to the business after I met you.”

“Did I ask you to?” Millie demanded. “Did I ever ask you to spend any money on me, or did I ever tell you to stay away from your business—you damn fool.”

“No,” Warren protested. “No, I’m not blaming you, Millie. But I couldn’t stay away from you.”

“Didn’t I try to send you home to your family?” Millie asked. “Didn’t I always get you up in the morning in time to get to your office? Didn’t I always try to stop you from having those eye-openers before breakfast? You men make me sick!”

“I’m not blaming you, Millie,” Warren said, pulling her closer.

“Why don’t you go back to your wife and babies?” Millie asked, resisting his arms.

“I only want you, Millie,” Warren said.

“Well, you got me,” Millie said.

“I want you all to myself,” Warren began.

“Don’t say it,” Millie warned, “or we’ll be through.”

“I won’t say it,” Warren said. “I promise.”

“A man’s promise,” Millie said. “I heard ’em before.”

CHAPTER NINETEEN

“I ’M A hard man,” Jimmie Damier said to Fat Johnston, as they sat in the Waldorf-Astoria bar at the cocktail hour. “But that jezebel Millie Blake sure has me on the run.”

“‘Lay ’em, pay ’em, leave ’em, and forget ’em,’ Jimmie,” Fat said. “She’s a hell-cat, all right, that dame.”

“She’s crazy,” Jimmie said. “Crazier’n hell.”

“What’s she done now?” Fat inquired, sipping his dry Martini.

“She’s crazy,” Jimmie exclaimed forcefully. “I furnished an apartment for her, and she laughed at me. And I bought a car for her, and she laughed at me. And I tried to take her abroad with me, and she laughed at me.”

“Gave you the mitt, huh?” Fat suggested.

“Not that way,” Jimmie said. “You know me, Fat. There’s no need of kidding; everybody knows it. I’m in the chicken business.”

“Well, Millie ain’t a chicken any more,” Fat observed. “And the town is full of chickens, waiting to be grabbed off. Let’s have one more cocktail—I don’t mind two before dinner—and forget her.”

“That’s the trouble,” Jimmie said. “I can’t forget that dame. By God! She gets in your blood. She may not be a chicken, but she’s the finest female woman I ever had.”

“Well, if you had her, what are you kickin’ about?” Fat asked.

“I had her,” Jimmie said wearily, “and I can have her again when she feels like it, but the trouble is that I want her all the time—God damn it! But she insists on working. And she won’t take anything from me or anybody else, and she lives in a bum room with a chauffeur’s family, where she can cook meals in the kitchen. If she feels like it, and if I stay out and drink enough with her, she takes me up there.”

“I heard she had her own ideas,” Fat said.

“She spends all her own money,” Jimmie said, “and she has a way of getting a man to spend all his. If I didn’t have plenty I’d be in hock now. She wants to give orchestras a hundred dollars at a clip, and she hands

streetwalkers anything she can get hold of from you, from a five- to a thousand-dollar bill.”

“I seen her,” Fat said. “But what was that I heard about you givin’ fur coats to all the streetwalkers in Jack’s Christmas Eve?”

“That was that damned Millie,” Jimmie said. “I met her at Jack’s, and I took up a couple of sable coats for her to pick one of ’em for a present. I thought that might hit her. Well, she tried ’em both on, and she looked kind of excited. And then she saw a poor, shivering little pale-faced runt, with big black circles under her eyes, sitting at a table just across from us, and she walked over, and had the coat on the girl before I could think what was happening.”

“Well, you could’a got the coat back,” Fat observed.

“Yes I could!” Jimmie said. “You don’t know Millie. When I started to yell about giving that dame the coat, she grabbed the other coat and gave it to another dame. And then she wound up by giving all the dames all the money I had with me, which was a Christmas roll and included gold pieces—about three thousand. She said I could sign the checks.”

“It ain’t Millie that’s crazy; it’s both of you,” Fat said.

“You should have seen the dames blow as soon as they got the coats, or the dough,” Jimmie exclaimed. “They went out of there as if they were hitched to the tails of kites.”

“I’ll bet they did,” Fat said. “They had a merry Christmas.”

“Merry hell!” Jimmie ejaculated disgustedly.

“And you got the credit all over town for bein’ a Sandy Claus,” Fat grinned. “I heard about it over in the Opera Café early Christmas morning.”

“Millie is the best cook I ever dreamed of,” Jimmie Damier sighed.

“She must be,” Fat agreed. “Her coffee and beans must certainly be good, if they affect you this way. For Christ’s sake, what’s the matter with you, Jimmie? Lost your kick, sittin’ here moonin’ over a dame—just a healthy dame with red hair. The ocean’s full of ’em.”

“Not full of ’em like this one,” Jimmie grunted. “It’ll be a long time before you ever see me again like this, George. But I’ve had three years off and on with this baby, and it’s getting my goat.”

“Aw, come on down to South America with me, Jimmie. Or run over across to Monte Carlo. Forget it.”

“That young brat Tommy Rocke that she lived with so long, has gone on the blink,” Jimmie said. “He lost his job with the bank.”

“He’s got a newspaper job again,” Fat said. “I see him around at Cavanaugh’s and Healy’s, drunk most of the time.”

“That feller Warren Reading,” Jimmie continued, “he hangs around her all the time. He had a good paper-box business he inherited from his father, and he went bankrupt, and his wife took the kids and left him, and he’s a salesman now, with the seat out of his pants. But he still hangs around, and Millie don’t give a damn.”

“She’s a devil, all right,” Fat said. “I see her out with lots of fellers—that Petey Wren, the reporter, is around with her.”

“Yeah, his wife left him too,” Jimmie said. “She’s a funny dame. You could offer her a million dollars to spend the night with you, and she’d give you the laugh, but if a bum happened to please her, she’d go away with him.”

“She’s crazy, all right,” Fat said. “But you guys that run after her are crazier. Me, I can’t understand it.”

“You never slept with her,” Jimmie said.

“I never wanted to,” Fat said.

“You know,” Jimmie confided, leaning across the polished table top, “I’ve had more’n half an idear that Millie and Mike, my chauffeur, have been slipping it over on me.”

“Mike’s a better lookin’ guy than you,” Fat said.

“Well, as I told you, I’m in the chicken business,” Jimmie said. “I been in the chicken business ever since I made my pile. I give ’em plenty, and I don’t expect much, except being kidded that I’m the only feller there is for the time bein’. But this Millie is getting on my nerves. I can’t figure her out.”

“By the way,” Fat exclaimed. “Speakin’ of chickens, that daughter of hers is somethin’ to write home about.”

“I knew she had a kid,” Jimmie nodded. “She always goes to see the kid Wednesday afternoons—lives with its grandmother.”

“You never saw a picture of the kid, did you, Jimmie?” Fat asked.

“No,” Jimmie admitted. “She never talked about the kid much—just that she always saw the kid on Wednesday afternoons and took it a box of candy, or somethin’. I offered to send the kid a present—just once. I nearly got my head knocked off.”

“Well, that’s a chicken, Jimmie,” Fat said. “Now that’s something I could understand a man going crazy about—the kid.”

“Did you see her?”

“Yeah, I saw her. As a matter of fact, I see her every so often. You see, I get up and go to church Sunday mornings, which is something you may not have heard anything about. And I see the kid going to church in Madison Avenue with her grandmother, and that tall old buck that Millie was married to.”

“John Maitland,” Jimmie contributed.

“That’s right. John Maitland Maitland,” Fat said.

“I haven’t seen him since his brother blew his brains out when the firm went under,” Jimmie said.

“Well, they haven’t the dough they used to have, I guess,” Fat said. “They walk to church anyhow, and they ain’t dressed so hot, but if you saw that kid you’d never think anything about clothes. She looks something like Millie, only younger and softer and prettier. I’d say she was the cutest kid I ever saw. She looks great in church with one of those stained glass windows back of her.”

“So that’s what you go to church for,” Jimmie grinned.

“It ain’t what I go to church for,” Fat replied. “But it’s what I go to that particular church for. I go to church because it’s the only thing I ever did to please my mother, I guess.”

“What church is it?” Jimmie inquired.

“Ha! Ha!” Fat cried. “You’d like to look over the little girl yourself, wouldn’t you?”

“If she’s as pretty as you say, I’d sure like to see her,” Jimmie admitted.

“Well,” Fat said, “I guess it’d take your mind off the old lady to see the offspring.”

“What church is it?” Jimmie repeated.

“The Tillson Presbyterian,” Fat said.

“Today is Wednesday,” Jimmie Damier observed. “Next Sunday morning you call for me, and we’ll go to church.”

“Why should I call for you?” Fat demanded. “It’s out of my way.”

“If you know what’s good for you, you’ll call for me,” Jimmie snapped, his big jaw setting hard.

“All right. All right,” Fat agreed. “I’m not looking for any argument with you. I’ll call for you at ten.”

“Okay,” Jimmie said.

“The church is likely to fall in next Sunday,” Fat said.

“I’ll admit I never thought of looking for chickens in churches,” Jimmie conceded. “But you live and learn.”

CHAPTER TWENTY

“**W**AR may be hell for some people, but it’s a grand party for you,” Millie Blake said, as Helen Riley poured the Scotch in Helen’s kitchen.

“I’m not in the profiteer class, but I’m no dollar-a-year girl, either,” Helen admitted, smiling smugly.

“You must’ve gotten enough Liberty Bonds last night to paper the living room,” Millie said. “And all I got out of it was some dolls.”

“Well,” Helen said, “the Johns ask me what I want to remember ’em by, and look at me and then at those damn’ dolls, and I say I want to help win the war so buy me a Baby Bond. And they think I’m cute, and they buy me the bonds. I’ve gotten so I’m a swell Liberty Bond guide. I know all the places and the hours where they auction off the bonds.”

“You’re welcome,” Millie said. “I wouldn’t be bothered.”

“I’m different from you anyway,” Helen explained. “Gee. The first man that gave me any money didn’t hand it to me. He took me down to the bank in Toledo, Ohio, where I grew up, and put the money in and gave me a bank book.”

“You’ve still got the book,” Millie cried. “Give me another drink.”

Helen beamed pleasantly.

“I still got the book,” she admitted. “He gave me a checking account and a savings account, that fella. I never spent anything from either of ’em. He was going to marry me as soon as his wife died, but she’s alive yet. She had heart trouble then, and she’s still got it.”

“You must have a lot of money,” Millie said.

Helen’s lips tightened, and her smile faded.

“Everything is so expensive,” she said. “I’ve got a lot less than you might expect.”

“But you’ve got a flock of Liberty Bonds, and two or three apartment houses, and some bank accounts.”

"I don't mind admitting to you, Millie, that I'll never starve," Helen confessed. "But I wouldn't say a word to any of the girls. They're jealous."

"I don't blame 'em," Millie said. "They're on the bum, and you've got plenty."

