Broken Barrier

A romance of
Staten Island
and the
Province of New Brunswick

Grace Helen Mowat
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by

GRACE HELEN MOWAT

A romance of Staten Island and the Province of New Brunswick

With a foreword by
The Honourable D. L. MacLAREN, P.C.

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FOREWORD

Although the scene of this story starts in New York and Staten Island, it eventually moves to Canada and the Province of New Brunswick. The plot deals with the descendants of the United Empire Loyalists.

Little is known of these people who fled from the rebellious colonies after the American Revolution. These loyal exiles endured untold hardships for the sake of King and country and the British flag. Their lands were confiscated by the victorious rebels. They were driven from their comfortable homes, insulted, tortured, and thrown into filthy prisons.

At the close of the war they were finally transported to the bleak wooded shores of the Bay of Fundy and given grants of land from which the French had been previously expelled. This territory had been the old Acadia during the French period and now comprises the three Maritime Provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island.

Between thirty and forty thousand came in this strange migration. They were not the usual type of adventurers and traders that one associates with the settlement of a new land. They were the flower of the old Colonial life. Refined and cultured people accustomed to comfort, and even luxury, when living in their old homes. They brought with them their servants and all their household possessions that could be stowed away in the little sailing ships that the British government provided for their transportation. On their arrival these possessions were crowded into small log huts until more suitable dwellings could be erected.

The courage with which the Loyalists overcame their difficulties, cleared the land, started farming and lumbering, and eventually developed trade and commerce, makes a romantic page in history which has often been overlooked by historians.

George III has been severely criticized by historians; but he won the love and respect of the Loyalists. To them he was always “the dear old King”. He appreciated their loyalty and wept for their adversity. He insisted that they should receive recompense for their lost property, likewise food, building materials, and farming equipment, till they were established in the new land.

When they went to him in England with petitions and grievances he received them personally at Windsor Castle, giving what help and encouragement he could. There are old churches throughout the Maritimes that have beautiful communion plate inscribed as the gift of George III.

The descendants of the Loyalists have penetrated into every part of Canada and have contributed much towards its growth and development. Without this influx of

loyal British stock Canada today might still be a French colony under British rule.

Today you may still find, along the peaceful rivers of New Brunswick and the fertile valleys of Nova Scotia, old farm homes remote and lonely, where they will show you with pride beautiful pieces of old mahogany and silver brought by their Loyalist ancestors. The older people will converse with you in the speech of a bygone day and the graceful phrases reminiscent of the eighteenth century. This way of life is slowly changing. The old houses are passing into other hands. The present generation, with the radio and automobile, find themselves more in contact with the outside world, but there are still a few of the old homes remaining and a traveller through this country cannot fail to feel the atmosphere of courage and loyalty that still lingers like the scent of faded rose leaves.

D. L. MacLAREN,
Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick.

CHAPTER I

Maggie knew that the night of a board-meeting dinner was not the best time for breaking an important and disturbing piece of news to the master. It might be better to wait until he came down to breakfast the following morning. Breakfast, on the other hand, was a somewhat unapproachable meal and also hurried, on account of the master having to catch the ferry. That, however, would shorten the interview. It would perhaps be better to wait until then.

Undoubtedly the news must be broken, for the day had been set and the plump and prosperous grocer, who was the man of her choice, would wait no longer.

The master returned earlier than she had expected. She heard his step on the veranda and the fumbling of his latchkey in the door. Maybe it would be better to get the worst over now so that it would not be hanging over her all night.

She waited for him at the dark end of the front hall, while he took off his hat and coat and hung them in the coat closet by the stairs. Then he came into the library, a tall, slim figure in evening dress, with a face that seemed too young for the iron-gray hair that crowned it.

He sat down by the fire, lighted his pipe, and picked up a book.

Maggie's round, comely figure in black dress and expansive white apron remained in the doorway for some minutes before he looked and saw her there. She did not wish him to know that she was afraid. She intended that the news, when it was broken, should be definite and quite final. However, it was a very difficult break that she was about to make. She felt it keenly herself.

She had come to work in that house when but a slip of a girl. Stephen Trancher had then been in his first year at college. She had stayed on through the years when his mother had been mistress there, and after her death she had remained and carried on the domestic arrangements, taking entire charge of the house. Stephen never had to give these things a thought. Everything went like clockwork, just as it had in his mother's day, and he never dreamed that it would not always be so. She knew this and it made the moment tense and terrible.

"Maggie," he said when he finally noticed her presence, "you are a lucky woman. You never have to attend board meetings."

He spoke in the whimsical way in which he often talked to her. Through the years they had learned to understand each other.

"No, sir, I don't. But I've other worrisome things just as bad. When I tell you what I'm going to tell you, it'll seem worse than any board meeting," she said, nodding her head at him.

"Dear me!" he said. "You fill me with foreboding fear! You are not going to spoil the first peaceful hour I have had today, I hope. I like to leave my troubles behind me at the office."

"You wouldn't like this piece of news any better if I took it to the office to bother you in business hours."

"Well, what is it? I am prepared for the worst."

"I doubt if you are, sir," retorted Maggie, piqued at his show of indifference.

"Then let us have it and end the nerve-racking suspense."

"Well, sir, you know Jenkins," Maggie began courageously, "Jenkins that keeps the grocery store."

"Yes, I know Jenkins."

"Well, his wife died about three years ago. His daughter is 'most grown up now, but she's a scatter-brained thing, can't keep house for him—wants to take dancing lessons. His son is not much good, neither. Got no right idea about work. Wants to go to college, and I say he might just as well, for he'll never be fit for much else. So poor Jenkins feels he can't stand things no longer."

"Is Jenkins looking for a good housekeeper?"

"Yes, more or less, but his main idea is that him and me should get married."

Silence, deep and appalling, followed. A silence that could be felt. Silence was Stephen Trancher's most deadly weapon. Maggie knew this. It was the things he did not say that mattered.

"I understand," he said, at last, very quietly.

A shadow crossed his delicate, refined features. He sat looking at the fire. When he did look up, he only said "Goodnight, Maggie."

She turned and went slowly into the kitchen, sat down on the rocker beside the stove and threw her apron over her head. She knew he would take it like that. "I'd a sight rather he had swore at me," she grumbled to herself. "Then I could have talked back at him." But she was devoted to the master and her loyalty asserted itself. "I wouldn't have liked it any better, I s'pose, if he hadn't of cared about me leaving him," she sniffed, wiping her eyes with her starched white apron.

She always called him the master. Her mother had once been a maid in the household of an English bishop and she had taught her that the head of the house should always be spoken of as "the master" by those who served him.

On the night that the old master died, Stephen Trancher had come into the kitchen and said to her, "Father has gone, Maggie," and all she could think of to say was, "And you are the master now."

Ever since that night he had been the master to her.

It was a terrible wrench. Was Jenkins worth it? she asked herself.

Next morning, in the bustle of preparing breakfast, she decided that he was, and boldly carried the coffee-pot into the dining-room.

The master was seated at the table. He unfolded his napkin and glanced at the morning paper. Maggie stepped back and forth, bringing in toast and bacon. When she finally arrived with the marmalade he put aside the paper, fixed his deep-set grey eyes upon her, and asked, "Who is going to look after me, Maggie?"

"I've been wondering about that myself, sir. It's been worrying me considerable."

"It has not worried you sufficiently to induce you to give up Jenkins?"

"No, sir. I thought last night it had, but I feel different about it this morning. Jenkins won't take no for an answer."

"In that case, Maggie, you must find some woman to take your place and teach her all the things she will have to do in the house, just as my mother taught you. If you don't do that, Jenkins can't have you."

"I'll do the best I can, sir."

"Where did you come from in the first place, Maggie?"

"Me? Oh, I came from the Provinces."

"Very well, then. Get me a girl from the Provinces, wherever they are." And without further comment he rose and left the dining-room.

When Maggie heard the master go out, she felt rather baffled by the task he had set her. She took up the paper and scanned the advertisements for situations wanted, but saw nothing that seemed at all promising. So, piling the dishes in the sink, she put on her hat and coat and went over to the grocery store to consult Jenkins, for whose resource and business-like qualities she had a secret respect, but she was careful not to let him know it.

She found him laying out some newly arrived stock and singing in his melodious voice a fragment of the song *Brightly Dawns Our Wedding-Day*.

Maggie brusquely interrupted. "If you don't attend to this right away," she said, "there won't be any wedding-day, bright or dull."

"David!" he shouted to his son, who was idly gazing into the street from the shop doorway. "Take my place here. And Maggie, you come into the back office and speak what's on your mind."

In his crowded little office, seated at his desk with his shrewd dark eyes fixed on Maggie, he listened to her account of Trancher's ultimatum.

"Said that, did he? It was no way to speak."

"Don't you say a word against the master, Jeremiah Jenkins!" Maggie

interrupted. "Poor Mr. Trancher can't be left to shift for himself."

"And what about poor Mr. Jenkins? Is he to be left to shift for himself? However," said the grocer, "there's no occasion to put sand in the sugar. All you've got to do is to advertise. Put an ad in half a dozen of the leading newspapers in the city. It'll cost something, but the gentleman should be willing to pay for it."

"That part could be easily arranged," Maggie assured him. The difficulty was she didn't know how advertisements got into the papers.

"You'll have to write it out for me, Jenkins. I don't know nothing about such things. Cooking's my specialty."

He selected a clean piece of paper and a pencil.

"Now," he asked, "what do you want to say? 'Wanted, a maid?'"

"Better say 'working housekeeper'. She'll have to do a sight more than any maid—marketing and all that."

"Then we'll say, 'Wanted, experienced working housekeeper'."

"Cut out the 'experienced', Jenkins. I know the experienced kind. You can't teach them nothing. If she's neat and handy, and knows something about plain cooking, I can teach her the rest myself. I'll be able to keep an eye on her for a while, even if I am married to you."

"I suppose so," agreed Jenkins. "How's this, then? 'Wanted—working housekeeper with some knowledge of cooking'. Shall I say 'neat and handy'?"

"No! They all think they're that. Say 'Small family, good wages', and—wait now! Say 'must come from the Provinces'."

"Why?" asked Jenkins.

"The master said so."

"I think that's a mistake," said Jenkins, shaking his head. "Some mighty good girl might turn it down just for that."

"You go on, now, put it in! There's plenty of good country girls that come here from the Provinces looking for work, and they got no flippery nonsense about them, neither. I could handle one of them better than these foreigners you get nowadays."

"If you aim to get a Canadian, like as not you'll land a French girl from the Province of Quebec."

"Jenkins! For a man of your intelligence, you know awful little sometimes. When I say 'the Provinces' I mean the Maritime Provinces. I'm not referring to the whole Dominion."

"Oh! But who's to know that, besides yourself?"

"There's likely plenty of ignorant people in New York City that don't know it, but the girls will know it themselves, and that's what counts."

This argument seemed convincing and Jenkins finished the composition, adding telephone number and address, and offered to see about getting it to the papers in time for next morning's issue.

Maggie, much relieved, returned to the neglected breakfast dishes. Having disposed of them, she got out the ironing-board but was interrupted by a ring at the doorbell.

"Well, so it's you, Tony," she said, admitting Trancher's confidential secretary. He was still hardly more than a lad. He had been the office boy, but after taking a business course he had been promoted to his present position. "And what has the master forgot now?"

"His briefcase. It's got some important papers in it. He said to tell you he left it in his bedroom."

When Maggie returned from upstairs with the case, Tony was sitting on the kitchen table with the cookie tin beside him.

"The nerve of you, Tony! Now don't eat up all my cookies. I'd like to have some left for the master's supper."

"Plenty here for both of us, Maggie. That ocean voyage on the ferry always gives me an appetite."

"You better get off now with the important papers."

"No hurry, Maggie. I can't possibly get this ferry, and it's too soon to catch the next, so I might as well stay here and talk to you."

Maggie went on ironing the master's fine white handkerchiefs. She was used to Tony. He had been sent on similar errands ever since he had been the office boy.

"I had a notion he'd forget something this morning," Maggie said. "He needs a wife to look after him. I told him so the other day."

"You're a brave woman to tell him that, Maggie! Don't you know he's down on matrimony?"

"Just don't I know it? Tell me, Tony, is he in a pretty good humor this morning?"

"Well, I don't know. He refused flat to see Mrs. Farquhar; said he was too busy. I don't blame him for that, but just wasn't she mad!"

"I despise that woman," Maggie said, and spat on the iron viciously.

"So do I. How do you know her, Maggie, and who is she, anyway?"

"She's a pest. Her husband was Mr. Donald Farquhar. He and the master were always great friends. They used to go to college together. Then they went abroad together. In fact, they were always together till Mr. Donald got struck on this little bunch o' notions, and she kept the leading strings on him pretty tight after they were married."

"She would!" said Tony, feelingly.

"She just wore him down to a frazzle trying to make money enough to pay for her whims. Then one winter he took pneumonia and died. The master was left executor of his estate."

"I know that, all right. She comes round all the time bothering him for money. He hates the sight of her, but he's awfully patient with her."