"They're a lot of bums," Helen said. "They don't even know enough to spend their money for clothes. They've got lovers. I had one of those bums in for a big shipbuilder yesterday, and she looked like she was dragged in through a rat hole. I gave her some underwear, and a dress, and let her wear one of my coats. And I got a hundred from the shipbuilder for her, and she kicked because I gave her ten dollars. Ten dollars! She wouldn't have gotten ten cents if it had been left to her."

"You certainly know how to get the money," Millie said.

"Then I cried a little," Helen continued, "and the shipbuilder asked me what I was crying for, and I said I was worried about the rent, and he asked me how much rent I paid, and I said it was two hundred and sixty-six dollars and sixty-seven cents, and he gave me a check for two thousand."

"You're a wonder," Millie said.

"The men like to give money to a girl that they think is going to take care of it," Helen explained. "They wouldn't want to give those bums any more than they had to—ten or twenty-five dollars maybe, or perhaps fifty. But they know I take care of it, and so they give me more. They're all like that."

"There's nothing the matter with your head, Helen," Millie asserted heartily. "Look how you got Angie married."

"That bum!" Helen exploded. "That bum! I got her the clothes for that old guy, and told her what to say to him, and how to act, and he fell for the baby stuff so hard that he took her right out and married her. She never even paid me for the clothes, let alone give me what was coming to me. The rat!"

"You can't blame her for looking after herself," Millie smiled tolerantly.

"I can blame her for not knowing me when I met her in Shanley's about a year after that," Helen said. "She looked right through me."

"I can't imagine Angie being upstage," Millie said. "She always was a sap."

"When she got this old man, she got religion," Helen said.

She got up to crack some more ice. The kitchen was large for an apartment, and was decorated in green and white. Green-and-white curtains covered the two windows, in which the panes shone like crystal, and the frames shouted of a recent scrubbing. The green-and-white linoleum and the green baseboards were spotless.

“That maid of yours is a wonder,” Millie said. “Most maids forget the sashes.”

“If mine ever forgot the sashes,” Helen said, “she’d have a headache from me screaming at her for the rest of the week.”

“This is one flat I come into that I don’t feel like taking off my duds and pitching in and giving a good cleaning to,” Millie admitted.

“You’re a good housekeeper, too,” Helen smiled, as she dropped ice into the tall glasses, and opened a bottle of mineral water.

“This is good Scotch,” Millie said.

“From my lawyer,” Helen nodded. “I nearly put the Scotch bottle with the tea in it on the table. You’d have liked that.”

“You’d never find me drinking tea while the men were drinking whiskey!” Millie exclaimed. “Ha! Ha!”

“You wouldn’t, Millie, because you aren’t one of the girls. But they got to drink tea, and like it. It’s bad enough to have the Johns get drunk, without having the girls get drunk too.”

“I wonder how long this damned war will last,” Millie commented.

“I hope it’ll last a little longer,” Helen said. “Collecting bonds hasn’t even begun to hurt me yet.”

“Prohibition is going to start next Saturday night,” Millie said. “Whiskey prohibition, that is. And they say all-around prohibition is coming later.”

“There’ll be good money in selling booze,” Helen said.

“I never thought they’d have prohibition,” Millie said.

“You drink too much, Millie,” Helen said, pouring another drink for both of them, “and you’re too easy with the Johns.”

“That’s my business,” Millie exclaimed harshly.

“I didn’t mean anything, Millie,” Helen protested. “But you’re the most regular girl I know, and it’s a shame with all these steel men and contractors

and shipbuilders and oil Johns throwing their money around that you don't get some of it."

"You look to your knitting, and I'll tend to mine," Millie said.

"Well," Helen said, "you always have some job somewhere, and you're too proud to be in the underworld, but you don't make much money out of the job, and you're always around with us."

"I suit myself," Millie announced.

"How is your daughter?" Helen asked.

"She's fine," Millie said. "Let's have another drink."

"Still with her grandmother?" Helen asked, as she poured the drink.

"Yes, but she's going away to school next fall," Millie said. "One of those ritzy schools up in Connecticut."

"Your husband is making money again," Helen said. "I see him around nights, anyway."

"Yes," Helen agreed. "He's with Wasker and Company, down in Wall Street, and he's selling oil stocks. From the way he acts he must own six gushers himself."

"He was a wise guy not to go to the war," Helen observed. "You know I haven't gotten over the shock yet of having that Walter Perkins come back, all gassed up, expecting me to be loving him like I said I was when he went away."

"I heard he looked pretty bad," Millie said.

"Bad!" Helen echoed. "He looked as if he was only holding himself up out of his grave with his chin, and that was greased."

"He had a tough time, I guess," Millie said.

"It isn't his fault I didn't hear all about it eight times," Helen said. "There must be something the matter with his head. He looked fine when he was in his new uniform, and he was good-looking then. I cried when he went away, and promised to write to him, and be waiting for him when he came back."

"You were still here," Millie commented.

"I was still here," Helen laughed. "I didn't write to him. What did he want, anyway? He was gone more than a year, and when he came back he wanted to know if I had been true to him. Can you imagine?"

"I haven't that much imagination," Millie admitted.

"Well, I told him he was crazy," Helen said. "I told him to go to a hospital, that I wasn't a nurse. My God! I haven't any use for ruins. Now if he had stayed here like the rest of the wise guys and gotten into oil like your husband, and kept his good looks, I might still be in love with him."

"He's a hero," Millie said. "He's got about a dozen medals."

"A hell of a lot of good medals are," Helen replied. "You can buy 'em at pawnshops."

"Your lawyer, and your shipbuilder, and your contractor, and the rest of your men, never will take any beauty prizes," Millie said.

"They've got plenty of money," Helen said, "and that makes 'em look great. It's a funny thing, but when a homely John has got money enough to buy expensive clothes, he looks better to me than a good-looking bum."

"I've never seen any good-looking bums around you," Millie remarked.

"Oh, I had a couple of 'em," Helen confessed. "There was an actor in Toledo; I cried my eyes out over him. And there was that Willie Briller, the big bum. I cried my eyes out over him. All I ever got out of love was a pain. Now I love myself, and my money."

"I love myself," Millie said, "except when I hate myself."

"I love me," Helen repeated. "I love me, and money."

"I'm getting tight," Millie said.

"Let's get tight," Helen said, blinking back a mascaraed tear, and getting up and going to the icebox. "That damn' Willie Briber," she said.

"Men are bums," Millie said.

"Men are bums," Helen agreed, walking carefully back to the table, and thumping down a bottle of champagne. "Let's have some wine."

"Men are no good," Millie said solemnly, reaching for the bottle, "but we can't get along without 'em."

"Ooh, OOH!" Helen wailed, "my eyes are all full of mascara."

She pulled a dish towel from the rack, and put it to her eyes, and went out of the kitchen.

"Wait till I get my mek-up off," she said.

“I’ll be right here till tomorrow,” Millie called after her. “Take your time, Baby.”

“I forgot,” said Helen, when she returned to the kitchen, in a kimono, with her eyebrows and lashes ash color instead of black, and her cheeks pale instead of red. “I was going to ask you if you had heard that Jimmie Damier was back of that Wasker and Company. Did you hear that?”

“No,” Millie replied.

“I thought it was funny,” Helen explained, “if Jimmie Damier was the guy back of the company that your husband was working for it. Jimmie must’ve given him the job, or okayed him getting it.”

“That’s funny,” Millie said. “I haven’t seen Jimmie for a couple of years, except to say ‘Hello’.”

“Why should Jimmie Damier want your husband to have plenty of money?” Helen asked. “Is he stuck on him, as well as on you?”

“You don’t know if Jimmie is back of the company or not,” Millie said.

“Well, my banker told me he was,” Helen said.

“Let’s have a drink,” Millie said. “I don’t feel like thinking today.”

“It’s funny, isn’t it?” Helen asked.

“Life is funny,” Millie said, “as long as you don’t try to figure out what it’s all about.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

MILLIE and Petey Wren and six others rode in two taxicabs from Healy's Golden Glades down to Hesse's in back of Brooklyn Bridge on Prohibition Eve. They no sooner were seated at two tables in the upstairs dining room than Tommy Rocke staggered over.

"Hello, Tommy," Millie said, "sit down."

"Sit down, Tommy," Petey urged. "I guess you know everybody. If you don't it's all right."

"I certainly know Smitty Hammond, and Cora," Tommy said. "Hello, Smitty. Hello, Cora."

Smitty Hammond, playwright and author, was very tight. His thick, black hair was tousled, and his brown eyes were bloodshot. Cora, who had lived with him for several years, was even tighter. Her efforts to hold her small body erect caused it to jerk spasmodically every so often, and she had great difficulty keeping her eyelids propped open.

"These are two friends of ours from Kokomo we just met tonight," Smitty Hammond said, with a gesture of his right hand which knocked an ash tray to the floor. "Two friends from Kokomo, Tommy Rocke," he said in introduction. "And the husbands of the two friends from Kokomo," he added. "Tommy Rocke," he concluded, "Champagne—right away," he said to a waiter.

One of the two men looked up with bleary eyes.

"We ain't from Kokomo," he protested. "I'm from Sain' Paul, and my friend, Mr. Deutsch, is from Minn'apolis. We ain't from Kokomo at all, and these ladies ain't our wives. Our wives are home 'n' in bed."

Everybody, except the two men who weren't from Kokomo, and the ladies who weren't their wives, howled with laughter.

"We're ash good ash your wivesh," one of the ladies said.

"I guesh I know when I been inshulted," the second lady exclaimed. "I'm going home."

She stood up suddenly, and sat down as suddenly. She said:

“What wash I goin’ to do? It wash somethin’ important.”

“Have a drink,” Smitty Hammond said. “You were going to have a little last drink in your life of champagne. We’re all friends—dyed-in-the wool and tested-in-fire, friends,” he announced gravely.

“I been inshulted,” one of the ladies insisted.

“You can’t inshult ladies aroun’ me,” shouted the gentleman from Saint Paul, and he hit Smitty Hammond feebly in the chin.

Smitty clawed at his assailant, and Tommy Rocke tried to separate them, and the gentleman from Minneapolis tried to hit Tommy Rocke, and all rolled on the floor together. Millie stood up, put her hat sideways on her red curls, and put her hands on her hips. Two waiters and a dozen guests gathered in an instant.

“Two-eleven-forty-seven. Around right end,” Smitty Hammond said, and caused a tremendous upheaval in the mess of humanity, which upset Millie.

“Hold ’em, Yale!” Millie screamed.

“Touchdown!” Tommy Rocke yelled.

“Buck the line,” called Smitty Hammond, butting vigorously with his tousled head, and shoving with big shoulders.

Sandy, the proprietor, finally restored order.

“It was a great game,” Smitty Hammond said. “Who thought up that game?”

“What is Jimmie Damier hanging around Jack Maitland’s house for?” Tommy Rocke said to Millie.

“That’s his business,” Millie said. “I’m not his keeper.”

“Well,” Tommy said. “I just hope he isn’t after your kid. Thash all.”

“You’ve got a dirty mind,” Millie grated. “Robbing cradles is about your speed. She’s only a baby. You dirty bum! Get away from me.”

“All right,” Tommy replied. “All right. But I never knew Jimmie Damier to do anything for anybody unless he had a reason, and he cert’nly put Jack in that bucket-shop of his, and he certainly goes calling at the house, and takes the old lady and the kid out to ride with him.”

“You got a dirty mind, Tommy,” Millie said. “She’s only a baby.”

“Well, if she’s a baby, she hasn’t got any mother,” Tommy cried bitterly.

Millie hit at Tommy's jaw, but her aim was bad, and she hit his shoulder instead. The blow, however, had enough power to capsize Tommy. White with rage, she arose from her chair, only to be tackled by Smitty Hammond.

"He's got a dirty mind," Millie exclaimed hoarsely. "Let me alone."

"All down," Smitty said to Millie. "We're supposed to be having a good time."

He turned to Tommy, who was getting up from the floor with the help of a waiter, while another waiter with an anxious face awaited developments, and Sandy hurried up from the cashier's desk and service door, at the rear.

"You better blow," Smitty said.

Sandy repeated Smitty Hammond's advice:

"You better go, Mr. Rocke, you've had enough."

"Aw right," Tommy said, suddenly amicable. "I'll go. Don't rush me. Where's my hat and coat? I'll go. Don't push."

"You know how it is, Mr. Rocke," Sandy said apologetically.

"Sure," Tommy agreed pleasantly. "I been heaved out of better places than this, as Socrates used to say to his wife. One more little drink, and then I'll go."

Tommy had his one little drink and went, leaving a table loaded with bottles full of champagne, which no one was able to drink. It was cold outside. Tommy shivered and walked, shivering, to Park Row, where there was a four-wheel, horse-drawn cab.

"Turkish bath," he said to the driver, climbing in.

The driver stopped at one Turkish bath after another, going in at Tommy's orders to find out if there were room for one more. But, at that time, the hotels were chock-a-block, and the Turkish baths were chock-a-block too. Finally, the driver stopped at the Hotel Massive, and prodded Tommy awake.

"They've got room in here, sir," the driver said.

"Thank God!" Tommy said. "I never was so cold in my life."

He gave the driver five dollars, and went up the stairs to the Turkish bath. It was a new hotel, and a new Turkish bath, and Tommy never had been in it before. He went in the office on the men's side, where the clerk told him there was no room.

“Aw,” Tommy pleaded, “have a heart. I’ll give you five dollars to sleep on the floor.”

“Get out,” the clerk said. “Get out and stay out.”

“You’re a bastard,” Tommy exclaimed and, turning hurriedly, walked out the nearest door and across the hall and stopped suddenly. He was in the women’s side. Feminine forms, swathed in sheets, were all around him. He stood, swaying slightly for a moment, and then walked over to a cot and tentatively pulled at a sheet. The sleeper didn’t move. Tommy pulled harder at the sheet, laying bare a generous expanse of sagging fat. The sleeper stirred uneasily, and Tommy walked away quickly, winding up in a few steps in the hot room.

“Gee—Suss!” Tommy exclaimed.

He turned around and walked out of the hot room, and passed another sleeping figure. He stopped for a moment, regarding it with fishy, red eyes. Then he reached out a gloved hand and twitched at the sheet.

“My God! All fat!” he exclaimed.

This sleeper started up on her elbow and blinked. Tommy turned and went out through a door, and down a flight of marble steps, past a Swedish scrubwoman who screamed, dropped her rag beside her pail, and fled, and out onto the street, and into a taxicab which pulled up, as if by prearrangement.

“Forty-second Street and Broadway,” Tommy said. “I just been in a ladies’ Turkish bath,” he confided to the driver.

“Sure, you were,” the driver said.

“If you ever had any ideas about wanting to be in a ladies’ Turkish bath,” Tommy volunteered, “give ’em up. There’s nothing in it.”

Tommy paid the driver at Forty-second Street and Broadway.

“Ziegfeld doesn’t pick ’em for Turkish baths,” he said.

He went into Henry’s Restaurant, where two friends of his from the *Times* were standing at the cashier’s desk, just inside the door.

“I was just in a ladies’ Turkish bath,” he said, without preamble, “and it’s nothing like you might think.”

“You’re tight, Tommy,” one of the reporters said. “Why don’t you hit the hay?”

"No place to go," Tommy replied. "I got in a ladies' Turkish bath, but that was N.G. Gee—Suss!" he exclaimed suddenly. "I'm glad none of those dames waked up. I'd 'a' been mobbed."

"Come here," said a familiar voice.

Tommy looked up. Millie was sitting at the first table, beside the cashier's desk.

"Come over here and sit down, you and your ladies' Turkish bath," she said. "You're crazy, Tommy," she added, as Tommy sank into a chair beside her. "Have some coffee."

Tears welled from Tommy's eyes, and spattered on the table cloth.

"I can't find any place to sleep," he said.

"You can come up to my place and sleep on the cot," Millie said. "I wouldn't leave a dog out on a night like this. But don't think up any more dirt."

"I swear, Millie," Tommy said earnestly, "I think that dirty rotter, Jimmie — —"

"One more word out of you about that, and you can stay out all night, for all I care," Millie said.

"I was in the Hotel Massive ladies' Turkish bath, Millie," Tommy said, and he told her about it.

"I believe you, Tommy," Millie said when he was through. "You aren't crazy about that, anyway. You know just how it's laid out in there, and just how those fat women look. My God! It's a good thing none of 'em waked up. You'd 'a' been killed."

"Just what I was thinking," Tommy said. "But I'm no more crazy about that than I am about — —"

"Remember what I said," Millie exclaimed.

"Oh, all right," Tommy agreed. "All right."

They drank their coffee, and went to Millie's place in a cab. When Tommy awoke on his cot in the morning, his suit was cleaned and pressed, his shoes were shined, his socks and underwear were washed, his collar was starched and ironed, and his tie, still smelling faintly of gasoline, was faultlessly smooth.

“Your tub is ready,” said Millie, who was dressed for the street. “There’s coffee in the kitchen, and a half-bottle of Scotch right here,” pointing to a bottle on the dresser.

“Wait a minute, Millie,” Tommy cried. “Don’t go out. I want to talk to you.”

“Those days are gone forever,” Millie replied in a hard tone. “When you go out, be sure the door locks behind you.”

“But, Millie!” Tommy pleaded.

“Goo’bye, Baby,” Millie said, and snapped the door after her.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

BOBBIE COWPER was a dressmaker. He had a flat in the Sixties, which he called his playhouse. It was daintily furnished, and on the walls were photographs of noted beauties of the stage and screen, most of them nude and all of them autographed to Bobby in most endearing terms.

Any girl, who wasn't too unpersonable, could get a beautiful set of "longeray" from Bobbie merely by letting him put it on her. Bobbie was ambisextrous. He had two pretty twin daughters by a divorced wife, whom he had married when he was a lad, but he liked to dress in elegant feminine garb, when he became Clotilde, instead of Bobbie.

Millie, who knew every one in the slightest way connected with the underworld life of Broadway, was a friend of Bobbie's, as was Sadie Thomas.

Millie came back from the races at Belmont Park in 1921 one evening, and went into Gerard's Restaurant. Gerard's was one of the new type restaurants, brought into existence by Prohibition. Millie walked through a restaurant on the ground floor, and through a kitchen in the rear, went down a flight of stairs into the cellar, where there was a bar with three perspiring bartenders behind it. The rest of the cellar was a restaurant, with stuffed chairs at the tables, and men and women drinking. Sadie and Bobbie were sitting at one of the tables. They hailed Millie.

"Sit down, Millie darling," Bobbie said.

"How were the races?" Sadie asked.

"A John laid \$2,000 on Hostetter on the nose, in the second race," Millie said. "And if he won, I was going on a trip with him. But he didn't win. I'm thirsty."

"Pardon me for pointing," Bobbie said, in his clipped, elegant way of enunciating, "but will you girls tell me who is that son-of-a-bitch over there?"

Millie looked over her shoulder, and said:

"Why that's Jimmie Damier, you know him."

"I know who he is," Bobbie said. "And I saw him out riding yesterday with the cutest little dear in New York—red hair like yours, Millie—but a chicken. I'd give her enough lingerie to last her the rest of her life. A perfect love."

Millie's cheeks flamed red through the rouge.

"Stop kicking me, Sadie, you jealous thing," Bobbie exclaimed, turning to Sadie Thomas. "Have you got your eye on the little girl too?"

"I'll kick you," Millie snarled. "I'll kick you both."

"Don't get mad, Millie," Sadie exclaimed. "Hold your horses."

"You make me sick," Millie said. "I'd smash you both for five cents—you damn degenerates."

"My word!" Bobbie cried. "What's the matter all of a sudden, Millie sweetheart?"

"Shut up, Bobbie," Sadie urged in her deep contralto. "That's Millie's daughter you saw with Damier."

"Oh, I'm terribly sorry, Millie," Bobbie said. "I'm frightfully upset. I know just how you feel: have two daughters too. I know just how a mother feels."

"If I ever hear of you even speaking of my baby again, you bum, you'll never know how anything feels when I get through with you," said Millie, who had risen from the table, and was standing trembling with rage, "and you too, Sadie," she added.

"Aw, be reasonable, Millie," Bobbie protested "I didn't know it was your daughter."

"Go to hell, both of you," Millie exclaimed. "I'm going before I crack you both one."

Millie got up and went over to a table where Jimmie Damier was seated alone, with a bottle of mineral water in front of him. Jimmie arose and bowed, and held a chair for Millie.

"My dear!" Bobbie exclaimed, rolling up his eyes, as Millie was sitting down. "Hasn't our Susan gotten virtuous all of a sudden?"

"You can't blame her," Sadie said.

"Oh, yes, I can," Bobbie said. "Oh, yes, I can blame her. She runs around with us, and she doesn't care what happens to any one else's

daughters. And she does what she damn well pleases. Haven't I children of my own?"

"She wants her baby to be different," Sadie said. "You can't understand that, not being a woman."

"I'm as much of a woman as you are, Sadie," Bobbie giggled, "but I don't expect to raise my daughters to be virgins."

"Honoraria is a beautiful girl," Sadie said.

"Hurray!" Bobbie crowed delightedly. "Let's have a drink on that."

Millie was boiling mad.

"And you," she said to Jimmie. "I been hearing a lot about you and Jack, and calling at the house, and being with my baby. Now, you keep away from her!"