"He thought a lot of Mr. Donald. And a fine, promising young fellow he was, too. It was her that makes the master so set against people getting married. She just straight turned him into a woman hater."

"It's funny," Tony said, "how set he is against marriage. We all know that at the office. You remember Lindsay, Maggie. Bob Lindsay used to work in our office one time. Well, he got married and he didn't dare tell Mr. Trancher and yet he thought he ought to. So he just cut the wedding notice out of the paper and left it on his desk. A swell wedding, too, bridesmaids and ushers and all that. Lindsay married money. In comes Mr. Trancher and picks up the notice and reads it, and me standing there waiting to take the letters. And all he said was, 'Poor Lindsay, poor fellow!'"

"That's how he looks at it all the time," said Maggie. "He thinks Mr. Wilcox would have been saved a lot of trouble if he'd stayed single."

"Poor old Wilcox, he's had a run of tough luck. Either the children are always catching something, or his wife has to be operated on. But I must say he's devoted to his family." Tony sighed. "I don't know how I'll ever break the news to Mr. Trancher when I get married."

"A youngster like you needn't be bothering about that for a long while yet," said Maggie with an indulgent smile.

"I'll be twenty-two my next birthday, Maggie, and I got the girl all picked out. One more raise and we're married."

"It will be my turn before that day comes," said Maggie, slapping the iron backwards and forwards with alarming energy.

"Oh, Maggie, you never could leave the master. That would be too awful."

"No worse than the rest of you. But I couldn't just leave a wedding notice on his desk and walk out. I'd have to go into details."

She said it with such a superior air that it suddenly struck Tony that she might be serious. Boldly he put the question.

"Come now, Maggie, who's the lucky man?"

Maggie glanced at the clock. "You'd better hustle off now or you'll miss that ferry. Here! Don't forget the briefcase."

CHAPTER II

Next morning out came the paper. "Paper! paper!" newsboys cried from one end of the great city to the other. The morning paper that gave the public the news for which it craved. It appeared on newsstands and breakfast tables. It was read on trains and buses. Everyone, everywhere, must know the news before the work of the day began.

To Maggie and Jenkins the most important item in the paper that morning was found in the classified ads. Jenkins read it when he opened the shop. Maggie read it before she placed the paper on the breakfast table. Trancher read the paper when he was going over on the ferry, but neglected to look at the classified ads. A girl from the Provinces read it at noon, as she sat on a bench in Central Park.

By noon the morning paper had become a discarded thing, thrown into wastepaper baskets or left on trains and park benches. One copy had been blowing about among the fallen leaves until a wind of destiny brought it to the feet of this slim little figure in black. She stooped and picked it up, automatically turning to the classified ads. Maggie's masterpiece might have escaped her notice but for the one sentence that caught her eye, "must come from the Provinces".

She had been searching for work in this great alien city for three weeks without any success. At first she had hoped to get a job teaching music or playing for concerts. She knew she had talent and had been well trained, but always people wanted things she did not have—diplomas, records of experience—things that really did not matter but seemed so important in the eyes of employment agencies and schools.

She read Maggie's advertisement through again. Here was a requirement that unquestionably she could fill. Somewhere someone wanted her just because she came from the "Provinces". What else was required of her? Some knowledge of cooking. That was all right, she knew how to cook. Working housekeeper. She had no illusions about that. At best it would mean a responsible upper servant. It was a job, and it would give her food and lodgings, at least until something better turned up. She was desperate. Her money was gone except for the price of her fare home and five dollars and a few cents she had in her purse. It was not even enough for another week's rent.

She must decide quickly. It was either try this or go home, and she could not go home a failure. Yes, she would try this job. Rising with quick determination, she made a note of the telephone number and went in search of a pay telephone.

Maggie, who had already dismissed two unpromising applicants, answered the

call in a sceptical frame of mind. "Yes, the situation was still open. She would see her if she came. Yes, any time, the sooner the better. She could take the subway for the Staten Island Ferry. Yes, the conductor would tell her. Yes, the name was Trancher, Mr. Stephen Trancher. Goodbye."

Lydia followed the direction and found herself on the ferry, moving slowly out into the harbor, leaving the great city behind, on her way to Staten Island. What was she drifting towards, she wondered. The future seemed as obscure as the fogs of her own Bay of Fundy. It was a strange adventure, but she would take what came. And she thought of the old farm house that stood at the end of the corridor of elm trees by the banks of the River St. John. It was for the old place that she needed money. If she could save a thousand dollars, she could go home and run the farm with efficient modern machinery. The thought of home evoked a loneliness that brought tears to her wide wistful eyes, and she looked over the head of the other passengers to a gaudy advertisement pasted on the wall of the ferry's cabin. The faces that she saw appeared confident and secure, each absorbed in a private world, oblivious to her, to her loneliness, and to the job that finally entered her thoughts. With a determined lift of her head she concentrated on the job and her confidence returned as completely as it had deserted her. No, she would not go home and admit the failure of her plans. She had defied the family lawyer, who had urged her to sell the place.

"Why, the sale of all this fine old furniture alone would yield a small fortune!" he pointed out.

"But I don't want a fortune," she had argued. "What I want is to keep the house my ancestors built with their own hands a century and a half ago. It would be a sacrilege to sell it!"

"But this wildcat scheme of yours, going to New York and earning a thousand dollars . . . !" he had protested.

She was adamant. So to New York she had come, rooming at a Y.W.C.A. hostel, leaving her grandfather's old retainers, Jake and Janet, to carry on until she returned with the thousand dollars. Then she would make the place pay as it had never paid before.

Lydia was absorbed in her own world when the ferry docked, and took little notice of the stream of passengers. The bus was waiting and she had no difficulty in finding the house which she surveyed minutely as she approached the door for details that would reveal hints at least of what her life inside this house would be like.

Maggie gave her a severe, appraising look when she let her in. "Too young," she thought. But as she seated her in the warm, comfortable kitchen, she liked the calm,

self-assured way the girl faced her, her conservative black dress, and intelligent expression.

"I have a notion the master would want someone more middle-aged," she remarked doubtfully.

"That will come in time," replied Lydia, smiling under Maggie's penetrating scrutiny; and because Maggie had already begun to like her, she agreed cheerfully.

"That's a fact," she said in a more confidential tone, "and a pity it is too. But when you get them middle-aged, they soon get old and useless. I can tell him that if he complains about it. There was a poor, decrepit old thing applied this morning and all she wanted was to have the good wages handed out to her on a platter. Said it was a terrible big house and she'd have to have help with the cleaning. Whenever I'd mention the work she would say, "Please remember I'm not very strong." So I just led her to the front door and put her out. I hope you know something about work."

Lydia smiled. "I know enough about it not to be afraid of it. Have you had many other applicants?"

"Only one and she was worse. Looked like a fashion plate. Asked me if there was a room where she could entertain her gentleman friend. I told her there'd never be such goings-on in this house. I turned that minx out the back door."

Lydia laughed. "I'm beginning to wonder by which door I'll get turned out."

"No, I have some hopes of you. Have you had any experience in working out?"

Lydia was obliged to say she had not, but added, "I think I would understand how a gentleman should be waited on. I know how to cook, though I might not be able to handle a large party."

"You wouldn't have to do that, ever. When the master entertains he mostly does it at the club. He likes to keep his home peaceful. But you would have to do all the marketing. I could direct you where to get things and tell you what he likes. He's not fussy about his eating."

"I believe I could do it," Lydia said. "Do I wear a uniform?"

"Yes, you had better. I just wear a black dress and white apron. I don't hold with these colored rigs the girls wear these days."

"Where can I get one?"

"We'll have to get something new for you. Anything I'd be wearing would go round you twice. The master pays for it. That black dress you have on would do for now. He don't notice things much. Now, wait a minute, there's something here that was too small for me." She opened a drawer and pulled out a maid's apron and some stiffly starched collars and cuffs. "You try these on."

Lydia pulled on the cuffs and adjusted the collar, then tied on the apron. She had once taken the part of a pert and flippant maid in a college play. She felt as though this was just another role in a new play, with Maggie as prompter and stage manager. It might be fun.

"Do I look all right?" she asked.

"Very good indeed," said Maggie. "Maybe I might try you."

"I would like to come," Lydia said. "I am sure I could do the work if you will tell me what I am expected to do. I have no gentleman friend, but I would like to know what wages I would get."

"Sixty a month, and your board and uniforms provided."

Lydia made a few quick calculations. Twelve months in a year. That would be seven hundred and twenty dollars. In a year and a half she would earn over a thousand dollars. She would have to use some of it for her personal expenses, but with her uniforms and board provided she would require very little. She had clothes enough for the present and there would be a little money coming in from the farm.

With a pleasant smile that won Maggie's heart, she said, simply, "If you will help me, I will do the very best I can."

"Sure I'll help you," Maggie said. "I'll be living only two blocks down the street, above the grocery store. I can look in often to see how you're doing and you can always get me on the 'phone."

"That will be a great help. When shall I come?"

"Could you come tomorrow?"

"Yes, I should be glad to."

"That will suit me fine. You see, I'm expecting to get married and I want to have a few free days to settle my mind before the event takes place. This tying yourself up with a man for the rest of your life is an awesome thing to contemplate."

"I suppose it is," said Lydia.

"So, now, you come out first thing in the morning and I'll show you what's to be done. Will you tell me your name? I didn't catch it over the 'phone."

"My name is Lydia Allen."

"That is a good, sensible name, and do you come from the Provinces?"

"Yes, my home was on a farm on the River Saint John."

"Was it now?" Maggie said approvingly. "I was raised on that same River, down Jemseg way."

"We lived some distance from Jemseg," Lydia told her, rising abruptly and removing the apron. She did not want to be questioned further.

"How did you happen to come all this long way from home?" Maggie asked, as

she let her out by the front door.

"I needed to earn some money," said Lydia briefly. "Goodbye, and thank you for your kindness. I will come back early tomorrow."

"So that's settled," said Maggie, as she closed the door. "I hope to heavens the master takes to her!"

CHAPTER III

The following morning Maggie informed the master that a new housekeeper had been engaged and would be on duty when he returned in the evening.

He accepted the information in silence, a silence Maggie found difficult to penetrate. But she would not permit the master to dismiss the achievement of finding such a capable and pleasant successor so easily.

"I was very lucky to get her so soon. She's a nice, tidy, respectable-looking girl. No frills or nonsense about her. Quiet and sensible, and a good cook too."

"Did she have good references?" he inquired with acid scepticism.

"She didn't need references, I know where she comes from," Maggie retorted with lofty confidence. And she departed to the kitchen.

Crossing on the ferry, through the mist of an Autumn morning, Stephen Trancher sat enshrouded in gloom. He loathed the thought of any change in his household. His mother had run the establishment with smooth efficiency and Maggie had followed in her steps. It was a nightmare to think of a stranger coming in, one unaccustomed to the daily routine. He could face the problems and worries of his business with patience and fortitude, but this unexpected upheaval in his peaceful home was a calamity.

If only people would not get married! Marriage was the cause of all domestic woe. And Maggie, linked up for life with the portly Jenkins, would soon find it out. The thought gave him grim satisfaction.

Marriage had robbed him of Donald, his closest friend. His mind went back to school and college days with Donald, to happy holidays spent camping in the Adirondacks and to one glorious summer when they had gone abroad together. Donald was studying architecture then, and to him a cathedral was a poem and a ruined castle a medieval fairy tale. He made the past live again for both of them. History and romance were glorified under the spell of his delightful imagining.

After that summer, Donald had married and things were never quite the same. Cora was very young and pretty and coquetish—and completely brainless. Her wide, childish eyes stared stupidly into space when Donald read to her or gently explained the beauty of some exquisite building or painting.

"It will take time," he had told Stephen. "She is just a child still; she never had a chance. What can you expect? She has been brought up by a mother of the social-climber type in a home with no literature beyond a fashion magazine. Wait till she really understands. Then you will see."

Stephen had waited, and all he ever saw was an empty-headed, rather ordinary,

thoroughly selfish little woman, incapable of doing anything but spend the money that Donald worked so hard to earn, till eventually he broke down under the strain. Stephen and his mother had together urged him to take things more easily. They knew he was overworking, but he was in a treadmill and could not stop, until one tragic winter the 'flu developed into pneumonia and he was gone.

Sitting there in the ferry, Stephen Trancher thought savagely that it was marriage, and not death, that had robbed him of his friend.

Marriage, likewise, had wrecked the career of Wilcox, his faithful accountant, a lean, spare, sad-faced little man with thin, greying hair and threadbare coat. Wilcox had a good business head, was patient, painstaking and accurate. Unencumbered by an ailing wife and five children, he might have been, by now, a prosperous business man in comfortable circumstances.

Then there was the marriage of his cousin Oscar. That was too awful! Oscar lived in the West on some outlandish prairie, and had married a girl of Scandinavian ancestry whom he had once employed as a domestic on his ranch. This fair-haired stolid creature, a modern Bruennhilde, he had inconsiderately brought to New York for their honeymoon. Hulda, transplanted suddenly into the unaccustomed refinements of civilization, was passive and inarticulate. Her idea of seeing New York was to visit Coney Island. Stephen's dear, frail, delicate mother, then in her seventieth year, had taken her there, and Stephen had never forgiven any one of them for allowing such an indignity. When he had remonstrated with his mother, she had said, "Stephen dear, it was the only thing the poor girl wanted to do."