Jimmie Damier raised his eyebrows. Except that he was a little grayer, and the lines under his eyes were a trifle heavier, he showed surprisingly little outward traces of the passing years. He was a well set up, beautifully valeted, impressive-looking chap always. What quirk it was that made him, as he said himself, a chicken fancier, often had been a question of discussion among his fellows on many directorates of big companies. He looked with his heavy-lidded eyes straight at Millie.

"What's the trouble, Millie?" he asked. "Something been getting you excited?"

"Yes, I'm excited," Millie admitted. "I've heard enough wise cracks about you and my baby, and they're going to stop. You're going to stay away from her, or you'll have me on your trail."

"What's happened?" Jimmie asked quietly, at the same time signalling a waiter by pointing at the floor, where a bucket would stand, that he wanted wine.

"Plenty," Millie said. "Bobbie Cowper and Sadie Thomas have seen you with my baby, and you know what they thought. You keep away from my daughter, or you'll find I'm not one of those women that take it and like it."

"For heaven's sake, Millie, I never thought you were anything of the kind," Jimmie said. "I believe, however, if you'll just think matters over, that you'll find you've gotten yourself all steamed up over nothing but dirty thoughts in dirty people's minds."

“Well, you keep away from the baby,” Millie repeated. “You’re dirty enough yourself so you shouldn’t be with her. You’ve got a rotten reputation where girls are concerned. And you know it.”

“None of us is perfect,” Jimmie admitted blandly, and inclusively. “But some of us aren’t degenerates that go around spoiling everything we look at, even children, with our degenerate thoughts.”

“Bah!” Millie exploded. “You always grabbed ’em pretty young, Jimmie Damier. You probably heard yourself what they say about you that a girl of thirteen is an old hag where you’re concerned.”

“That’s a slight exaggeration, don’t you think?” Jimmie asked, politely, nodding to the waiter to serve the wine.

“I don’t want a drink,” Millie snapped, seeing the gesture, and glancing at the waiter with napkin-cloaked bottle.

“You’re enough of a woman of the world to have a drink while we talk this over,” Jimmie argued. “You see, I don’t blame you for feeling the way you do about your daughter, but I’d like to prove to you that I’m her friend as well as your friend.”

The waiter filled the glasses.

“What did you give Jack a job in your bucket-shop for?” Millie demanded.

Jimmie Damier looked at her, for a barely perceptible pause, with no expression at all and then said:

“Millie! Millie! Wasker and Company is not a bucket-shop. Where did you hear that?”

“That’s what I’ve heard it is,” Millie said. “But never mind what it is. Why did you give Jack a job there? You might just as well tell me the truth.”

“Well,” Jimmie said, “John Maitland got that job because he was the best man available for it. He has a real talent for the business, and he has made a lot of money.”

“I remember you got Tommy Rocke a job when you were after me,” Millie said.

“Well, Tommy was all right as long as you were looking after him,” Jimmie said.

“He was all right as far as he went, but he didn’t go very far,” Millie sneered. “He’s like all the men—a bum. Anyway, I’ve been hearing about you and the baby for a long time now, and I never paid much attention before, but it suddenly came over me that you’ve got to stop seeing her. You keep away.”

“I take both your mother-in-law and your daughter for automobile rides, and I call upon your mother-in-law frequently,” Jimmie said. “It would be awkward for me to explain why I suddenly stayed away. Don’t you think you are unreasonable?”

“Unreasonable or not,” Millie said, “you’re going to keep away. And don’t be afraid of its being awkward. I’ll tell Mother why you’re staying away.”

“Quite determined, aren’t you, Millie?”

“Look here, Jimmie,” Millie grated huskily. “You don’t know how determined I am.”

They looked at each other silently for a moment, and then Millie said:

“I’d kill you as soon as I’d kill a dog—quicker, if you hurt my baby.”

Jimmie smiled grimly, his gaze still on hers.

“Have your own way, Millie,” he said quietly. “And now will you have a drink?”

“Are you going to keep away?” Millie insisted.

“I’ll keep away,” Jimmie said.

“Okay, then,” Millie said, straightening her shoulders and settling back in her chair.

She picked up the glass in front of her, and held it up, a smile coming to her face.

“Skol!” she exclaimed, as Jimmie tinkled his glass against hers. “I haven’t anything against you myself, Jimmie,” she said, putting the glass down. “I’m willing to be friends. The only thing is you’ve got to keep away from the baby.”

Jimmie filled her glass again. The orchestra began to play “Millie.” Millie’s green eyes crinkled, as she ticked her glass against Jimmie’s.

“I haven’t heard that song for a month of Sundays,” she said, and sang in her husky contralto:

“I’m a red-headed woman—
Look out for me.”

“And I mean it,” she added.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

“YOU’RE a peach, Uncle Jimmie,” said Honoria Maitland, as they sat at dinner in the south room of the Old Beagle Inn, one crisp November evening.

“I don’t deserve any credit,” disclaimed Jimmie Damier, dipping a spoon into his cup of chicken gumbo soup, but looking with eyes unwontedly alive at the girl, back of whom, in an old-fashioned fireplace, a six foot log burned lazily, sending spirals of pale blue smoke up a huge, blackened chimney.

“I didn’t know what had happened to Mother,” Honoria said. “It was a big shock to me to learn that she is a dipsomaniac. I still feel awful about it. Isn’t it terrible?”

“It isn’t very nice,” Jimmie agreed, finishing his soup by raising the cup and drinking from it. “We had hoped to keep her condition from you, but your father and your grandmother and I agreed, after she made that last scene, that it was the proper thing to tell you everything.”

“I am glad you did,” Honoria exclaimed. “I had to know it sooner or later. Of course, I always felt there was something funny. I always was ashamed that Mother only came to see me on Wednesday afternoons, and sometimes she wouldn’t see me for two or three Wednesdays, and once two months went by without her coming to see me. And she always wore a blue suit with a fur piece, and a sailor hat, except in the summer time.”

“Your mother is a wonderful woman in many ways,” Jimmie said judiciously, “but she is unbalanced—poor thing. And when she goes off the handle there isn’t much that any one can do, except humor her.”

“I have been sort of afraid of her, ever since I was a little girl,” Honoria said. “And when I happened to hear her telling Grandmother that I shouldn’t ever see you again, that you were bad, her voice was so coarse. Jack told me she had been drinking. And then he explained everything.”

“It was too bad,” Jimmie said, shaking his head. “It upset your grandmother, and it made it necessary to tell you the truth. I’m sorry, but I suppose it had to happen some time.”

“I’m glad,” Honoria exclaimed. “I’m grown up now, and I don’t have to be kept in cotton wool. I think I ought to know about my family.

Grandmother told me that, in a way, Mother is not to blame, and that there is no one in the world that she feels more sorry for.”

“It’s just an unfortunate thing,” Jimmie said.

“But it makes me feel like a conspirator,” Honoria smiled. “We all have to pretend that I never see you, and you come up here to school to see me every week, and sometimes twice a week.”

“We’re going about it the only way possible,” Jimmie pointed out.

“And then you and I have our secret,” Honoria said.

“The stage?” Jimmie asked, smiling.

“Oooh! That’s all I dream about, Uncle Jimmie,” Honoria cried, laying the knife and fork on her plate of roast duckling. “But I can’t help worrying over what Grandmother will think about that.”

“We’ll have to see about that when the time comes,” Jimmie said easily. “I shouldn’t be surprised if we can find a way to win her over to our way of thinking, but we must be cautious. We wouldn’t hurt her for anything, would we, Honoria?”

“Oh, Uncle Jimmie! She is everything in the world to me. She’s too wonderful to be true.”

“A lady, if there ever was one,” Jimmie said heartily. “A charming, lovely, sweet old lady—the kind you read about in books.”

“She is all that,” Honoria said, “but I wish she were in better health.”

Jimmie’s eyes took on the unfathomable expression with which they ordinarily regarded life, as he replied:

“I wouldn’t have anything happen to her for anything.”

“I don’t just see how we are going to get me on the stage, and not shock Grandmother, and humor Mother,” Honoria sighed, making a little wry mouth.

“You leave it to me, Honoria,” Jimmie encouraged. “Your Uncle Jimmie has engineered many more difficult deals than that in his life. But none so important to him,” he added.

“I dance in my room in front of the cheval glass every night,” Honoria confided. “I have a calendar on the wall, and I mark off every day that passes with a red mark.”

“Well, you’ll find that the time will pass,” Jimmie soothed, “and then you’ll be a star.”

“I can’t believe it,” Honoria breathed softly. “I can’t believe it even when you tell me it’s true.”

“Well, you have Higbein’s word for it too, haven’t you?” Jimmie smiled.

“Mr. Higbein was wonderful to me,” Honoria nodded, “but I keep thinking that it is because he is a friend of yours, and wants to please you.”

“Oh, no,” Jimmie protested gently. “Higbein is a business man first and a friend second. He feels grateful to me for discovering you for him. How is the Christmas play coming along?”

“We are working awfully hard,” Honoria replied.

“Higbein will be there to see you.”

“It scares me, so that I can hardly breathe when I think about it,” Honoria confessed.

“Don’t worry,” Jimmie comforted. “You’ll knock ’em off their seats.”

“I can’t imagine a real uncle being as wonderful to a real niece as you are to me, Uncle Jimmie,” Honoria said softly.

“Raspetti tells me that your voice is coming along in great shape,” Jimmie said. “But you want to be careful and not overdo this business of singing and dancing, and studying your lessons.”

Honoria laughed, a sound startlingly reminiscent of Millie’s infectious contralto merriment. Her small, straight nose wrinkled just like her mother’s too, but there was a dimple in her left cheek which her mother lacked.

“I’m as fit as a fiddle,” she boasted. “I ride, and I fence, and I swim, and I play on the class basketball team, and I’ll be skating and skiing this winter.”

“You certainly are a picture of health and beauty,” Jimmie said. “I’ll bet you don’t lack young men.”

“Oh, there are plenty of those,” Honoria admitted, with a laugh. “But they seem awfully shallow after knowing you. They only want a good time. And they all want to kiss every girl they meet.”

“I really can’t blame ’em for wanting to kiss you,” Jimmie said, his eyes and face expressionless.

"A lot of good it does them," Honoria laughed gaily. "The only men I've kissed since I was a little girl, and was in love with a boy that went to dancing school, are you and Jack."

"There can't be much thrill in that," Jimmie suggested.

"Why, Uncle Jimmie!" Honoria cried, dimpling. "I really think you're fishing. And now you're blushing. Yes, you are."

"I wish I could blush," Jimmie asserted. "I wish I was young enough to blush. You'd make any old man wish to be young again."

"You're not old," Honoria said stoutly. "I think you're distinguished-looking. If you weren't so blasé you'd be thrilled to know how many of the girls have got a crush on you. You look as if you ran things, and are so big and strong, and stern. I could only love a big, strong man, with a little gray in his hair."

"My hair is gray enough," Jimmie observed, touching his sleek, beautifully groomed head with a hand on which a big diamond sparkled.