It had all been horrible. Oscar's honeymoon had been a perfect nightmare.

As the ferry docked, he remembered that this was Wednesday and Cora Farquhar would be at the office. It was a dreary world indeed. Cora was worse than a new maid.

Cora arrived while he was going through the morning mail with Tony. He made her wait until they had finished, and she began by complaining bitterly of that when finally admitted to his private office.

"I do think, Stephen," she grumbled, "you might consider my convenience a little sometimes. I came all the way from Southampton the other day, a terribly tiresome journey. I wanted to see you on very important business but I was turned away. They told me you refused to see me. Then I had to come again this morning and you have kept me waiting for an hour."

"No. Only thirty-five minutes."

"Well, it seemed more like an hour to me."

"What are you doing at Southampton?"

"I have taken rooms there for a time."

"Isn't it a rather expensive place for you to live?"

"Yes, it is. But I can't help that. All my friends are there, and it means so much to me to be with the right kind of people. Why is it, Stephen, you are always harping about expense? Donald never did. He always wanted me to enjoy myself and have the things I wanted."

"Yes, and finally it killed him, trying to get them for you."

"I think it is most unfair of you to say that. Donald died of pneumonia."

"And overwork."

"You always see the gloomy side of everything."

Stephen studied her in silence. Her youthful prettiness had faded. She was now nearing forty and there were hard lines about her small petulent mouth. Her withered looks had been goaded to a second bloom with an exaggerated make-up and peroxide-tortured hair. He looked away from her and said:

"You came to see me on business?"

"Yes, I want to know how much money I have tied up in bonds."

"Quite a bit. I don't remember the exact amount. You are lucky to have them in times like these. They are listed above par now."

"Well, I have been talking to a Mr. Cohen. He is a great friend of these people I know at Southampton. He says it is utter nonsense for me to keep money tied up in bonds when I could double or triple my income by investing it in something that would pay real dividends."

"I do not know of anything that would pay any better and still be safe."

"Mr. Cohen says that if I got stock in 'Mining Consolidated' it would be just as safe as any bonds and pay double the interest."

"I fear your friend Mr. Cohen does not always tell the truth."

"I don't see why you should say that, Stephen. You don't even know the man. He is very clever about money matters and has made a fortune on the stock market. He keeps right up to the minute on everything."

"Do you mean to imply that this firm does not?"

"Oh, I suppose you do, in a way, but you are so afraid of taking chances, and I can tell you that you are losing business by it. I have heard people say that you could do a lot better for your clients if you were willing to risk something."

"They may be right."

"Then you will sell those bonds for me and buy Mining Consolidated?"

Trancher was silent. He was thinking. A vivid memory came back to him. He was sitting in the hospital by Donald's bedside and heard him saying, "Don't ever let

Cora have control of the money. She is a child about such things. She would be the victim of any crook that came along selling worthless stock." For Donald's sake he must keep this trust.

"Will you do it, Stephen?" Cora demanded.

"I don't think so."

"You don't seem to realize how hard it is for me to manage on such a small income. I have so little compared with my friends. I feel absolutely destitute sometimes and it is very humiliating."

"I would suggest that you cultivate less extravagant friends."

"You can't ask me to give up my friends," she whined. "It means everything to me to be with pleasant people. I simply cannot understand you, Stephen. Donald always had so much faith in you, I'm sure I don't know why. I wish he had left my affairs in the hands of someone who would try to do what I want."

"I sincerely wish that he had."

"You are always so indifferent and unsympathetic. Won't you promise me now, before I go, that you will turn those bonds in for Mining Consolidated?"

"I will promise you nothing without looking into the matter."

"Then I will have to keep coming back here till you do. Poor Donald little knew what I would have to put up with."

She rose and pulled on her gloves over claw-like, red-tipped fingers.

Trancher opened the door for her, but she hesitated. "If you would feel better to talk with Mr. Cohen yourself, I could ask him to drop in to see you."

"Please don't. It would not make me feel any better. Good morning."

"Goodbye. I will be back again next week."

Stephen returned to his desk, vexed and disturbed, as Cora's visits always left him. After all, perhaps it was better that Donald had not lived to really know this woman he had married. There were things in life far worse than death.

He settled down to work, thankful that the interview was over but remembering vaguely that there was another depressing item on the day's program. Oh, yes, Maggie would have this new woman installed in the house when he returned home. Life was very trying, but he had at least avoided the complications of matrimony.

He heard Tony singing in the corridor. Tony always burst into song the moment the office door closed behind him, like a bird let loose from a cage. Fragments of the words floated through the transom.

"Oh, I loved her in the springtime
And I loved her in the fall,
But alone upon the back porch
I loved her best of all."

Tony will likely be the next one ensnared, he thought dejectedly.

Tony continued on his way to the end of the corridor to buy some stamps from Chadwick. Poor old Chadwick had a stand where he sold stationery and other supplies for the convenience of the large office building. It was a cell-like room that he was pleased to call his shop. He was a pathetic figure with his worn black coat and courtly manners. He had seen better days and liked to talk of old New York, when horse-cars ran in the gas-lighted streets, before the invention of telephones or moving pictures.

Tony always enjoyed a talk with Chadwick, so he loitered over his purchases, a scribbler, a package of cigarettes, and stamps, and then returned to the office, still singing merrily.

Trancher waited until the song ceased and the office door closed. Then he rang the bell.

"Tony," he said, "ask Wilcox to get me a report on Mining Consolidated."

CHAPTER IV

Maggie spent the day instructing the new housekeeper in the art of keeping house for an eccentric bachelor.

"You'll have to do all the thinking for him," she explained. "His mother never let him think for himself, so now he can't do it."

"Can you tell me all the things I will have to think of? Perhaps I had better write them down."

"No, it's not that complicated. Now, for instance, he'd never think of things being needed for the house. If anything wants replenishing you just ask him for the money and go out and buy it. Then you have to send his suits to the cleaner. He'd never think of that."

"How will I know when to send them?"

"Use your eyes, girl. Just notice when they begin to look kind of grimy. He has two of them grey office suits. You keep one clean and ready and just lay it on the chair by his bed, and he'll know enough to put it on in the morning. And when he goes out you can get the other one for the cleaners. If he ever sends Tony out here for his dress suit, you find it in the suitcase in his closet. It's just as well to run the iron over it before you send it, too. It's bound to be wrinkled, folded up in the case the way he keeps it. Just before he gets home at half past six, you light the fire in the library."

"I can remember to do all that. It doesn't seem as if the work would be hard."

"No, it's not hard, only you just have to think of everything."

They decided that Lydia should prepare the dinner entirely herself while Maggie looked on and advised. Lydia asked if she could make a lemon pudding during the morning so that the dessert would be ready beforehand. Maggie agreed; the master always liked lemon things.

"Another thing," she said. "At ten o'clock I always take him in a cup of cocoa with a bit of cookie or something to go with it. I've done that ever since his mother died. You see she was ill a long stretch before she died. He thought an awful lot of his mother, and I must say she was a lovely lady. He would sit by her bedside sometimes half the night, and after she died he couldn't seem to get to the habit of sleeping again. I tried giving him hot cocoa before he went to bed and he thought it helped. Now he looks for it every evening when it comes round ten o'clock."

"I suppose he will tell me if he wants anything."

"He is liable to, after he gets used to you, but he is a terrible silent man. Mostly he'll just sit there all evening reading some queer old book. Sometimes he'll talk to

me about the things he's been reading. He can talk all right if he has a mind to. I tell him it's all a pack of nonsense and them books is good for nothing but to collect dust and make work for me. Then he'll just laugh at me."

"I am afraid he is going to miss you, Maggie."

"I'm afraid he is," Maggie admitted with a sigh. "And I tell you, I don't like leaving, neither. I been living here so long I kind of got attached to the place, but, naturally, I couldn't keep putting Jenkins off forever."

"I am afraid I shall make a lot of mistakes."

"Now don't worry. I will keep an eye on you till you get into step with things. Just call on me any time."

"That will be a great help," Lydia told her gratefully. She was liking Maggie.

They went all over the house together and Lydia learned where things were kept and the routine of her work.

She cooked the dinner under Maggie's critical eye and finally they heard the front door open. The master had arrived.

"Now," said Maggie, with the air of a general, "we don't put on the dinner till he comes in and sits down at the table. He's very prompt. Comes in mostly at sharp quarter to seven. I always have everything ready by then. You do all the waiting yourself. I won't let him see I'm here. I can just set the dishes through the slide for you."

Lydia experienced all the excitement she had felt on her first stage entrance in the college play. In fact, the thought of facing this one, lone, eccentric gentleman was more of an ordeal than the sea of faces that had looked up at her from the college auditorium.

"There he comes now," Maggie said.

For Lydia it was the curtain call. She glanced in the little mirror on the kitchen wall. Her dark hair, parted in the middle, was smooth and neat, her collar and cuffs nicely fitted to her black dress. Her white apron with straps over the shoulder was carefully tied in a butterfly bow at the back. She was ready for the big act.

"Now take in this platter with the chops and the gravy. Leave them right on the table. He will help himself. Then you come back for the vegetables. After that you come out here and wait till he rings for you."

A small pantry separated the kitchen from the dining-room, with a swing door and slide opening into the dining-room.

Lydia took the dish of chops from the stove, paused for a moment in front of the swing door, to collect her courage, then boldly entered and placed the platter before the master. The drama was on.

He gave her one penetrating look and inclined his head with a gesture that seemed more like an acceptance of the inevitable than the greeting of a new member of his household. Slowly and indifferently he unfolded a large white napkin and placed a chop upon his plate.

Lydia returned with the vegetables, which he accepted, still seemingly unaware of her presence, after which she thankfully retired to the kitchen to wait for the bell that was her next cue.

"He is quite an old man, isn't he?" she said in a low tone to Maggie.

"Well, he is and he isn't," she replied. "There's times when I think he never was young and there's times when I think he is nothing but a child. His hair turned white before it ought to, and that makes him look older than he really is."

"Does he entertain at all?"

"Not much. Sometimes he will ask an old friend for dinner and sometimes he'll be asked out. Business men he disposes of at his club in the city. What he likes best is just staying at home reading them old books, and that's what's making him queer. He ought to get out more and see people. When I tell him so, he says he is seeing people all day. But that's just business people and it ain't the same."

"He should get married," suggested Lydia, hoping that some romantic tale of unrequited love might be forthcoming.

"Certainly he should," Maggie agreed, "but I've given up all hopes of that. He thinks marriage is the cause of half the troubles in the world and can quote examples to prove it. His mother picked out a nice young lady for him, but he never took much stock in her. Now he has just got used to living alone and doing what he likes. I could never picture him tolerating married life. With Jenkins, now, it's different. He was married before and is kind of acclimatized to the state. A woman don't take near as many chances, marrying a widow man. They get so used to being bossed around, they can't live without it."

Just then the bell sounded and Lydia sprang to her feet.

"Take your time," cautioned Maggie. "Just go in and clear off the dirty dishes and put them through the slide. I'll get them, and hand you in the dessert."

Trancher seemed lost in thought during Lydia's second appearance. This gave her confidence as she deftly removed the remains of the first course and set down the dessert and coffee.

"Do you think I shall be able to carry on?" she asked Maggie, when she finally returned to the kitchen.

"Sure you will," said Maggie.

"It must have been a blow to Mr. Trancher when you told him you were going to

get married."

"Blow! Yes, I only administered the blow day before yesterday and he hasn't come to yet. But don't you pay no attention to him. He'll come round after a while. He'll likely get so as he depends on you, same as he does on me now. He's just like all the men, hates changes and kind of enjoys a grievance. But on top of all that, he is always a gentleman, one of the old school, and that variety is getting scarcer every day."

Lydia, smiling to herself, thought of the stunned bird she once found lying in the road and how she had subsequently tamed it by providing it morsels of inviting food. The strange situation she now faced seemed somewhat similar.

"What do I do about breakfast?" she asked.

"I'll tell you just what's to be done and leave everything out handy for you. Now don't you worry," Maggie reassured her. "You can't go very far wrong, and if you do make a mistake sometimes, what's the odds? You can get me on the telephone any time. All you have to see to after breakfast is the marketing and cleaning up the house and getting things in line for dinner. The master leaves the house at half past eight and he won't come home till dinner time."

"The work seems easy," Lydia said. "I'm not worrying about that. Only I'm afraid I can never fill your place"—a remark which gratified Maggie, who felt that it showed intelligence and a becoming humility. Lydia, she thought, would do.

She departed, leaving Lydia feeling lonely and weary after all the strange experiences of the day, wondering just what she had got in for, and how long she would be able to stick it out. Anyway, she thought, it was better than giving up and going home like a failure. She had a roof over her head and no further anxiety about money. Thus consoled, she prepared the cocoa and carried it in to the library at ten o'clock.

Trancher was absorbed in a book and did not notice her. She set the tray on the table and noiselessly left the room, then went upstairs to her bedroom and unpacked. With a few familiar objects about her, she felt more at home and ready for her new adventure.

CHAPTER V

Next morning Lydia rose early and prepared the simple breakfast carefully, just as Maggie had directed.

At eight sharp Trancher was seated at the table. She got ready a perfectly cooked dish of oatmeal to take in after he had finished the grapefruit which she had left at his place.

He was looking over the paper when she entered and was still absorbed in it when she returned with toast and coffee. She wondered resentfully if he would ever find it necessary to speak to her should she remain in his service for a year. Anyway, she thought, if he could not speak to her he could not discharge her, and perhaps, if she managed to save the whole sixty dollars a month, she might get away even sooner than she had planned. She still had the money for her passage.

She heard the front door close as she was clearing away the breakfast. Now she would have the house to herself for the day. She finished the dishes, tidied the kitchen, and then went about the house exploring.

It was a typical Victorian house, built in the 'eighties, with high ceilings and walnut furniture and an atmosphere of quiet dignity and comfort belonging to that period when houses were lived in by a decorous and home-loving generation.

She went upstairs and made the bed in Trancher's room. On the bureau she noticed a framed photograph of a sweet-faced young woman dressed in the fashion of the 'nineties, and wondered if that were his mother. Another photograph of the same lady hung on the wall. In this one she was seated, and a small, curly-haired child in a velvet suit stood beside her. They made a charming picture. The mother was looking at her little son with a fond, far-away expression, as if seeing happy visions of his future. The child was leaning against her, looking at a picture-book that she held open for him. Still another photograph of the lady, grown older, was in the library. The hair was white and the eyes no longer looked into the future. But there was the same gentle refinement, with the added repose of tranquil maturity.

All day, as she worked in the lonely house, the presence of the lady of the pictures seemed to linger in every nook and corner. Lydia began to feel that she was employed by her, working for her rather than for the tall, silent man whom she was expected to feed periodically.

There was a room upstairs that had evidently been her bedroom. The dresses she had worn still hung in the closet. Silver toilet articles were on the dressing-table. A bookshelf was filled with books that had charmed the readers of a past generation —Tennyson, Ruskin, Mrs. Humphrey Ward, Jean Ingelow, and Rossetti. On the wall

were reproductions of paintings by Burne Jones and Alma Tadema, and faded photographs in oval frames. On the bureau, in a silver frame, there was an enlarged snapshot of two young men with bicycles, taken in the setting of an English landscape. One she recognized as the master, and felt surprised that he could ever have been so young.

Everywhere, everything gave signs of a refined and cultured presence that had long reigned there but had now vanished. It was evident downstairs, too, in the long and pleasant living-room. Against a piano in one corner a violin case rested, and near the window stood a little desk with account books and a telephone. The chairs were large and comfortable, and on the table was a work basket that evidently had remained long unused.

The library, where the master sat in the evening, was the most livable and least ghostly room in the house. Books filled one entire wall, and there were bookshelves on either side of the fireplace. There was a Morris chair by the fire, near a table strewn with books and papers.

Lydia looked over the books on the shelves—complete sets of standard authors, history, philosophy, biography—what a chance for reading in this quiet house when the work was done! She was enchanted. Here were books that she had always wanted to read, and books that she had never heard of but longed to explore. She had loved the English courses at college and here was a wide field open to her and no outside distractions to take up her mind. All the books she could possibly want. A year and a half would never be time enough to get through them.

She was quite happy now thinking about the books. They occupied the back of her mind in the kitchen during the afternoon while she carefully prepared a delicious dinner. Could she muster up courage to ask for one that evening? A good dinner might pave the way for such a request. So she broiled the steak with infinite pains, concocted a tempting dessert, and set the table with studied care.

But Trancher, when he came in to it, still behaved as if wholly unconscious of her presence. Like the rest of the house, he seemed a mute relic of a forgotten past. Lydia wondered what his voice would be like if he ever did speak. The thought of breaking such overpowering silence was too frightening, and she decided to wait another day or two before asking permission to borrow a book.

At ten o'clock she set the little tray on the library table near Mr. Trancher as he sat reading before the fire. The silence was still unbreakable. Apparently he had neither seen nor heard her and she slipped away as quickly as she could.

Next morning, however, when he came into the room as Lydia was tidying the library before breakfast, she courageously resolved to suddenly break the spell and

said, demurely, "Good morning, sir."

"Good morning," he said, not unpleasantly. "I am looking for my fountain pen. Did you see it anywhere?"

"Yes, sir, I saw a pen on the hall table. I will get it for you."

When she handed it to him he said, "Thank you," very politely.

Lydia thought he had rather a nice voice. She was glad the spell was broken and bought a chicken for dinner when she went to the market that morning. In the evening at ten o'clock she would ask him for the book.

That evening after she had cleared away the dinner and washed the dishes she sat in the kitchen and wrote to Janet. When she had finished, she read some government literature on agriculture until the clock ticked slowly to the hour of ten. She made the cocoa and set the cup on the tray with some ginger cakes she had baked that morning. The sensation of stage fright came over her again.

The master, as usual, was reading when she went in. She set the tray beside him, but he did not look up. Did she dare disturb him? She turned to go, but when she reached the door she summoned up all her courage. It was ridiculous to be afraid to ask a man to lend her a book. He could do nothing worse than refuse her.

"Mr. Trancher," she began. "I would like to ask you something."

He looked up slowly, his expression rather unpromising. "Well," he said, "what is it?"

"I wondered if you would mind if I borrowed one of your books. I would be very careful of it and put it back where I found it."

Trancher looked surprised but relieved. "Oh, is that all!" he said. "I thought perhaps you wanted to borrow the living-room to give a party for your friends."

Lydia smiled an elusive, shy little smile. "I don't wonder you were alarmed. I am not quite so presumptuous. Besides, I have no friends, at least not here. I only came to New York three weeks ago and I don't know anybody."

Trancher lowered his book and studied her with some attention.

"Won't you be rather lonely here?" he asked.

The man spoke quite kindly! This was going to be a real conversation!

"I don't think so. My home was in a lonely place. I am used to being by myself. I won't mind if only I can have one of your books. I love to read and I have plenty of time in the evening and sometimes in the afternoon."

"Why, certainly," he said, "take any book you like if there is anything that would interest you among my old books." He remembered Maggie's comments on his taste in literature.

"Oh, Mr. Trancher, I think you have wonderful books. I dust them very carefully

every day."

"Do you?" he said, and smiled approvingly. "I am pleased to hear that. Maggie always expected me to dust them with my pocket handkerchief."

He seemed to have suddenly become quite human. Lydia had touched him in his vulnerable spot.

"When I dust those books," she said, "I always feel I am in such good company."

"Books are very companionable," he replied. "It is a pity more people do not realize it. What book would you like to take?"

"I would like to read a great many of them, but perhaps I had better begin with one of the older novelists like George Eliot or Jane Austen."

"They are both good," he said, rising and going to the shelf where rows of standard novels were kept.

"I have only read *The Mill on the Floss*," Lydia said, "and I enjoyed it."

"Then try *Middlemarch*," he suggested. He brought it to her as she stood in the doorway. "Try this and when you have finished it come back for another."

"Thank you so much, sir," she said. "This is a wonderful opportunity for me. I could not always get the books I wanted when I was living at home."

"Where is your home?"

"On the River Saint John. I lived on a farm there with my grandfather. When he died I came to New York to look for work."

"What is your name?"

"Lydia Allen."

He frowned slightly. "Have you any other name besides Lydia that I could call you by?"

"Not a very useful one. It is a surname. I was baptized Lydia Sewell." The thought struck her that it would, on the whole, be much better to work under another name so long as she was acting in this strange drama. "You might call me Sue or Susan. That would be near enough."

"Very well," he said, "I may do that. I have family associations with the name of Lydia."

She thought it probably had been his mother's name. "I understand how you feel about it, Mr. Trancher. From now on I will answer to the name of Susan. I hope your cocoa has not got cold while we have been talking," and she disappeared into the unlighted dining-room with *Middlemarch* under her arm.

"Not a bad little creature," Trancher thought. "I wonder where on earth Maggie found her. She has a nice voice and certainly knows how to cook and dust books.

Things may not be so bad after all."

Next morning, when he reached the office, Mr. Trancher gave Tony some money and asked him to buy a wedding present for Maggie.

"What shall I get?" asked Tony.

"I don't know," said Trancher.

The resourceful Tony settled the question by telephoning Maggie and asking what she wanted. Maggie, taking this to indicate that the master meant to end hostilities, replied delightedly that she had always longed to pour tea from a silver service.

Nearly the entire morning was spent by Tony in the search of a silver tea service of good appearance for the money he had. He succeeded at last in finding a plated set by beating the salesman down five dollars.

On the following Sunday afternoon Mr. Trancher, carrying a large blue box, went to call on Maggie, now established as Mrs. Jeremiah Jenkins in her new home over the grocery store.

She received him with pride and delight, and was quite overcome by the magnificence of the tea service. As she took the various pieces from the blue box and removed the tissue paper wrappings, she placed each on the table, exclaiming happily, "Well, will you look at that, now. Jenkins ought to be a proud man. I venture to say nothing like that ever came in at his first wedding. Wait until some of his relations come nosing round about tea-time. Won't that just open their eyes! You sit down, sir, till I get you a glass of wine and a piece of wedding cake. This place don't look like much," she explained, returning with the wine and wedding cake, "but I'll fix it up real tasty after a while."

"I am sure you will, Maggie. I consider Jenkins a most fortunate man."

"He thinks that himself, now. I don't know how long it will last. Tell me, how is Lydia getting on?"

"She dusts my books better than you did."

"Does she, now? Well, she'll soon get tired of doing that, for it's a thankless job."

"She says she likes my books."

"I thought she would have had more sense. I never saw a room so cluttered up with old, trashy books as that library. I often thought I'd like to take an armful of them down to the furnace."

"That was a cruel thought, Maggie. Where would I be without my books?"

"You'd be a sight better off. Nobody reads books nowadays. They can get all that in the movies."

"So I understand, but then I don't like the movies."

"No, and you don't like radios, either, and they're very improving to the mind. I learned how to make that butterscotch pie off of the radio."

"That would be a little out of my line, Maggie, I am afraid."

"Radios put on a lot of that dry education stuff, too. Now Jenkins, he likes politics, but I don't let him carry on with that for long. I just turn it to some good, interesting play."

"What does Jenkins say to that?"

"He knows enough not to say anything."

"Does he like to read books?"

"I let him read the papers when there's nothing else for him to do."

"I begin to feel great sympathy for Jenkins!"

"You needn't. He can look out for himself and he's used to being bossed around. The advantage of taking a man who's been married before is that he's broke in before you get him."

"I see. He is resigned to his fate."

"Well, he's got me and he was dead set on that, and now we have a silver tea set. What more could he want?"

"I suppose that any man should be content with that," Trancher said, as he rose to leave. "You are a good soul, Maggie, and I miss you, even if you are a tyrant. Goodbye."

"Goodbye, sir, and thank you for the nice present. Tell Lydia to come and see me."

"Yes, I will. I fear the poor girl may be lonely. I have quite enjoyed being scolded again."

"I only gave you a little good advice."

"Very well. We can call it that. This new little creature seems to regard me with some respect."

"Maybe she'll see through you like I do, some day."

"I dare say she will," agreed Trancher, with a whimsical smile, and he turned and descended the dimly lighted stairway that led down to the street.

CHAPTER VI

That evening while Lydia sat in the kitchen reading *Middlemarch*, her attention was arrested by the distant music of a violin. The sound seemed to come from the living-room. She looked into the library, but the master was not there. He must be in the living-room, playing the violin. What was it that he was playing? Something familiar. She opened the dining-room door and listened. She recognized it now—Beethoven's *Minuet*. She remembered learning it and proudly playing it once at a school recital. She wished she could go in and play the accompaniment for him, but that, of course, would be quite out of keeping with her part of Susan the maid.

As the plaintive notes rose and fell, softened by distance, she considered the strange barrier that existed between herself and this man who played them. The barrier of servitude that was forever insurmountable, even though they should live for years under the same roof. Behind this barrier she had voluntarily placed herself. She did not wish to break it, nor did she at all resent it. In fact, she intended to keep it impenetrable as long as she stayed there. This man, Maggie had said, was "a gentleman of the old school". She instinctively knew that he was. Her old grandfather had been a gentleman of a still older school, influenced by Victorian standards and comfortable and complacent class distinctions which were rarely questioned or disturbed, like the life of the English country gentry as described in *Middlemarch*. That way of life was passing in England. It was passing at home, too.

It set her thinking, and remembering stories told of Fredericton in the old days.

She loved Fredericton. She had gone to college there. A beautiful little city set, like a gem, on a wide river, a city of quiet homes with lawns and flower gardens, and no skyscrapers or large factories or street cars or hurrying crowds. There was the Parliament building and the college above on a wooded hill, and old Government House, and the Cathedral where chimes rang for Evensong out over the great elm trees to the river bank.