"And I love you," Honoria exclaimed, leaning across the table over her demi-tasse. "How could I help but love you? You're the good fairy that is making life so exciting for me that I think I'm dreaming. You're just too sweet for words, Uncle Jimmie."

"Why don't you call me Jimmie?" he asked. "You call your father Jack."

"All right, Jimmie," Honoria said, "I'll call you Jimmie. Only, it seems funny."

"Call me Jimmie again."

"Jimmie, dear," Honoria exclaimed, and pouted her lips at him in a half-kiss.

"I'd buy a theatre for you for less than that, Honoria," Jimmie said.

"You've spoiled me terribly, Jimmie," Honoria confessed. "Ever since you've known me you've given me everything I wanted. I guess I would have a terrible time being a poor man's wife, wouldn't I?"

"I want to spoil you," Jimmie said. "And I would hate to see you a poor man's wife."

"No fear!" Honoria smiled. "I'm never going to get married. I'm going to be a great actress, and have a career, only I can't believe it myself."

Honorita looked around the big room, which had been made by knocking out partitions of three rooms in an old Colonial house. Her gaze passed over pewter plates, and old candlesticks, and men and women, most of them motorists, sitting at linen-clothed tables, and came back to Jimmie's face.

"I just can't believe this is real," she said. "I feel like a girl in a fairy story."

Jimmie bent over her, helping her on with her coat as she arose.

"That last perfume was the best yet, wasn't it?" he asked, his face close to her massed red curls.

"All the girls are jealous of it," she laughed.

When they arrived at the school, Jimmie waved away the chauffeur, and helped Honorita from the limousine. He walked up the steps, and rang the bell. Honorita put her face up and kissed him, just before a maid in uniform opened the door.

"I guess all the boys are jealous of me," Jimmie said. "I'll see you next Thursday, and if you want anything just let me know."

"Good night, Uncle Jimmie," Honorita said decorously. "And give my love to Grandmother."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

MILLIE was drinking in Quinn's downtown on the nineteenth of December. She was with Joe Burkis, a professional bondsman, who was supposed to possess unseen influence in the various criminal courts. She was the only woman in the back room and was in high spirits, hat tossed sidewise on her red curls and her laughter ringing out frequently.

"What did you sock the cop for, Millie?" Joe Burkis asked. "For Christ's sake, you'll be taking a poke at the Mayor yet."

"I went into Church's with another girl and two men," Millie said, "and we had some drinks. About half-past five the two Johns had to go, but we wanted to stay. So they paid for a bottle of fresh whiskey for us, and they got up and went. And before we had a chance to touch the whiskey, the waiter came along and picked up the bottle, and told us to get out. He said ladies weren't allowed without escorts."

"He picked a fine one, when he picked on you," Joe Burkis exclaimed.

"Ha! Ha!" Millie laughed, but with no mirth in her tones. "I told him the whiskey was ours, and that it was paid for—twenty-five dollars for the bottle too, and from him—and that if ladies weren't allowed without escorts we'd go, but we'd go with our bottle of whiskey. And he wanted to know what bottle of whiskey, and I hit him in the nose."

"I'll bet he knew something hit him," Joe Burkis grinned.

"Well, there was a lot of noise," Millie continued, "and some dishes were broken, and a chair or two was upset, and then the manager came in with a cop—a big Irish cop."

"And you hit the Irish cop on the chin," Joe Burkis supplied, "and he pinched you, and I just got you out."

"I told 'em I wouldn't be in long," Millie said. "Some day these bum cops may believe me when I tell 'em."

"But it's just luck I happened to drift into the police station," Joe Burkis said. "You might've stayed there all night. The cops were sore as hell."

"Can you beat it?" Millie demanded. "Here's Church selling liquor, and this cop who is on traffic duty outside on the corner knows he's selling

liquor, and has a drink once in a while himself. And then when I'm getting gyped out of my liquor that has been paid for the cop comes in and grabs me. That's crazy."

"You know the way things are, Millie," Joe Burkis said. "You don't have to be told."

"Things may be that way," Millie asserted vigorously, "but they can't do it to me."

"Well, look at all the trouble you were in, and you might have been there all night," Joe Burkis pointed out. "It was lucky for you I happened to come along."

"I telephoned a friend of mine," Millie said, "and she was going to see about bail."

"Helen Riley," Joe Burkis said. "And the cops have got it in for her, for some reason too. Don't mention me whatever you do, but you might tip Helen off that the cops are after her. They'll frame her sure."

"You know everything, don't you, Joe?" Millie said sarcastically.

"I know some things," Joe Burkis replied. "And when I know 'em, I know 'em. Excuse me a minute, I got to go out to the bar a minute and see Pat Quinn."

Joe Burkis heaved his big figure out of his chair, got up from the plain deal table, which was one of twenty in the back room of Quinn's speakeasy, and disappeared in the direction of the bar in front. No sooner had Joe Burkis gone than Louis Riccio, a swarthy chap of medium height, with a white Fedora set slantwise on shining black hair, and wearing a stiffly pressed blue suit, went over and sat down at Millie's table.

"Hello, Millie," Louis said, showing white teeth. "Will you have a drink with me?"

"Hello, Louis, how's the bootleggin' business?" Millie asked. "I'll have a drink with you," she added, "but don't try to make any dates with me because I told you a long time ago you're not my style."

"I would love to have you, Millie," Louis said, after ordering drinks. "I have lots of money."

"Keep your money; I don't want it," Millie said.

"I will give you a thousand dollars," Louis said, turning over his right hand, and exposing a thousand-dollar bill on the dark table cover.

“You put it up, Louis,” Millie ordered. “And shut up. You’re greasy to me. I wouldn’t give a damn if you had ten billion dollars. Let’s have our drinks. I’m in no mood for fooling tonight.”

“Two thousand dollars?” Louis asked, adding another bill to the first.

Millie got mad, jumped up and, leaning over the table, said harshly:

“What kind of a dump is this anyway that a girl can’t come into it without being insulted by a bum? Get out of here.”

A young chap, who had been following Millie’s every move with fascinated gaze from the moment she had entered the place, went over and took Louis by the collar.

“I’ll teach you to insult a lady, you tramp,” he growled.

Two men who had been with Louis were on their feet with the young chap’s first move. As he grabbed Louis, one of them lifted the young chap’s hat, and the other crashed a syphon of carbonated water brutally down on the exposed skull. Then they pulled blackjacks and began to beat the unconscious body on the floor, while a third member of the group stood with a drawn revolver, saying:

“Le’ me get to the bastard!”

“Not that! You Slim! Not that!” came a voice from the bar end of the room whence Quinn came running. “No guns. For Christ’s sake, what did you have to do this for?”

Millie had hit Louis and his nose was dripping crimson. He had hit her, as an angry red mark on her left jaw line testified. Her hair was down and her eyes were aflame. Two or three men were on the floor.

“All out, quick!” Quinn called, twisting the revolver from the hand of its holder.

Joe Burkis, right behind him, said crisply:

“Everybody get out of here as fast as he can, and don’t try to come back tonight.”

He pushed his way through still struggling men to Millie.

“God damn you,” he whispered. “You started this.”

“There’ll be no more women in this place so long as I live,” Quinn was saying, as he and his bartenders and waiters were herding out the sweating customers.

“Come on, Millie,” Joe Burkis said. “We got to beat it quick.”

Millie went over to the unconscious figure on the floor, knelt, and put the head on her lap.

“He isn’t dead,” she said. “But I’ll be surprised if he lives. Those dirty cowards!”

“You got to get out,” Joe Burkis exclaimed impatiently, grabbing Millie by the arm. “You’re crazy. The cops’ll be here in a minute, and you don’t want ’em to find you here.”

“I don’t give a damn,” Millie said. “This John thought he was helping me, and I’m going to stick to him.”

“Oh, hell!” Joe Burkis growled and, taking Millie by the arm, he lifted her bodily from the floor, and carried her, screaming hysterically, to the bar. There he propped her against the wall and shook her vigorously.

“Look here!” he said. “You’ve made enough trouble for one day. You’re going to do what I say now.”

“All right, Joe,” Millie said, in a soft voice, and with astonishing meekness. “Where’s my hat?”

“My God!” Joe exclaimed.

“Here’s her hat and her bag,” Quinn said, tossing them on the bar. “And now get out of here, and there’ll be no more women in any place of mine so long as I live—so help me God!”

Joe Burkis and Millie walked a block to Broadway.

“What happened, Millie?” Joe asked.

“Greasy Louis was trying to give me two thousand dollars and I was telling him where he got off when the other man came to help me,” Millie said. “And those pals of Louis’s mixed in. One of them took off the man’s hat, and another hit him on the head with a seltzer bottle. And then they tried to kill him.”

“Maybe they did,” Joe Burkis said callously. “This is a fine town to butt into other people’s business in.”

“I’ve seen some tough sights,” Millie said, stifling a nervous sob, “but that was the worst I ever saw. I need a drink.”

“You need a rest,” Joe Burkis said. “You been raising hell for years, Millie, and it’s getting you. You’re all shot. Pull yourself together. Where

shall I tell him?"

A taxicab had stopped, and Joe Burkis was holding the door open. Millie gave him her own address, and Joe relayed it to the taxi driver.

"You get a good rest, Millie," he said. "You don't have to be in court tomorrow morning. I'll fix that."

"That's fine, Joe," Millie said.

"And you take my advice and go on the wagon. Take a trip somewhere. Go to the country. Pull yourself together. You're too decent a dame to be the way you are. For God's sake!"

"I'm going to pull myself together, Joe," Millie said.

"If you need any money for a week or two or three," Joe offered heartily, sticking his hand in his pocket, "I can let you have some."

"I don't need any, Joe," Millie said.

"Well, you better take this, anyhow," Joe insisted, pressing some bills into her hand. "You may need it. So long."

"Goo'bye, Baby," Millie said.

She switched on the overhead light in the cab, and looked at the money. There were two hundred dollars. She sniffed a bit, and dabbed at her eyes, as she started to tuck the little wad into her well-worn tan leather handbag. A heavy, unaccustomed object already was in the bag. She closed her fingers on it. It was a revolver.

"Quinn isn't so dumb," she said to herself, putting the money in with the gun and closing the bag.

It was snowing slightly, just enough to powder the asphalt, and give the town a wintry look and smell. It was after theatre-going time, and the thinned throngs on Broadway were hurrying with their heads bent against the north wind, and huddled in collars against the cold. New York was full of chilled souls, each going about his own affairs—a more suitable spot than a desert island in which to be truly lonesome.

The taxicab bumped over holes in the pavement, and skidded slightly once or twice. Once it jerked to a standstill, with a shrieking of brakes, against the coat-tails of a jaywalker.

"For Christ's sake, watch where you're going," Millie screamed at him. "You fool!"

The cab finally stopped at the old apartment house where Millie still was living with the chauffeur's family. When she got out, a big man opened the apartment house door and ran down the steps.