Fredericton, in days gone by, had been a garrison town. Gay English officers had been stationed there, and there had been elaborate entertainment and ceremony, and social standards brought from the Old World, strangely incongruous in that new land so lately hewn from the primeval forests.

Her grandfather, in reminiscent mood, had told of parties at Government House, of footmen in livery and the large ball room with crystal chandeliers suspended from the ceiling. There, dignified dowagers sat on frail little gilded chairs upholstered in crimson brocade and watched the dancers. Great men had been entertained there in days before Confederation. Even Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, had danced in

that ballroom when a young man.

Fredericton and home seemed very far away now. Here she was, sitting in the pantry, on the other side of the social barrier, acting the part of Susan the maid!

After all, it was an adventure and good fun. She thought she would like to write a story about it—a human interest story with a touch of philosophy. Whence this barrier, and why? She would wait till some day, when at home the winter storms were whirling around the old house, blocking the country roads. In that white isolation she would see these things in perspective. It would be easy to write then.

But now she must play the role of servitude, never betray herself, never break through the barrier till the day came when she could lay aside her white apron and go off the stage.

In the dimly lighted pantry, Lydia's knitting became involved; the yarn was in a snarl, and, endeavouring to untangle it, she failed to note that the strains of the minuet had ceased and the master had returned to the library. He sat down by the fire and lighted his pipe. He always wore a black velvet smoking-jacket in the evening. This, with his finely cut features and iron-grey hair, gave him the distinguished appearance of an old painting. Lydia, peering through the slide, thought what an air of mystery there was about the man. It fascinated her. Then she noticed a strange thing. Instead of taking up his book, as she expected him to do, he took from his vest pocket a small red case, unclasped it, and looked intently at the contents for a long time.

As he moved the case in his hand she thought she caught a glint of light as though it contained some glass object. What in the world could he be looking at with that rapt expression on his face? She wondered if he were a crystal-gazer. Could that little red case contain a diminutive crystal sphere that foretold events to come? She hoped that he would leave it on the table so that she could examine it when she dusted the library. But he did not do that. He closed the clasp and put the case back in his pocket.

Suddenly she realized what she was doing and hurriedly closed the slide with a feeling of guilt and hastened back to the kitchen. She had been eavesdropping! What right had she to sit watching her master when he was wholly unconscious of her presence? She could at least retain the instincts of good breeding even if she was taking the part of Susan the maid. She was thoroughly shocked at herself.

The incident, however, made a strange impression on her, it was so mysterious. She felt as though she were entering haunted ground when she went into the library that night.

The master, however, looked up at her with something akin to a smile, which illuminated his usually serious face and accented the youthful look that contrasted so

strangely with his silver hair.

"I went to call on the bride this afternoon," he said.

"Maggie? I'm sure that would please her."

"Yes, I believe it did. She wants you to go to see her. She told me to tell you."

"Thank you, sir. I would like to go."

"How is *Middlemarch* getting on?" he inquired.

"I am just in the middle of it. I find it very interesting."

"I have not read it for years," he said, "but it is a good story. If I remember rightly, the heroine was rather a fool."

"She would be considered impossible in this age, but, at that time and with the kind of life she led, I can understand her. What I like best about the book is the true picture it gives of English country life in those days. It is all told just as George Eliot knew it, not as someone of the present day imagines it might have been."

"You will get that same thing at another angle in Jane Austen, I believe."

"Then I will try her next, if I may take another book."

"Certainly, take any book you like."

"Thank you, sir." She turned and went back to the kitchen, her little white apron disappearing into the darkness, like a white butterfly, he thought, as he watched her.

An unusually intelligent girl, he reflected, and he liked the slightly unfamiliar intonation of her voice. Perhaps he might guide her reading a bit. He would let her go on with the old novelists for a time and then try her on something else, like biography, or even poetry. He wondered what Maggie would think of it. Some day he would tell her, just for fun.

After he had gone out the next morning, Lydia found the music for Beethoven's minuet still on the piano. She sat down and played it through. It is a lovely thing, she thought, and he plays it very well. I wish I could play it with him.

That afternoon she went to see Maggie and was given cake and wine, and the silver tea service was displayed. Maggie told her all about the master's visit. It had made her very happy.

"I was afraid he'd never have nothing to do with me ever again," she confessed. "He was so set against me leaving him."

"I'm sure he thinks a lot of you, Maggie. I don't blame him for feeling badly when you left. I try to do everything that I can, but it doesn't make up for you."

"If you ask me, I'd say we were lucky to find you. That Jenkins wanted to leave out the piece about coming from the Provinces, when we was writing the advertisement. Now I hope he knows I'm always right about things."

To avoid being questioned further about her home, Lydia changed the subject by

asking for instructions about some household matters that had bothered her. She would have liked to ask about the little red case and the crystal, but felt it would be prying into the master's personal affairs. It certainly was none of her business.

The same thing happened a few days later. She had left the slide open in the pantry, hoping he would again practise the minuet, but, as she found out afterwards, he played only on Sundays. Having finished *Middlemarch*, she prepared the cocoa and, while it was still heating, she went into the dining-room to get a tray cloth from the sideboard drawer. She had no intention of eavesdropping, though it was her custom to move quietly about the house. Turning from the sideboard to go back to the kitchen, she caught sight of the master in his usual place by the fire, his gaze fixed on the contents of the little red case. It was uncanny. She felt this the more because she spent so many hours alone in the house that still seemed dominated by the sweet-faced lady in the photograph. There was an atmosphere of the past about everything and here was another mystery.

When she took the tray in, he was again reading.

"I have finished *Middlemarch*," she said shyly, placing the tray beside him.

"Have you?" he said, looking up. "It did not take you long."

"I read very quickly."

"I wish I could," he said. "I read rather slowly."

"Perhaps you remember better what you read."

"I don't believe it makes any difference. What book would you like now?"

"I want to read more of George Eliot, but, for a change, I would like to try Jane Austen."

"Jane is the wittier of the two, and they both have a penetrating insight into human nature, but George Eliot has greater depths and wonderful descriptive powers." He got up and went over to the bookshelf. "I believe *Pride and Prejudice* is supposed to be the best. You had better begin on that," he said, handing it to her.

"Thank you, sir," she said and vanished into the dark dining-room.

Trancher drank the cocoa and lighted his pipe. It was interesting to bring out these old books again. It brought back days of school and college and Donald. Few people read Jane Austen now. Maggie was right; they went to the movies instead and never knew what they missed. He resolved to try some literary experiments with this little white butterfly, who had flown in from a farm on some far-off river. It would be amusing to lead her on to greater heights and see how she responded.

When, next evening, he told Lydia something of this plan, she was as delighted as though she had never graduated from college with honors in English. It would be better than college—plenty of books, plenty of time, and a master-mind to guide her.

Only she must carefully conceal any trace of those college courses! She wished he would start calling her Susan, which he had not done so far; it would remind her to keep in her place and avoid any unintentional slip. As Susan she would be so completely somebody else.

She even reminded him of it once when he called her Lydia. He explained that he heard Maggie calling her Lydia.

"It seems to suit you better," he said. "I believe people grow to look like their names—and you are not my idea of a Susan!"

He looked at her rather critically, and for the first time noticed the clear transparency of her complexion and the pretty waves of dark hair neatly brushed back from her face, but with little tendrils that escaped, softening the more severe outline. Her eyes were almost too large for the delicate features, yet they were beautiful and expressive; blue eyes, like the colour of woodland violets.

"No," he said slowly, "you could never be called Susan."

The days passed with astonishing swiftness. Autumn faded. It was nearing Christmas. Lydia thought of home and the autumn that had passed, the scarlet and amber maples, the glory of the harvest, the first snow, the frosty sun rising red above dark fir trees. The River would be frozen now and everyone out on skates. Some day she would go back to it again.

She was not unhappy in her work. She had arranged a methodical system for each day. She kept the house immaculate and enjoyed planning and preparing tasty dinners for the master. When she felt the need of someone to talk to, she could always go to see Maggie. The daily walk to and from the market provided air and exercise. There was plenty to do, but her time was her own.

The crowning moment of the day, however, came at ten o'clock each evening when she took in the cocoa and Trancher talked to her about books, sometimes reading to her passages that he had enjoyed in his own reading. His wide knowledge of English literature amazed her. It was more helpful than college had ever been; besides, she was older now and more appreciative.

Sometimes, on Sundays, when the weather was mild, Trancher would go off for the day. He had a taste for old burying-grounds and old church records. He was making out a family tree and some of the branches were missing. Maggie told her about this, remarking that "The master don't take much stock in his relations while they're alive. When he gets them underground, that's how he likes them. Morbid, I call it."

On these occasions Lydia was free for the day. She would go to church in the morning when the familiar ritual of the Anglican service seemed to bring her nearer to

home. One Sunday afternoon she went to the city to visit the Metropolitan Museum.

For the first time in her life she saw the original paintings of the old masters, and relics of tribes and nations that had existed long before the Christian era, Egypt and Assyria, Greece, and Rome.

She returned bubbling with enthusiasm. In the evening she could not help telling Trancher about it. She stood in the doorway, a charming study in black and white, with her thick, dark hair framing her glowing young face—an ethereal little person, he thought.

"How do you happen to know so much about the ancients?" he asked.

"I *don't* know, that's the worst of it!" she said. "I thought you might have some books that would help me to know more about them."

"I will see what I can find," he said.

"Tomorrow will do. Drink your cocoa now or it will get cold." She was learning to admonish him as Maggie had done.

Trancher picked up the cup obediently, but asked another question, fearing that the butterfly was about to take flight.

"Did you ever hear of a poet named Matthew Arnold, Lydia?"

"I think I have," she replied vaguely.

He put down the cup and went to the bookcase, taking down a volume of Arnold's poems.

"This is the only thing that comes to my mind at the moment. There are two poems in this," he said, turning over the leaves. "Try *Sohrab and Rustum*, or, better still, the *Sick King of Bokhara*. Read that one first, it is beautiful flowing verse and not very long. It won't tell you much, but you will get the wonderful atmosphere of ancient Persia. Those are the only two poems in the book that deal with ancient Persia."

He handed it to her and she turned to go. He detained her, saying, "I think I have a book more like what you want. I used to have a history of Egypt under the Pharaohs. I will find it for you."

"I should love to see it," Lydia said as she flitted out.

She has a wonderfully receptive mind, Trancher thought, as he picked up the neglected cup. I wonder what she will make of Matthew Arnold. I believe I would have been a success as a college professor.

CHAPTER VII

Christmas came, and Trancher rather unwillingly accepted an invitation to dine with some relatives living in Connecticut.

Lydia went to church and then on to have Christmas dinner with Maggie.

The Jenkins's small apartment was in a state of uproarious Christmas confusion. The festive odour of roasting turkey, mixed with the scent of woodland evergreens, greeted her as she ascended the stairs. Jenkins, in shirt-sleeves and wearing a rakish paper crown (recently exploded from a Christmas cracker), sat in a huge armchair, contentedly smoking a cigar in the midst of chaos. His tall, overgrown son and the flighty daughter were both present, and two children about eight and ten, that Jenkins explained he had borrowed from an orphanage for the occasion.

"We can't have no fun Christmas without youngsters and them two of mine has got so big that Santa Claus don't mean a thing to them. Now this little one here," he said, drawing the little girl to him, "She knows who brought her that doll. Show the lady the doll, Emmy. That's the girl. Ain't that a beauty, now? And who brought it for you?"

"Santa Claus," said Emmy, with a broad grin on her little freckled face.

"Of course he did! Who else would it be? My! them reindeers must have worked hard last night. Jamie there, he's got a whole train of cars. See, now, he's fixing the tracks for them to run on."

The boy was sitting on the floor, absorbed in the wonders of the new train. The place was littered with tinsel and gay paper wrappings while an energetic radio contributed carols to the Christmas cheer. But Jamie was oblivious to such things. He was a railroad man, now.

Maggie appeared from the kitchen, an ample blue apron covering her best dress. She welcomed Lydia and wished her a Merry Christmas and apologized for the confusion of the room. "Just leave them in this clutter till after dinner and then they can clear it up themselves."

Dinner was all ready and she summoned her two step-children to help bring it in. Lydia offered to assist too, but was turned down because she was the guest of honour.

They were all squeezed into the tiny dining-room before a table laden with food in great variety. Jenkins served the turkey and plates were piled with vegetables, cranberry sauce, and pickles till there was room for nothing more.

Lydia loved it all. "This is a real Christmas," she said. "It was good of you to invite me. Think how lonely I would have been all by myself in that big house."

"Where did the master go?" Maggie asked.

"He said he was going to dine with some people who lived in Connecticut."

"Oh, I know. It's them Martins. Mrs. Martin was a half-sister of his mother's, but no more like Mrs. Trancher than cream is like vinegar. I wonder that he'd go there. He never liked that outfit much. It would be more to his taste to spend the day in a graveyard."

"I sometimes think he should go out more," said Lydia.

"That's just what I tell him. He's getting old before his time. When he does go out it is just to dine with Mrs. Marsden or some old lady that knew his mother. You can't do anything with him."