"I been waiting for you a long time, Millie. I thought you never was coming."

"Well, what the hell do you want, Mike?" Millie inquired unsociably. "Have you got change for a twenty?" she asked the driver. "Have you got a dollar, Mike?" she asked, when the driver growled a negative.

She handed the driver his fare, and turned to Mike Farrer, chauffeur for Jimmie Damier.

"What did you want to see me for?" she asked. "You know I don't want any more to do with you, and there's no good hanging around. I'm all to pieces. I'm shot. My God! All I want is to be let alone."

"I'm through with Mr. Damier," Mike Farrer said. "But that isn't why I've come to you. I'm no squealer, but there's some things that ain't right."

"What isn't right, Mike?" Millie demanded.

"Your little girl and Mr. Damier," Mike said.

"Well, what about them? For God's sake, talk. What is it?"

"Well, maybe it's all right, and maybe it isn't, but I never saw that bird interested in any girl unless it was for one thing; you know what," Mike said.

Millie screamed and stamped her foot.

"What?" she asked again.

"Well, she's up at Mr. Damier's camp at Cokesbury," Mike said. "They were to go up there today, and I thought you ought to know about it."

Millie hit blindly at Mike with both hands and began to sob. Mike held her arms in his big hands. After a minute or two, Millie spoke in a choked voice.

"I got to get up there tonight, Mike," she said, stifling a sob. "I got to get up there."

"It's a hell of a trip," Mike said doubtfully.

"I've been up there," Millie said. "We used to make it in three hours."

“It’s winter now,” Mike said. “You got to drive in with a horse and sleigh from Cokesbury, and the snow’ll be up to the horses’ bellies, I’ll bet.”

“I’ve got to go,” Millie cried. “I’ve got to go. Oh, God, when I get Jimmie Damier I’ll kill him. I told him I would, and I will. So help me God, I will!”

“Be quiet, Millie,” Mike said. “Sure. Don’t carry on that way. There ain’t goin’ to be any killin’ done. Get hold of yourself.”

“You know the road, Mike. You drive me to Cokesbury.”

“I’ll do nothing of the sort this night,” Mike said firmly. “You get some sleep. It’s sorry I am that I told you about your daughter this night. Sure, you’re all upset.”

“I got to get there,” Millie moaned.

“Tomorrow maybe, but not tonight,” Mike repeated soothingly.

“If it was your daughter, would you go tonight or tomorrow, or next week, you bum?” Millie asked.

Mike rubbed a big paw across his face, and looked baffled.

“What would you do if it was your daughter, or your sister at Jimmie Damier’s camp?” Millie repeated. “You’d go.”

“I’d be there by this time,” Mike admitted honestly.

“Well, you’ll drive me, won’t you, Mike?” asked Millie, her voice suddenly become soft and wheedling.

“By God! I will,” Mike said.

“Can you hire a car?”

“I can get a good one,” Mike said. “Tim Murray has got one of his cars that he runs booze in from Canada at the garage now, and he’d let me have it in a minute. Always after me, he is, to work for him.”

“All right,” Millie said. “Let’s get going. Hurry up.”

Mike looked at her, and shook his head.

“You can’t go like that, Millie. You got to get a heavy overcoat, and you should have galoshes for your feet. A fur coat and galoshes you’ve got to have, an’ for that drive out to the camp you should have two coats and four galoshes. It takes an hour to drive that four miles in them hills, and it seems

like a month before you get there, even if you start out with hot bricks in the bottom of the sleigh.”

Millie couldn’t budge Mike from his stand. When she said she’d hire her own driver, and go by herself, he replied:

“If a driver don’t know the road with this snow, and everything, he might be a long time getting to Cokesbury, and he might not get there at all, at all. You do what I say, Millie, and we’ll save time. I’ll go get the car, and come back for you.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

WHEN MIKE FARRER returned with a sedan, of a make most popular at the moment with bootleggers because of its quick pick-up and speed on the road, Millie was waiting at the curb. She was wearing a chauffeur's fur coat.

"I began to think you weren't coming back," she said, in high-pitched tones.

"I was only gone fifteen minutes," Mike replied. "Get in and we'll be on our way."

Millie climbed into the car and seated herself beside Mike, and began to wail and snuffle. She was trembling all over.

"Look here," Mike exclaimed. "You're in no shape to make this trip. You ought to be in bed."

"I'll be all right," Millie assured him. "For God's sake, shut up and let's get started. I don't care how fast you go, as long as it's as fast as possible."

She whimpered a little again.

"You're crazy," Mike said. "You nearly got the DT's, or I'm a liar."

"I'm all right," Millie sobbed. "I got some Scotch here. Will you have a drink?"

"I'll have nothing," Mike said. "I got to drive. And you'd better have nothing at all, either. You want to get there sober."

"I'll be sober," Millie asserted. "I'm sober now, if I ever was sober. But I've got to have a drink to steady my nerves—just a little medicine."

"Well, just a little medicine then," Mike conceded, grudgingly. "There's a glass in the pocket next to you."

Millie took a drink from a full bottle, and choked over it. Mike shook his head, but released the clutch, and the car started slowly forward.

"I'll go St. Nicholas Avenue and the Speedway," he said, "and hit Central Avenue as far as White Plains. We've got good roads all the way."

The motor settled into a deep, vibrant hum, as they turned north. The snow was still falling lightly. Millie sat back, wailing almost under her breath, and dabbling at her eyes with a handkerchief.

“Mike’s whole attention was on the ever-winding strip of concrete which led northward. Now and then he slowed down a trifle, but the dim light on the dash showed the indicator usually hovering around the sixty-mile mark.

“We’re in Connecticut now,” Mike said, at length, and then he added, “Damn!” and braked the car to a sudden, smooth stop.

“Cops!” he said.

“I’ll talk to ’em,” Millie said. “Let me talk to ’em. I’ll give ’em some money.”

“You shut up,” Mike said. “If you want to get anywhere tonight, you shut up. You don’t give these Connecticut State Troopers nothin’. You tell ’em what they want to know, and if you tell ’em right, you’re all right.”

A flashlight shot into the car, blinding them, quickly joined by a second flashlight.

“Two of ’em,” Mike said. “Maybe they’re after us for speeding, I dunno.”

One of the troopers opened the fore door, and the other opened the rear door and looked inside.

“Where you going?” the first one inquired.

“I’m taking this lady up to a house party at Damier’s in Cokesbury,” Mike said. “She’s going to join her family up there. She is way late and I was hurrying a bit.”

The troopers spent ten minutes asking questions, and looking at owner’s license, car license, and driving license, and then stood back.

“All right, go ahead,” they said.

“I thought they would take my bottle of Scotch,” Millie said. “They looked right at it.”

“They’re not interested in one bottle of Scotch—those boys,” Mike replied. “They’re after bootleggers, and any sort of crooks. As long as you’re okay, they don’t bother you. It’s lucky I have a standing arrangement with Tim Murray to run this car, though, or I wouldn’t have had the key for where he keeps his licenses. And then we would have been in Dutch.”

"I'm going to have a little drink," Millie said. "Sure you don't want one?"

"No, and I wish to heaven you wouldn't take any more either," Mike growled.

"I'd liked to have smacked one of those cops," Millie said. "They were fresh. What the hell did they want to stop us for anyway?"

Her voice ended in a near scream.

"For two cents," Mike said, "I'd turn around right here and go back to town. You're crazy."

Millie dropped her voice to a coo, and kissed Mike on the ear.

"You'd do more than this for Millie, wouldn't you, Mike?" she whispered.

"Damn it! It's me that's crazy, I guess," Mike said, starting the car rolling again.

"I'm a red-headed woman—
Look out for me."

Millie sang the lines in a choking voice, and then began to cry.

"This ain't a ride," Mike said. "It's a nightmare. For Christ's sake, Millie, brace up and be yourself."

"I'll take another little drink," Millie said, "and then I'll be all right."

"O God!" Mike said.

"Everybody's 'O Godding' me today," Millie said. "But I'll do some 'O Godding' myself before I get through. I'll kill a bastard before the day is over. You watch and see."

"If you don't stop," Mike announced, "I'll turn around."

"If you do I'll raise hell with you, Mike Farrer," Millie screamed. "If you do, I'll get us both arrested. I'll get us both pinched. I'll hound you till the day of your death. You keep driving."

Millie was crying again.

"I wish I never had gone to see you tonight," Mike Farrer said.

"I wish I'd never seen you or Jimmy Damier either," Millie said.

It stopped snowing. The car went sliding through the crisp night on singing rubber, stretches of gaunt trees alternating with groups of dim frame houses and open fields, all run together. A gust of wind rattled the glass windows now and again.

"This is mad business," Mike muttered. "Like riding in a nightmare."

"I guess I'll have a little drink," Millie said, and crooned softly to herself as she drank it, and then coughed and cried.

"We're coming into Cokesbury," Mike said. "We'll be stopping at Ed Winslow's and get a cup of coffee."

"I don't want to stop anywhere," Millie exclaimed. "You keep right on going to Damier's Farm. That's where we're going."

"We couldn't go a foot along the road that leads up there," Mike replied. "You never been there in the winter. That road is rolled after the first snowfall to make a foundation for runners, and then it's ploughed sometimes after that. It's a hell of a job for a horse to go through there sometimes."

"Well, I'll get a horse at Winslow's," Millie said.

Mike drove the car into a yard—house to the northwest, sheds to the north, and barn on the northeast, making a pleasant pocket with its only outlet to the south.

"Ed's barn is the only garage around here," Mike explained, "and his kitchen's the only place to get warm that I know of. We'll have to wake him up."

Ed Winslow appeared at the door, carrying a gasoline lantern, which revealed him in gray woolen undershirt, wrinkled trousers and felt boot linings. His sparse gray hair was tousled, his faded gray eyes were blinking behind steel-bowed spectacles, and it was obvious that he had neglected to add his false teeth to his toilet.

"A purty time of night," Ed Winslow said.

"Hello, Ed," Mike greeted him. "It's Mike Farrer and a lady who wants to get out to Damier's—Miss White."

"Oh, hello Mike," Ed said. "Well, the lady can sleep here and telephone Damier's to call for her in the mornin'."

"That's right," Mike whispered. "Keep her here if you can."

“What’re you whispering about, Mike?” Millie cried. “Mr. Winslow, I don’t want to telephone to Damier’s, and I don’t want to sleep in your house. I want to drive out there now. I got to get out there tonight.”

“The snow is pretty deep on the mountain road,” Winslow said. “And I don’t know anybody that’d drive you at this time of night. I guess you better sleep here, ma’am, and call up in the morning.”

Ed Winslow meanwhile had led the way into the kitchen where a big coal range was glowing red with heat.

“Maybe you’d like a cup of coffee, or—” he looked quickly at Mike and then at Millie—“or a drop of somethin’ a leetle stronger.” And he winked.

“I’d like some of it in a cup of hot coffee,” Millie said. “A little whiskey in hot coffee would be good for me, but I’ve got to get to Damier’s tonight.”

“You better take it easy,” Ed Winslow said, putting down the gasoline lantern and lighting a lamp. “You better stay here tonight.”

Millie’s voice rose to a low scream.

“I’m going out there tonight if I have to walk,” Millie said. “And no one’s going to stop me.”

Ed Winslow raised his eyebrows and glanced questioningly at Mike, who spread out his hands and shrugged his shoulders.

“I guess if she’s got her mind made up, Ed,” Mike said, “there’s nothing we can do about it. I know the lady, and she’s hard to handle if she’s got her mind made up.”

“Well, it ain’t any of my funeral,” Ed Winslow said. “And if you say the word, Mike, and she pays for it, she can have the horse and cutter. But I ain’t goin’ to drive her.”

“I don’t want anybody to drive me,” Millie said. “I can drive myself. I know the way, and I drove plenty of horses and sleighs when I was a girl. And I’ll pay.”

“I’d want twenty-five dollars tonight,” Ed Winslow said, glancing again at Mike.

“I’ll give you a hundred,” Millie said. “I’ll buy the horse and sleigh,” she laughed hysterically. “Only hurry and get it hitched up.” And she began to weep silently.

"I don't like this," Ed Winslow said to Mike out in the barn, "and I wouldn't do it for any one I didn't know like I know you."

"She's crazy," Mike said. "But I can't see what else we can do. We ain't going to fight all night with a wild woman, are we?"

"What did you bring her here for?" Ed Winslow grumbled.

"I couldn't help myself," Mike said.

"She ought to be locked up somewhere, what I seen of her," Ed Winslow said. "If she was my woman I'd whang her one, and put her to bed."

"If she was your woman she'd whang you one and put you to bed," Mike said. "You don't know this dame."

"I don't want to," Ed Winslow retorted, busying himself with hitching a black mare into the shafts of a light cutter. "I'd ruther have Mr. Damier lookin' after her than me."

"That's the way I look at it," Mike said. "If she had a gun with her I wouldn't let her go. Her daughter's up there, and she wants to be there too."

"My shotgun's in the kitchen," Ed Winslow said.

"It'll stay there," Mike said, "or she won't go. But I figure her bark's worse'n her bite right now. She's talking kind o' crazy from too much booze, but she can hold it all right. I've known her for a long time. She'll go up to Damier's and raise hell and sleep it off."

"It kind of makes me laugh to think of Damier having some troubles," Ed Winslow said. "He thinks the world has got to be run to suit him. When this hell-on-wheels blows in, he may lose a leetle sleep."

"I'd do a lot for this dame anyway," Mike said. "On'y I wish she was calmer."

"She'll be calmer after this ride," Ed Winslow observed. "You know," he added, "this mare'll come home if she ain't watched anyway."

Millie had put some bricks in the oven, and when Ed Winslow and Mike came in to tell her the horse was hitched, she said:

"Will you put those hot bricks in the sleigh for me, and give me a horse blanket?"

"She ain't so dumb," Ed Winslow said. "I guess she knows what she's doin'."

"I told you I've been sleigh-riding before," Millie said.

After she had the reins in her hand, and had been all tucked in, Ed Winslow said:

“You know the way, ma’am? It’s easy. Just turn right outside the yard here, and take your first left up the hill, and keep on goin’ uphill, most of the time, till you come to the Damier place.”

“I know it,” Millie said, and drove off, her sobs sounding above the jingle of sleigh bells.

“I don’t think we should’ve let her go,” Ed Winslow said. “I guess I must still be asleep.”

“I feel like I’d been doin’ wrong all evening,” Mike agreed. “She’s a hellion—that one, all right.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

“Oh, dear!” Millie sobbed, as the mare stopped to breathe in the deep snow on a hill. “Oh, dear!” And she beat the dash with a broken whip, which she had found sagging in its socket.

A pale moon was riding high up in a chilled steel sky, and a wild wind was howling down from the northwest, carrying stinging ice particles on its wings.

“Oh,” Millie wailed, and took a drink from the bottle which she kept beside her under the blanket.

The mare started again, floundering in the snow, and the cutter rocked and jingled through the drifts. Steam from the mare’s nostrils was whisked away by the wind. The mare stopped again, her sides heaving with effort. Millie fumbled with numbed fingers for the bottle, and took another drink.

“I’m a red-headed woman—
Look out for me.”

She began to cry with a little moaning noise, after that.

Finally, she started to go down grade, and after a quarter-mile the Damier place was visible ahead on the left-hand side of the road. She crossed a wooden bridge over a snow-covered depression in the rolling land, which in warmer weather was a rushing trout brook. She had fished in it herself.

When she turned in the drive at Damier’s, no lights were to be seen. The silence of the night was broken only by the creak of the runners in the snow, the tinkle of the sleigh bells, the panting of the horse, and the unconscious moaning which came from Millie’s throat.

She drove to the side door of the big house and stopped. It took her five minutes to get herself free of the blankets and out of the cutter. She swayed slightly as she went up the shovelled path. The door was locked. She lifted the knocker and pounded with it. She was sobbing.

A window was raised overhead, and a man’s voice called:

“Who’s there?”

“Let me in,” Millie shrieked. “You let me in.”

Windows suddenly bloomed a bright yellow. A big bulb over Millie’s head burst into incandescence, and a long string of shaded bulbs which ran out to the barn, and down the drive, followed suit.

“Who is it?” asked a man’s voice inside the door.

“Let me in,” Millie repeated, and she pounded on the panels.

The door opened a crack.

“It’s a woman,” a man’s voice said.

“Well, open the door and let her in,” Jimmie Damier’s voice ordered. “She won’t bite.”

The door opened, and Millie wavered over the threshold. A man servant, in trousers and dressing gown, closed the door again.

“Who is it?” Jimmie Damier’s voice asked from above, and Jimmie himself in silk dressing gown and fur-lined bedroom slippers appeared on the stairs.

“Millie!” Jimmie Damier exclaimed. “What are you doing here?”

“You’ve got my baby here,” Millie wailed, fumbling with her handbag. “I told you to leave her alone.”

“Who told you that?” Jimmie said. “That’s a lot of nonsense.”

“Who is it, Uncle Jimmie?” called Honoria’s voice from behind him on the stairs.

“Look out there, Maxwell,” Jimmie said sharply to the servant. “She’s drunk, and she’s got a gun. Grab it!”

Millie screamed as Maxwell grabbed her, and her handbag dropped to the floor. She hit Maxwell on the ear with her fist, and he fell back. Jimmie reached her in two strides, seizing her hands. The revolver exploded. Jimmie’s hands fell away, his eyes opened in an expression of surprise, and he collapsed on the hall rug.

Millie stood looking blankly down at his sprawled body, the revolver hanging limply in her hand.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

BEST place to learn what was going to happen in a trial in the Chippewa County Court House in White City was in Sam Bartel's Metropolitan Hotel, diagonally across Main Street. Every one who had business in the Court House, from judges down to janitor, ate there and—if they felt that way and knew Sam well enough—also drank what was referred to as Scotch and rye.

What once had been the bar now was a lunch counter. A rundown pool table, its faded cloth patched here and there with court plaster, an ancient music box, and a radio which suffered chronically from static were visible mechanical means of entertainment. Gossip about a good, exciting trial, however, was the best offering that Sam made to his public.

Juries in important cases, as in the trial of Millicent Maitland on a charge of murder, were victualed in Sam's main dining room under the glazed eyes of plump deputy sheriffs. Charlie Grimshaw, the leading sportsman of White County, had just watched the twelve men who held Millie's fate in their hands file dumbly out of the Court House and across the street and into the dining room, for their noon meal. Charlie shook his head wisely.

"It's too bad that woman couldn't have shot this feller down in Noo Yawk, or else in Long Island," he said. "Chippewa County is all set to show the rest of the world that when it comes to murder, a woman ain't no different from a man."

"Judge Belcher is showin' 'em some speed," said Magnus Magnus, who kept the filling station down the street. "When he ran out of the special panel, he sends Sheriff Heatley and his deppities out in their automobiles to get more talesmen the same night, and they was all on hand in the morning. And what with night sessions and all he ain't goin' to waste no time sendin' this female over the road."

"She's a gone goose," Charlie Grimshaw agreed. "All y' got to do is get one look at those married farmers on that jury. An' District Attorney Hawkins is lookin' for a record. He wants to be Governor. He's havin' the time of his life with all those newspaper men from Noo Yawk and Boston and everywhere else."

“Well, she shot him, didn’t she?” asked Pop Johnston, who had collected milk from farms along the Hill Road. “She shot him and she ought to be electrocuted.”

“Well, don’t worry, she will be,” Charlie Grimshaw announced, “and I’m bettin’ two to one on a conviction, and there ain’t no takers that I can see.”

“I’ll take you,” said a young man, who had been drinking a Special Ginger Ale at the lunch counter, the “Special” meaning that it contained rye. “I’ll take you for twenty-five dollars.”

“You’re one of those noospaper boys, ain’t you?” Charlie Grimshaw asked.

“Sullivan, of the *World*,” the young man replied.

“I suppose,” Charlie Grimshaw said, “that you’re bankin’ on sympathy, not to mention this here twilight state that the alienist imported especially from Chicawgo testified this mawnin’ that the defendant was in when she done the shootin’? You’re on for the twenty-five, son. Pop here’ll hold the money.”

Magnus laughed. “Twilight state!” he snorted. “Twilight state is just another way of sayin’ the lady had been drinkin’ too much. An’ that ain’t goin’ far with that bunch of joorymen.”

“As the District Attorney said in court when that twilight state business come up,” Charlie Grimshaw said. “For every medical expert the defense could put on to say the defendant was non compos mentis, the State could put on just as many to say the defendant knew just what she was doin’ at the time of the shootin’. An’ I’m believing that the gen’lemen of the joory are goin’ to follow the advice of the Deestric Attorney, and not pay much attention to what the eminent alienists have to say. They says whatever they’re paid to say.”

“I’m betting on old William Elder Timms,” Sullivan said, grinning. “I’ve looked over that old bird’s records around here, and I don’t know but what I’d rather have him as my lawyer for a trial in this neck of the woods than Clarence Darrow, or Martin W. Littleton, or any of those big guns.”

“They’s some truth in that, boy,” Magnus Magnus agreed, wiping froth from his bushy red moustache, and showing two or three scattered yellow fangs in a condescending grin. “Ole Bill Timms is a hell-roarer. There ain’t no mistake about that. He spends all his spare time ridin’ around the county pattin’ possible jurymen’s babies on the head, and tellin’ their mas that they got future presidents on their hands. An’ he’s as slick as they make ’em

when it comes to presentin' a case to the jury. He's as full of tricks as one of these here mageecians. But there ain't no tricks to pull in a case like this here one, that we can see. The cards is stacked against him."