"I was just wondering," Lydia said, "if we could get him to give a party himself next Christmas. Make him ask three or four people that he really likes. I would love to have a party, and it is so easy for Christmas, you just have the regulation dinner. If we had dinner at night perhaps you could come over and help me, Maggie. We could get a turkey and I could decorate the house and have everything nice and Christmassy."

"It would be a fine idea," Maggie agreed, "if we could get him to do it."

"You will have to invite some youngsters," put in Jenkins. "I tell you a Christmas party don't mean a thing without youngsters."

Maggie thought youngsters would be going a bit too far for the first time, but it might be suggested in a casual way in case any of the selected guests had children to offer. "We could keep talking of the party quite a spell beforehand so as to get him used to the idea," she said.

After dinner Maggie ordered that the disorderly room should be tidied, and put Jenkins in command of the job while Lydia insisted on helping her with the dishes. Then they played games and sang songs and carols.

Jenkins was delighted when he discovered that Lydia could play on the squeaky little reed organ that, he told her, he valued very highly because it had belonged to his mother.

At five o'clock Lydia went home, though they urged her to stay for the evening. She was afraid that the master might come back early and find no supper ready. Maggie had a small plum pudding that she sent him for a present. Lydia thanked them all for a very happy day and walked back through the frosty air and twilight that reminded her of home.

Trancher came home shortly after six, rather depressed and tired. The day had not been a success, though he had not expected much from it. He said he had eaten a very substantial dinner and would not need much supper. If she liked she might just

bring it in to the library on a tray.

Lydia lit the fire for him and brought in a prettily arranged tray with salad and cold chicken, rolls, and fruit.

"That looks very tempting, Lydia," he said. "It is all that I require."

"Did you have a pleasant day, sir?" she asked.

"No, very dull. I seem to have spent most of the day on the train and the rest of the time I listened to my aunt recounting her ailments. It was more like a clinic than a party. Then my uncle entertained me by telling of the vast opportunities for wealth that I might have grasped had I been on the look-out for them."

"Is he a very rich man?" Lydia asked.

"No. He seems to have let opportunity slip, too, but can generally give some good reason for it. He is always expecting to be enormously rich in a year or two. He gets great pleasure from anticipation. I don't like discussing business methods out of hours. I would have spent a pleasanter day if I had stayed at home."

"Why did you go?"

"One reason was that I knew if I stayed at home you would have had to stay, too, and cook my dinner." He looked at her with his rare, fleeting smile that twisted one corner of his mouth and always accentuated the youthful look.

Lydia was surprised. Why had this man, whom she had always thought so self-centered and detached, considered her interests above his own?

"Oh, Mr. Trancher," she said, "why did you think about me? I would have been glad to stay and cook your dinner. Now you did not get a bit of good from your holiday and there won't be another Christmas for a whole year."

"It is all right, Lydia. Never mind. Perhaps it was just as well that I went. This house gets too full of memories for me at Christmas. Did you have a pleasant day?"

"Oh, yes! a lovely day. Maggie invited me there for dinner. It was a very nice party."

She felt she had lingered long enough and was moving toward the door, but he said, "Don't go. I want to hear about the party."

"It was great fun. Maggie is a wonder. She manages that family like a sergeant on parade and talks to Jenkins as if he didn't count at all."

"I can well believe it. Maggie never thought I counted for much. She always gave me to understand that men were an inferior race. And then she goes and marries Jenkins!"

"Jenkins is a good soul. He had two little children there that he borrowed from an orphanage, for he said Christmas was nothing without children."

"I thought he was supplied with children of his own."

"He has two, but complains that they have outgrown the Christmas spirit. They gave the little orphans a wonderful time, loaded them with presents, and Maggie gave us a splendid dinner."

"Maggie is quite a remarkable person and much too good to be wasted on matrimony."

"She seems happy," Lydia said, "and she was wonderful playing with the children. She knows an endless number of games, and she was so funny. I don't know when I have laughed so much. Finally, we all sang carols and songs and Jenkins insisted on singing *When You and I Were Young, Maggie*, and became quite sentimental. She told him he was a foolish old thing. They seem to get on awfully well together. I think she makes him an excellent wife."

"I suppose so," Trancher said resignedly, "but it is too early yet for complications to arise. However, Maggie is very resourceful about overcoming difficulties. Why, she had you engaged and was off with Jenkins before I had time to realize what was happening."

"I want to try and fill her place as well as I can," Lydia told him, rather diffidently. "You must tell me when I don't do things to suit you."

"You always do things to suit me," he said, looking at her kindly. "I thought it would be terrible to have anyone but Maggie here, and you seem to have slipped into her place so quietly and unobtrusively that I hardly notice the change. I hope I won't lose you through matrimony."

Lydia smiled. "I don't see any danger of that at present," she told him.

"I have lost so many people that way," he said. "And now I have a haunting suspicion that Tony will be the next victim."

"You won't lose Tony if he gets married. It will only sober him and make him work harder. I like Tony and he tells me his girl is a perfect wonder. He talked of her the last time you sent him out here. He sat on the table eating cookies and told me the whole romantic tale."

"Did he, indeed? I wondered what kept him so long. He has never confided in me."

"He is afraid to. He thinks you don't like to see people get married."

"No, I don't. The illusion is short-lived and tragedy follows."

"Not always. There are cases when the illusion grows into a beautiful reality."

"They must be very rare cases."

"Perhaps they are, but I think it would be worth taking the risk." She moved to the door again, feeling that she had talked far too long and too much.

"Wait," he said, "I have a Christmas present for you, Lydia." He handed her a

small parcel that was lying on the table.

"Oh, how kind of you, sir," Lydia exclaimed in complete astonishment. "Thank you ever so much. I never expected you to give me a present."

"I thought you deserved one."

"You are very good to say that and I am so pleased."

"Open it," he said, "and see if you like it."

With excited fingers she undid the wrappings and took out a prettily bound volume of Keats's poems. Inside the cover was a card that said simply, "In appreciation—Stephen Trancher."

Lydia found it difficult to say anything. The little gift had touched her deeply.

"I think you will enjoy Keats," he said. "There is a luscious beauty in his verse."

"I know I shall enjoy it," Lydia said, turning the pages and reading some of the titles. "I will like having a copy that is my very own, for sometimes I like to mark the verses that I want to remember."

"If you ever want to mark my books, you may do so."

"Oh, Mr. Trancher, I would never mark your books!"

"Do it sometimes. I want you to. It would interest me to see the things that you like."

"I might mark the wrong things."

"Then I would reprove you for lack of appreciation and make you look for something better."

"That might be very helpful."

"Yes, but mind you, I don't expect the wrong things."

Lydia was very happy that evening as she sat in the kitchen reading Keats. It had been a lovely Christmas and the master's gift had been such a surprise. She began to realize the charm of his personality that sometimes penetrated the aloof reserve that enshrouded him, like sunshine through a cloud.

As the evening passed she was tempted to go into the pantry and look through the slide, just to see if he was again crystal-gazing. With a guilty feeling about eavesdropping, she turned to reading Keats.

"*Oh, what can ail thee, Knight-at-arms,*
Alone and palely loitering?"

When she had finished this weird little ballad she felt that she did not want to be alone herself. It would relieve the haunting impression of sorcery and the elfin grotto if she looked through the slide to make sure the master was still there and human. But after all, she thought, if he did not want me to see him, he could close the door

into the dining-room. He knew she was there and would be likely to pass in and out at any time, and she yielded.

There he was, sitting by the fire with the little red case in his hand. Fascinated, she watched him, his gaze intent on the crystal—alone, remote, detached.

She remembered her scruples about spying and returned quickly to the kitchen till it was time to take in the cocoa. Then she told him she had been reading Keats and they talked about the *Ode to a Grecian Urn*.

Trancher sat by the fire later than usual that evening, smoking contentedly. It was so peaceful and pleasant to be at home again. He would have been glad to have talked longer with Lydia, but she had flitted away as usual before he could think of a reasonable excuse for detaining her. He wondered why it was more interesting to talk to Lydia than to the rather dull couple who were his relatives.

The Martins were self-centered and complacent. Their interests were narrowed down to their ailments and occupations. With this young woman who appeared each evening with his cup of cocoa, he had a keen desire to talk about the things he liked himself. It was a pleasure to direct her reading and look for her eager response. A new interest had come into his life. He turned again to books that he had not opened for years. He would take Lydia through the same delightful paths. Just a little way at a time. She must not go far at first, then on and on like wandering in a lovely woodland. One day they would come to Browning, but not just yet. He thought it would be interesting to guide her through the intricacies of Browning till she discovered the wealth of wisdom hidden beneath the tangled words. Her face would light up with the pleasure of discovery. She would stand by the door in her black dress and white apron while he questioned her. She would think for a moment, looking away, then the dreamy look in her eyes would return slowly, slantwise, back to him. Her answers were always so unexpected and sometimes so illuminating. At other times she would look puzzled and question him and he would explain things to her. It was all very pleasant, only the time was so short.

He had sometimes thought of suggesting that she come in to him for an hour each evening, after dinner, and sit at the desk and really study. It could be done, but he would not do it. He was of another generation and, like Lydia, was conscious of the barrier.

CHAPTER VIII

The winter days passed rapidly for Lydia. She was quite contented. They were quiet days and seemingly uneventful, but she enjoyed her work. In the afternoons there were the pleasant leisure hours when she could read. In the evening she wrote letters and then read until ten o'clock came.

Occasionally Trancher dined out, when he could find no reasonable excuse for refusing an invitation. As an eligible bachelor with his good looks and polished manners he was considered a desirable acquisition to any dinner party, when he could be caught. Maggie had once remarked that "the master always made such a business out of being polite in company, he never got any fun out of it!"

One thing began to worry Lydia as the days went by and she found her bank account growing substantially. What would she do when the time came for her to go back to the farm and carry out her plans? It would be as difficult for her to leave as it had been for Maggie, and she would not have Jenkins to offer as a reasonable excuse. Some day she would have to tell him that this arrangement was only temporary and that she had never intended to stay on indefinitely, that she could remain only until she had earned enough money to return home. How could she ever tell him that? It seemed quite wrong now, a tricky thing to do. However, she need not think about it seriously for another year. Anything might happen in that time.

Once, when Tony came to the house on one of his periodic errands, they touched on the subject. Tony felt a personal pride in the office and liked to talk about it.

"Our office," he told her, "is different from any other office in the city. I can't just explain it. You'll hear some of the boys who work in the offices downstairs say how their boss bawled them out, or how lucky they are when the boss is away. Now, we never call Mr. Trancher "the boss", and talk about him like that. We all feel lost if he's away from the office. And he hardly ever bawls us out. He'll look at you as if he was just terribly disappointed in you, and when he doesn't say anything he's terrific. We would do anything in the world for him. Somehow he makes you want to work! I could never leave that office. I often think that when I get older I'd like to get into a business of my own, but I know darn well I never could tell Mr. Trancher I was going to quit."

"I feel that way, too, Tony," Lydia told him. "I like to work for Mr. Trancher and, I sometimes wonder how I can tell him when I have to leave."

"For goodness' sake, don't you go, Lydia! He was all broken up over Maggie's going. He never said so, but I know. Now he's just getting used to you. You mustn't

leave him."

"Oh, Tony, some day I will have to!"

"Don't do it! You don't realize how much it means for him to have this place to come home to. There's a lot of worry to our business. There are times when he has to spend half the day talking to some old lady about her financial affairs when she could just as well say it all in ten minutes. They all think their business is the most important our firm has to handle. Mr. Trancher will sit there, patient and polite, listening to some long story that doesn't mean a thing. Then finally he gets them all straightened out. They have a lot of confidence in him, just for that, and it's the backbone of the business."

"I see now why he likes to stay quietly at home in the evening instead of going out. He must get very tired talking to people like that."

"That's right. He hates these big dinners they give. He forgets about them if I don't remind him. Then he goes just because it's part of his job. The business men all like him. They think a lot of his judgment, but they don't really know him."

When Tony departed, Lydia pondered over what he had said about Trancher. There must be some hidden force in this silent and reserved and seemingly impersonal man, to have caught the devoted admiration of a bright, light-hearted, very modern youth like Tony and the mature and matter-of-fact Maggie. Why was she herself so content and happy in his service? He was a mystery.

She thought of him as she had seen him in the evenings, a picture framed by the limits of the pantry slide. The picture of a man in a velvet smoking jacket with silver hair above a youthful face, deep, piercing grey eyes and the delicate cameo-like features. A picture softened by the yellow light of the reading lamp and the flickering fire that caught one touch of red held in his hand, from which sometimes there shone a glint of crystal.

On the evenings when Trancher was out, Lydia usually devoted her time to writing letters. Spring would soon be here and she wrote to Janet about the work she wanted Jake to do. It was better to write to Janet because she would see that Jake did it. She gave directions for the spring planting and for the disposal of the winter's cut of wood.

She also wrote a letter to John Upton to consult him about some pulpwood land that he had told her was ready for cutting. She and John had been good friends at college when John was taking the forestry course. He was kindly, straightforward and, reliable. His understanding and intimate knowledge of fields and woods and all wild life had appealed to her. He lived now with his old mother on a farm some miles down the river.