"He's gotten away with a good deal already," observed Sullivan, ordering another Special Ginger Ale.

"Those character witnesses he called from town for Mrs. Maitland handed me a laugh. They come in all dressed up like an Easter parade, the gents in frock coats, and striped pants, and fresh hair cuts, and the dames looking as if they were fresh from church. And the District Attorney didn't know anything about 'em, so he let 'em get away with it."

"That Mrs. Riley made a good witness," Magnus Magnus volunteered.

"So did Quinn, and Burkis, and a lot of other well known gents from Broadway," Sullivan said, grinning. "It handed us a laugh anyhow. An' they all got it firmly set that Mrs. Maitland was a pillar of virtue, who earned her own living managing the candy department in a drug store."

"Well, that won't make any difference when those twelve good men and troo retire to the joory room to deliberate," Charlie Grimshaw announced.

Sullivan set his empty glass down on the counter, and turned to the group. His soft, and not too new, felt hat was pushed back from a wide forehead. His eager, sharp face, with shrewd blue eyes, under which faint shadows showed, was thrust forward.

"You want to be in court this afternoon, if you can make it," he advised. "Old Timms told us on the way over here that he's going to call the girl, Honoria, before dinner recess."

"Well, what good'll that do?" Charlie Grimshaw asked.

"It'll be the best scene of the trial," said Sullivan of the *World*. "I'll bet you on that."

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE room on the second floor of the Chippewa County Court House where Judge Belcher was presiding at the trial of Millicent Maitland, on an indictment of murder in the first degree, was thronged to capacity.

The Judge sat on a raised platform behind his bench, at the southern end of the room. On his left was the jury box, with its twelve occupants, farmers, clerks and one porter who worked for Sam Bartel—a cluster of twelve hard, uncompromising, stubborn, weather-beaten faces. On the platform at his left was the defendant, Millicent Maitland, clad in black. Her red curls were straightened out and gathered in a bun behind her head. Her face, free of cosmetics, was white and gaunt. She looked crushed and alone.

When she had been in the witness chair she had told how the revolver had been put in her handbag during a fight in a restaurant in New York, and how she hadn't thought of it again until, out of her mind with worry over learning that her daughter was at Damier's Farm, she had arrived there in a daze. She hadn't remembered firing the fatal shot. Except for her ordeal as a witness, she merely sat, as a dummy figure.

At counsel table with Millie was William Elder Timms, a gaunt man of fifty-odd, clad roughly in a black suit, with a partially bald head decorated by a single lock of sandy gray hair which fell forward over a dome-like forehead. Around his neck was a standing white collar of the choker variety, and knotted loosely around the collar, its ends straying over the glossy bosom of a boiled shirt, was a black string necktie. Gray eyes shone magnetically from beneath enormous sandy eyebrows, which looked like twin moustaches. Under his arched Roman nose, and long, smooth-shaven upper lip, was the mouth of an orator, wide, thin-lipped, flexible.

He sat at the table, dominant, powerful, with the air of a great tragedian in the midst of a favorite rôle. The Judge, round in face and figure, with red, out-of-doors cheeks, and blue eyes twinkling behind gold spectacles, failed to derive from his official black robes of office the majesty that was this country lawyer's by heritage and life training.

At the Judge's right, on the platform, were the newspaper men and women, writers and photographers. Back of them was the main door to the

room, held partly ajar by a line of heads.

The floor of the room was divided into two sections of benches, which were jammed solid with country folk, men and women in their poor Sunday best. And the side aisles were lined with as many spectators as they would hold, standing against the bare, whitewashed walls. Only the center aisle, which led straight from the platform to a door in the rear was kept free. The door in the rear was the one through which witnesses were brought to take the oath and sit in the chair at the Judge's left, between him and the jurors.

Over this room, dense with humanity, reigned supreme the odor that comes from unwashed skins. Big radiators with blistered silver paint pushed out heat in a steady stream, so that every dull face glistened with sweat.

About five o'clock, of this March afternoon, the gas jets overhead were lighted. Their flickering, unshaded luminance served to make the human assemblage even more drab.

Just after the gas lights began to hiss, and the torn, fly-specked yellow shades had been drawn down over the dusty, many-paned windows, Timms rose solemnly to his feet. He stood in dramatic silence for perhaps fifteen seconds, waiting until the last whisper, the last cough, the last uneasy scrape of a boot, or shift of a cramped body, had ceased to disturb a perfect silence. Then he said:

"I will call Honoria Blake Maitland."

All eyes turned silently to that door in the rear. The atmosphere was heavy with drama. After a moment the door opened and revealed a girl—a lovely, gracious, glowing girl, with red hair, and green eyes, and roses in her cheeks.

For five seconds the girl hesitated between two Deputy Sheriffs, who were her escorts. And a sigh rose from men and women, as they watched this vision of youth and beauty and innocence suddenly impinged upon their drab consciousness. It was a breath of spring in Siberia; the odor of mignonettes in a sweat shop; a dream of beauty to those long deprived of loveliness.

After her first hesitation, and still in a breath-held silence, the girl, Honoria Maitland, walked steadily up the center aisle. She wore a green frock, cut on those simple lines that only a great coutourier may achieve, and a green hat with a soft brim which shaded but did not conceal any of her wistful beauty.

In silence she reached the steps to the platform, and mounted them. Then she turned and held out her arms to Millie:

“Oh, Mother!” she said.

The deep organ note of that “mother,” the sadness, the pathos of it, instantly brought moisture to every eye. Next instant, Millie sprang to her feet and put hungry arms around the girl.

“My baby!” she cried. “My baby!”

“Oh, boy!” exclaimed Sullivan of the *World* as he stood up to check off as much of what was happening as was possible. “Oh, boy! There goes the hoss race!”

“Look at the jury!” Edgar of the *Sun* whispered. “Look at old No. 1.”

“Cryin’ like babies,” Fish of the *Tribune* said. “I’m cryin’ myself. God damn it!”

“Smell the violets,” Sullivan said. “First decent smell there’s been in this hell-hole for days. Old Timms has knocked ’em eyes, ears and noses. Oh, boy! Oh, boy!”

“How did the chairs get upset?” asked young Whittier, of the *News*. “Who separated ’em? My God! I got to get all this.”

“Wait a minute, she’s going to testify,” said Dolly Sardou, a champion sob sister.

“What she says won’t count,” Sullivan said. “The game is in the bag. Those jurors are still crying. Oh, boy!”

The fresh contralto voice, low pitched, faint hint of tears behind it, was answering questions. The tones were just low enough to compel every one to absolute silence, but with a quality that carried them like whispers of the heart to every strained ear.

“Mother didn’t want me to be an actress. She thought the stage was bad for a girl.”

“That’s enough,” Sullivan whispered. “That’s enough. Oh, boys!”

“Sssh!” his fellows and sisters hushed. “Sssh!” And their fingers flew over the copy paper, making great hen tracks of writing. They had to send their copy by automobile five miles to Corey, where it went on the telegraph wires, each newspaper with a loop into its office, and each office waiting for each “take” of the story.

“Your Honor,” said the District Attorney, jumping to his feet. “The photographers have their cameras on your bench, making pictures of the witness.”

“I can’t see them,” said Judge Belcher mildly, keeping his back turned to the photographers, his gaze on the interrupted witness.

“This whole scene is a disgrace to the court,” the District Attorney shouted.

Judge Belcher turned and glared at the District Attorney.

“Your conduct is unpardonable,” he said. “The Court is capable of maintaining the proper decorum. Sit down!”

After the night session had adjourned, the newspaper men cornered Timms.

“That was a great act you put on, Judge,” Sullivan said. “How many times did you rehearse it?”

“Boys,” Timms said in his solemn voice, “I hope you don’t think I would stoop to theatricals in a court of law.”

“You got just the right amount of make-up on the little girl,” said Dolly Sardou. “Just right for those gas lights.”

“And that smell of violets,” Sullivan said. “She certainly was the most beautiful smell as well as the most beautiful sight I’ve ever seen, and as a stage manager you’re to be congratulated.”

“Boys,” Timms said, looking at them with a portentous frown, “I want you to understand that I have never had, and never will have, anything to do with theatricals in a court room. It was my duty to call that little girl as a witness. I wanted to spare her, but I had my duty to a client. And I called her. That was all there was to it.”

Sullivan followed Timms, as he left the Metropolitan Hotel to get into his automobile.

“I won’t say a word, Judge, but I’ve got you to thank for the most dramatic incident I ever saw in my life, and I’d just like to be able to congratulate you honestly for it.”

Timms’ grin, wide lips twisted in a slight smile, and his deep-set gray eyes danced for a moment, as he turned to Sullivan with one foot on the running board of his car.

“I guess the make-up was just about right,” he said. “Good night.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

“MY GOD! IT feels good to be out of that hick jail,” Millie said to Helen, as she climbed into a limousine waiting in back of the Chippewa County Court House, about seven o’clock next evening. “Got any make-up?”

“I wondered if old Timms would get you clear of the reporters,” Helen said. “That guy’s my idea of a lawyer.”

“Just a minute,” called a voice. “Wait a minute—please,” it said breathlessly, and the limousine door opened again, and Sullivan of the *World* popped his bare head inside.

“Congratulations and all that, Mrs. Maitland,” he said. “Will you just give me a few words on your acquittal?”

“She hasn’t anything to say,” Helen Riley said. “Didn’t she just shake hands with the jury?”

“Juror Number 9 said he would have shot any one that tried to make an actress of his daughter,” Sullivan related, grinning. “This is a great triumph for morality, and all that. What?”

“It’s nothing but common sense,” Helen Riley said. “Millie doesn’t know how that gun went off yet. Now you get out of here—we’re going.”

“Where are you going?” Sullivan asked. “Your husband is around in the hotel with old Timms and the twilight state doc.”

“Get going,” Helen said to the chauffeur. “And you get out of here,” she ordered Sullivan.

Millie, having powdered her face, and used a lipstick on her mouth, now was rouging her cheeks.

The limousine started. Sullivan grinned and dropped to the ground, slamming the door.

“Good luck! See you later,” he called, as their car gathered momentum and shot over the smooth county road bound north.

“Have a drink, Millie?” Helen Riley asked, reaching into a side pocket and producing a Thermos bottle.

“Will a duck swim?” Millie demanded.

Ten minutes later, the chauffeur turned his head slightly to say:

“Four cars are following us—those reporters, I guess.”

“Well, you said no one could follow you; get going,” Helen Riley directed.

The car surged ahead faster; the motor droned deeper. It went faster still, the motor’s drone rising in crescendo until it was a roar.

“Whoops!” Millie cried, sticking her hat sideways on her curls, cheeks flushed and eyes sparkling.

“I’m a red-headed woman—
Look out for me.”

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Millie*, by Donald Henderson Clarke.]