"Dear John," she wrote, "I want to ask your advice about my pulpwood lands. I could do nothing about them this year, but am thinking of next fall. Do you think I had better sell the stumpage or wait for another year, when I will be at home and could undertake the management myself? Do you know of a reliable man whom I could trust to do the work?

"I hope to be able to save a thousand dollars before I go home. That will give me a little capital to start with. I want to go in for poultry on a fairly large scale. I will keep just the number of sheep and cattle that we have now. It is enough for Jake to look after. I will have to get extra help for the field crops. I cannot decide much about them until I have studied the markets and know what would pay best.

"I wish that I could go home for a couple of weeks this spring but it would be impossible for me to leave my present job. I like my work, but it is only temporary. I would never be content to live anywhere but at home.

"If you see any of the old college set, give them my love. What fun we used to have at the dances and rugby games and canoeing on the river! It seems a long time ago now.

"If you have any Government pamphlets on agriculture, would you send me some? I have read everything I brought with me.

"Please remember me to your mother. Ever sincerely yours, Lydia Allen."

This letter seemed very dull and uninteresting to Lydia when she read it over. She tried to remember what they had talked about when they were together. Dear old John, he never expected to be entertained, he was always quite content just to be with her. She could never get him much interested in books and always felt this was a serious lack in an otherwise perfect character.

The next evening she told the master that she had finished Keats's *Endymion*.

"Have you really?" he said. "And how did you like it?"

"It was very beautiful," she replied. "Keats describes Latinos just as though he had been there and seen it all. I see things more clearly every time I read him and I love the way he arranges words as though they were flowers."

"It makes pleasant reading."

"I think people miss a great deal when they don't read poetry."

"Tell me, Lydia, how and when did you acquire such a keen appreciation of these things?"

"We had a few old books at home—Scott's poems and the *Lays of Ancient Rome* and Goldsmith," she told him. "My grandfather used to read them to me when I was a child. I think I have always loved poetry ever since. You see, I was alone a great deal as a child, but I had the woods and fields to play in, so I learned to

understand some of the things that poets write about."

"That must have been a very remarkable school. I believe I would have liked such an education."

"I believe you would," she said.

"I should think your country would be fertile ground for producing poets."

"We have our own poets," she said. "There were Bliss Carman and Charles Roberts and his brother Theodore. They all lived in Fredericton at one time."

"And where is Fredericton?"

Her face lit up at the question.

"Fredericton is a beautiful little city farther up the river from my home."

"I have heard of both Carman and Roberts, but never have read anything that they wrote."

"I like them," she said, "because they so often write about things I know."

"I think I should like to read about the things you know, Lydia. I have never seen Canada, but have often thought it must be a pleasant land."

"It is," she said, with a wistful look in her dreamy eyes.

He watched her with interest. A little elfin thing that unaccountable fate had drifted to his door from that far land that seemed made for poets?

Swiftly her glance returned and touched his with a fleeting smile as she turned to leave him.

"Wait a moment, Lydia," he said. "Tell me more about your own poets."

"I am afraid you might not like them. They write about things too simple for you to understand."

"That is a peculiar statement. What things?"

"Roberts wrote about the first plowing and the solitary woodsmen and of log booms in the River and the wood-frolic."

"What is a wood-frolic?"

"They call it a wood-frolic when the neighbours take a day off to help one of the farmers haul his wood in from his wood lot. They start in the early morning before daylight and work all day. The farmer's wife gives them their dinner and supper, and other women in the neighbourhood come in to help her. After supper one of the men plays the fiddle and they have a country dance."

"It sounds like 'a draught of vintage that hath been cooled long ago in the deep-delved earth,' to quote our friend Keats. A pity he could not have written about your wood-frolic. He would have made a good thing of it."

"I can't see Keats doing it, somehow. He did not know our woods or our people and Roberts did. He begins by saying,

'*The morning star was bitter bright*
The morning sky was gray,
And we hitched our teams and started
For the woods at break of day.
Along the white and winding road
The sled bells jangled keen
Between the buried fences
The billowy drifts between.'

Then there is another verse I like, towards the end, where he says:

'*And 'ere we saw the sundown*
All yellow through the trees,
The farmyard stood as thick with wood
As a buckwheat patch with bees.
And then the wide, warm kitchen
With beams across the ceiling,
Thick-hung with red-skinned onions,
And homely herbs of healing.
The dishes on the dresser shelves
Were shining blue and white
And o'er the loaded table
The lamps beamed bright.'

It is very simple, you see, and you could never know how true a picture it is unless you saw it."

Trancher looked up rather wistfully. "Sometimes," he said, "we like to read about the things we don't know. There is not much poetry in the things I am most familiar with—wills and deeds and mortgages and unsettled estates."

"But you chose them?" she said.

"It is not the life work I would have chosen had I been free to choose. My father always expected me to carry on his business for him and he trained me for it. I understand the work and that helps. Then, when the day is over, I can come home and do what I like."

"I believe you would like a farm."

"I am beginning to think I might. I have always thought farming was only picturesque in eighteenth-century England. I have a vision of bleak farms in this country with enormous up-to-date barns, and crops that fail or get submerged in

dust storms or eaten up by locusts. And the people are always pining to leave them and go to the cities."

"That may be true of Western farms, but not our farms in the Maritime Provinces. A farm is the dearest place on earth."

"Don't people have to work very hard, with very meager returns?"

"Yes, but working hard makes them very strong, so they don't mind it, and one can be very happy on a farm without much money."

"I see," he said. "You are one of those rare persons who can say 'I also have lived in Arcady'."

Lydia suddenly realized that if she stood there any longer the barrier might get out of place. When Trancher looked up again she had vanished.

Strange, he thought, as he sat smoking alone by the fire, how a clever girl like Lydia could be content to spend her life as an ordinary domestic servant. He wondered if he should encourage her to go to night school or do something of that nature, but dismissed the thought. He might lose her, and, anyway, he could teach her better himself. He thought of her wandering through the Metropolitan Museum all by herself in search of a Grecian urn. That museum was a wonderful place. He had not seen it for years. He would rather like to go there with Lydia; he could help her about finding the things she wanted. He used to go there with Donald in their student days. Why shouldn't he take her there? The idea quite shocked him. He, too, felt the barrier—invisible but always insurmountable.

CHAPTER IX

The winter days passed rapidly, and spring came with a suddenness that surprised her. At home, the ice would not have run out of the river, and Jake would be yarding out cordwood with the sled. Lydia discovered a few neglected crocuses struggling into bloom in the back yard. She loosened the earth about them and hunted for other plants that might come on later. She decided to make a little garden in the back yard and plant hollyhocks under the kitchen window and asters and petunias, so that she could have flowers for the house all summer. Some parsley and herbs would also be useful. It would be fun to have a garden to work in during the summer.

One day the monotony of their quiet household was broken by the unexpected arrival of Cousin Oscar from the West. He was breezy, offhand, and full of business, apparently connected with the exporting of cattle.

Trancher did not particularly object to having him, as this time Oscar had left the impossible Hulda at home—she now had three little sons and they kept her pretty well tied down, he explained. Trancher thought dismally that these children would be the only heirs to bear the name of Trancher in the next generation. There were a few family heirlooms of real value and family records that he had been at much pains to collect and set in order. He mistrusted Hulda's ability to rear suitable children for such an inheritance. That this difficulty might be overcome by a less prejudiced view of matrimony on his own part never occurred to him!

Lydia enjoyed the novelty of serving meals for two. Oscar amused her. The contrast between the two cousins was funny and yet there were certain family characteristics common to both. She caught fragments of their conversation when she put the dishes through the slide.

"Say, Steve, do you remember the day when I tried to climb through that hole in the wall over there? That was the day we stole the cakes Maggie had made for the party."

"You mean you stole them."

"Yes, and you ate them. I always did the heroic stuff when we were kids, and you and Donald got the benefits. Poor old Donald! Too bad he had to go out like that. He was a fine chap."

"It was a crime," Trancher said. "It need not have happened."

Oscar delighted in reminiscence. "Well, well, the same old glass salt-cellars!" he exclaimed, helping himself to salt. "And you still use them when the rest of the world uses shakers. Glad you do, Steve. I like to come back and find everything just the

same. That old sideboard there, I can remember when I was small enough to hide in one of the cupboards. I get a great kick out of seeing the old things again."

When they rose from the table, Lydia inquired if she should bring in two cups of cocoa that evening. "Whisky and soda for me," Oscar said, and Trancher, beginning to feel the stimulating influence of his boisterous cousin, ordered the same.

"Darn good-looking girl you got there, Stephen," Oscar said as they settled down to smoke by the library fire.

Stephen made no comment on this remark.

"What became of Maggie?" Oscar asked.

"She married."

"Well, for the love of Mike! Whoever took Maggie? I thought she was quite elderly when I was just a kid."

"She married Jenkins, the grocer."

"Now, what do you know about that? Why, I remember Jenkins! Used to get popcorn balls from him. Whatever did he see in Maggie?"

"Maggie has a strong personality and he wanted a good cook after his first wife died."

"He had the right idea. That's what a man wants when he marries, a good cook with some personality."

Maggie's personality, thought Trancher, would compare favourably with Hulda's, but he refrained from saying so, and changed the subject by asking how old Oscar's children were.

"The two older boys are six and eight, both in school now. The little fellow's only three, but he's a smart one, afraid of nothing." Oscar went on telling of the exploits of his offspring, who seemed to be all a proud parent could desire. They reminded him of his own boyhood.

"I must have been a holy terror when I was young," he said. "I often think what a trial I must have been to poor Aunt Alice the times I stayed here." He got up and took the photograph from the mantelpiece and looked at it affectionately. "She was always lovely even when she got old, wasn't she? I thought the world of Aunt Alice."

"She was very fond of you, too. Candidly, I used to wonder why sometimes!"

"I believe she always saw the best in me."

"She saw the best in everybody," said Trancher, moved by Oscar's affection for his mother.

After a time Lydia came in with the whisky and soda.

"Bring it here, my girl," Oscar demanded. "I want to mix the drinks. This old

cousin of mine wouldn't know how. That was a swell dinner you gave us tonight."

Next day, while she was working in her back-yard garden, Oscar appeared on the scene.

"Here, let me do that digging," he said. "That is too hard work for a woman."

"I don't mind it," she replied. "I was born to the sod."

"So was I. At least, I've been ranching most all my life. Give me that spade. I need the exercise. This city life would finish me in six months. I like the country."

"I like it, too," she said, "but out here it is quieter than in the city."

"Staten Island is neither one thing nor the other. When I go to a city, I like a great big rip-roaring city. I like to get my business done up and take in a couple of good shows, get lunch at some swell place, do a little shopping for the wife and kids, and then I want to go home."

"I like Staten Island," Lydia said. "It's better than living right in the city where I couldn't have a garden."

"Oh, I like it out here staying with old Stephen. He's about the last family link I have left. He needs to be roused up. Seems to me he's getting into an awful rut. I'd like to have him out West with me for a while. We'd show him a few things that would wake him up."

"I think that would do him good, and he might like it. What kind of cattle do you raise on your ranch, Mr. Oscar?"

"Oh, I've tried different breeds. Got a good herd of Herefords, right now, and some Holsteins."

"I don't care much for Holsteins," she said with an air of authority. "Though I have sometimes thought they might be a good combination with a Jersey herd. The Holsteins give a good flow of milk, but it is poor quality. We sell our milk to a creamery and the butterfat counts."

"We go in more for beef cattle out West."

"I'd like to go in for that, too, but I don't know much about it."

"You come out West, my girl, and I'll show you all there is to know about cattle-raising. Where is your farm?"

"I'm a Canadian. Our farm is in the Maritime Provinces."

"Good Lord! Up Labrador way, isn't it?"

"Not quite," Lydia laughed at him. "But we do have rather long winters."

"That's bad for cattle raising. Have to keep them too long in the barn."

Lydia had to leave him at this point, to get dinner ready.

That evening, after dinner, when they were seated in the library, Oscar said there was a good show on at a nearby picture house. He had noticed the billboards as he

came by. "Would you care to go down and see it, Stephen?"

"I don't believe I would."

"Don't you ever go to the pictures?"

"Hardly ever."

"Not much fun going alone. I suppose you would object if I asked that little maid of yours to go with me."

"Yes, I would decidedly object."

"Of course you would. You just stick to the same old ideas we had hammered into us when we were young and you never get away from them. If you would come out West and stay with us awhile, you'd get over all that. Why, out there we don't consider what kind of work people do. We got sense enough to know that everybody ought to work. If we like them, they are our friends no matter what their job is."

Trancher was silent. He had no answer to these unorthodox views that came out of the West. Oscar was not disturbed by his silence and continued:

"Now this girl you have here is intelligent and good-looking. Good manners, too, as you could find anywhere, yet you think it would be a crime for me to take her out to see a picture show. Just because she does your work for you and cooks your meals, you can't treat her like a human being!"

"How did you find out that she was intelligent?"

"I was talking to her this afternoon. We were doing a bit of gardening together out in the yard. She was giving me her ideas about cattle-raising, and she's right, too."

"Was that the extent of your intelligence test?"

"Well, it surprised me. I bet there aren't many women in the whole of New York City that would know the difference between a Holstein and a Jersey. She has a nice voice, too, and speaks well, and I like that; there are plenty of women out where I live that think themselves quite important society ladies, and they don't speak as well as that girl does."

"I don't doubt that," Trancher said sarcastically. He could not quite understand why it should annoy him that Oscar and Lydia had been discussing the relative merits of cattle in the back yard. Why should he care?

"Maybe the girl wouldn't care to come with me if I did ask her," Oscar continued. "Likely she has a date with her boy friend."

"I *will* go with you, Oscar," Trancher said suddenly. "It will be a rare experience for me to go to the movies. Perhaps I am getting into a rut, as you say."

Out in the balmy spring evening, Trancher felt that it was rather pleasant to be

going out with Oscar like this. Every landmark they passed recalled some incident of their boyhood. Oscar remembered things that he himself had forgotten. Stephen was three years his senior and had never had much patience with his noisy and mischievous young cousin, but now he enjoyed a pleasant feeling of kinship. There was no necessity for entertaining Oscar, he did not even have to be formally polite with him. There was just a sense of natural companionship that he liked.

The picture was not as bad as Stephen had anticipated, either, and he thoroughly enjoyed the Disney cartoon.

When they got home Lydia brought them whisky and soda and they sat late talking together. Stephen spoke of Donald and gave the details of his marriage and early death. Then, with the relief of having someone to whom he could speak freely, he was led on to tell of Cora and the problem she presented.

With the departure of Oscar they settled down to normal life again. The summer came with heat, relentless and unbelievable. Lydia had never known anything like it, though Trancher told her it was much worse in the city. Even the nights brought no relief. It was often too hot to work in her garden, but she watered it faithfully and it always provided fresh flowers for the house.

It seemed to Lydia that the summer would never end, and she wondered if she would have the courage to face it another year.

With October, cooler days came, and she realized that she had completed her first year of exile and the problem of leaving began to worry her again.

When cooler evenings necessitated having a fire in the library, Trancher thought the time had arrived when he could suggest Browning for Lydia's course in reading.

"Browning gets a bit involved," he told her. "But his characters are wonderful—people that you won't ever forget. Forget that you are reading poetry when you first start in. Just take a sentence between two full-stops and observe the punctuation carefully. When you once grasp his meaning the rest is simple. He lacks the music of Keats and you will miss that at first."

"I have tried to read Browning," she said, "but never got very far. I always felt that he liked to make things unnecessarily obscure."

"No, just abandon that idea. The reason you think so is because he tries to pack so much into a single line that you can't understand it all at one time and you are liable to get a form of mental indigestion."

"You always make difficult things so clear to me," she said, looking at him with admiration.

"I'm glad you think so. Remember to take Browning as a whole, at first. People are apt to dissect him with a pick and shovel, and that spoils it."

They settled down again to another winter. The flowers faded and died in the little garden. Brown leaves floated down rustling on the sidewalks. The air at night was frosty, reminding Lydia of home. Christmas would soon be here, and the scheme for giving the master a Christmas party came up again. Maggie said she could come and help. She would have an early dinner at her house and the party could be arranged for seven.

"Who do you suppose he could ask?" said Lydia. "There are so few people that he really enjoys."

"Oh, he knows plenty of people about here, though they are mostly elderly people that his mother knew. He never seems to take up much with the young ones."

"Couldn't we find someone with children? They were such fun at your party last year, Maggie."

"I can't think of any that would be suitable," Maggie replied. "That Mrs. Marsden has a whole pack of grandchildren, but she will be entertaining them herself. Why don't you speak to him about it?" she suggested. "He might know someone with children, and we could set the dinner for six instead of seven, so they could take them home early."

"I'll tell him some day," Lydia said, "and I'll keep on mentioning it every now and then all through December; then, when Christmas comes, he'll realize he'll *have* to give the party."

"That's fine," said Maggie, looking admiringly at her. "Just keep nagging at him."

So one evening in early December Lydia broached the subject.

"Christmas will be here soon," she said cheerfully, as she entered the library. "I saw Maggie this afternoon and we have a plan for you for Christmas."

"A plan? What plan?"

"We want you to give a party."

He looked at her with an amused, twisted smile. "I knew some day you would ask to have a party in the living-room."

"*You* are giving this party," she told him.

"Am I really? Can you give me a few more details?"

"Yes. You are to ask four or five people that you like very much to come here to dinner on Christmas night. All you have to do is to give the invitations. Maggie and I will do the rest. Now, who would you like to invite?"

"Good heavens!—I don't know. I will have to think it over. I am quite dazed by the prospect."

"Maggie thinks that as it is Christmas, you should ask someone with children."

"Maggie is a tyrant and I am afraid that you are following in her footsteps."

"We will give you a week to think it over."

"Why are you and Maggie so anxious to give me a party?"

"Because we want you to enjoy Christmas this year. You had a stupid time last Christmas."

"So you think I am going to enjoy giving a party?"

"Yes, only you will not know how much you are going to enjoy it till it is over."

"Then I am not supposed to derive any pleasure from anticipation?"

"There is no law against that," she said, "but remember your part in the entertainment is to decide about the guests."

The following morning she telephoned Maggie. "Everything looks promising for the party," she announced. "The master has not raised a single objection to it yet."

"Who is he going to invite?"

"He has not decided. I gave him a week to think it over."

"Keep on just going easy-like," Maggie advised, "and we can get him round to it in time to order the turkey."

Trancher, however, did not require a week to decide. Two days later he told Lydia he had been thinking very seriously about the party.

"Do you know whom you want for guests?"

"I have made that decision, subject, of course, to your approval and Maggie's. For some time now I have been wanting to do something for poor old Wilcox and his family. They don't have much of a life. I would like to do something that they could all enjoy together. Would it be too much for you to manage if I asked the whole family here for Christmas dinner?"

"I'm sure it wouldn't. How many will there be?"

"There will be Wilcox and his wife and five children. The oldest boy is away now. I doubt if he comes home for Christmas. Then, I believe, there is a girl in high school, probably about fifteen or sixteen, and two little boys and a little girl about five or six."

"Splendid, all the children we need. Jenkins could not do better than that at an orphanage."

"I can't imagine what you will do with them when you get them here, Lydia."

"Maggie and I can entertain the children in the living-room, playing games, and you can have Mr. and Mrs. Wilcox in the library. But you and Mr. Wilcox must not talk business."

"We won't. I can promise you that."

"May we have a Christmas tree?"

"Yes, if you will see about the presents and decorations, or whatever is expected

of a Christmas tree."

"I would love it."

"I had better give you some money," he said, opening his pocket book. "I want you to get a present for each member of the family. Poor Wilcox is hard up this year, and his wife has not quite recovered from her operation. It might help them to have Christmas provided for. If you want more money let me know."

"That will be plenty, I am sure. I will go in to the city tomorrow and buy everything before the shops get too crowded. Jenkins will get the tree for me and you must be sure to find out from Mr. Wilcox if they can come."

"I won't forget. I am beginning to feel some enthusiasm myself for your party."

CHAPTER X

Wilcox was astonished but delighted when the master delivered the invitation next day.

"I think it is too much for you to do for us," he said. "But it would be a wonderful experience for the children, and my wife will enjoy it, too. She has been fretting because we can do so little for them this year."

Lydia was in her element, with the party now well in hand. She planned the dinner down to the minutest detail and then went over it all again with Maggie, when the menu was revised and enlarged.

On the day when she purchased the presents she burst all bounds and took them into the library to show them to the master long before ten o'clock.

"I have a present for everyone," she told him proudly. "All except Mr. Wilcox. I thought you might know of some little thing that he needed. Would he like a book, or a pipe, or a necktie? You see, I can't think of anything that seems just right."

"I can't, either, on such short notice, but I'll ask Tony. He always knows things like that."

"Very well, then, I will leave that to you to attend to, but don't forget, will you?"

"No, I wouldn't dare forget anything so important!" And he smiled at Lydia's lack of confidence in his memory.

"You may have to pay for it, too, for I have spent nearly all the money you gave me. The shops were so tempting and I knew you wanted me to get quite good things."

"I think I can stand that."

"Now look at what I have for the rest of the family. This handbag is for Mrs. Wilcox. I paid quite a lot for it, but they told me it was good quality and would wear well. The fittings and lining are good, and see the pretty box it came in. I got a blouse for the oldest girl. That was a real bargain, just half-price as it was slightly soiled. I washed it out and did it up the way they fold them in the shops, and it is as good as ever.

"I got games for the boys. They are just cheap ones, but I thought they might play with them during the evening. So I got them each a little pullover sweater, as well."

"You seem to be a genius at getting Christmas presents, Lydia," he said. "I never know what to give people."

"You haven't seen half of it yet. Here is the greatest bargain of all—a book of fairy tales for the little girl. It was a three-dollar book and I got it for half-price. The

jacket was soiled, and I took it off."

"Did you do all this on the money I gave you?"

"Yes, all this and more too. I had to save a little to pay Jenkins for the tree. See these little baskets full of candy like fruit and vegetables? I got them for the four children. I have some better candy for the elders. I got a few little cheap toys to amuse the children while dinner is being prepared. Here is a monkey that climbs a stick and a baby that creeps when you wind it up."

"May I see the monkey a moment?"

"Yes, here, take it. You can buy us another if you break it. See, it winds up like this. Perhaps if *you* are so pleased with it, we might give one to Mr. Wilcox for a joke. I thought we would need some little things to give for prizes for Maggie's games, so I got half a dozen of these handkerchiefs with pictures of nursery rhymes printed on them. That is the end of the exhibition. Jenkins is lending me the lights and some nice decorations, and I bought a silver star for the top of the tree. Won't it be fun?"

"It looks as if it might be. But I still wonder if you can keep those children amused for a whole evening."

"Don't worry! Maggie will attend to it. I hope they won't get too uproarious and disturb you."

"No. I will be thankful to know they are being amused, only I don't yet understand how it is done. You are going to a lot of trouble about this party, Lydia."

"I am having a grand time and Maggie is glorying in the prospect of a real party."

"Would you like me to order some flowers?" he asked.

"They would make the house look more festive. We could have them on the library table. I have holly for the dining-table."

"Then I will get some."

"I am afraid this party will be quite an expense for you before it is over," she said.

"I can see that, but I am resigned. I really do want to do something for Wilcox, though I never thought of anything as elaborate as this, and if I had I would not have dared to undertake it. However, I don't mind leaving the responsibility with you and Maggie. I understand all I have to do is entertain Wilcox and his wife."

"You will have to carve the turkey."

"What! for six people? No, I will not! You and Maggie can carve it in the kitchen."

"Restaurant style? No, it cannot be done that way. The turkey is the chief ornament of a Christmas-dinner table. Carved in the kitchen! I never heard of such a

thing!"

"Very well, then, I will make Wilcox carve the turkey. Likely he has had a good deal of practice."

"Then will you ask him tomorrow if he would mind carving the turkey?"

"No. I shall tell him he must do it or the family won't get any turkey."

On Christmas Eve, Trancher found himself standing on a chair fastening a brilliant tinsel star to the summit of the Christmas tree.

"Does it look all right from down there?" he asked Lydia anxiously.

"Yes, that will do. Now drape the lights over the branches. Keep them all in front and don't lump too many together. That is very good. Now I will put the plug in to see the effect. Get down and see how pretty it looks. We will hang the little fruit baskets at the very end of the branches. I want them to show. These other ornaments can go just anywhere."

"I believe I am going to like this party, Lydia. What do we do when we finish the tree?"

"You write the labels for the presents while I tie them up. See the lovely blue and silver wrapping paper I got. I don't like too much red and green at Christmas."

"You seem to have thought of everything."

"I have done this before," she told him. "I used to help with the Christmas tree they had for the children at the little church at home. That reminds me, I wanted to ask you, if I go to church tomorrow do you mind waiting a half-hour later for your lunch?"

"Not at all. I won't need much lunch. I intend to save my appetite for the turkey."

"That will be fine. Then I can go to church in the morning and give you a simple lunch when I come home."

"Why do you go to church, Lydia?"

She did not answer at once. The look in her dreamy eyes was far away in a land where Christmas trees grew wild and Christmas bells rang out over spotless snow fields. Then she said, slowly, "I think I go because my spirit needs the atmosphere of stained glass and chants."

"I have not been to church for a long time," he said. "I used to always go with my mother when she was living. What church do you go to, Lydia?"

"The English Church."

"That is the Episcopal, or Anglican, is it not?"

"Yes."

"Medieval, but beautiful. The Prayer Book is a literary masterpiece, full of grace

and dignity."

"I think so, too," Lydia said, and went out to the kitchen to prepare his cocoa.

In church the next morning she sat waiting for the service to begin, her hymn book opened to *Hark, the Herald Angels Sing*. She thought happily of the anticipated party, as the organist played soft voluntaries and the winter sun shone through the jewelled windows.

She sat near the door and watched the well-dressed congregation come in and walk up the aisle to their accustomed places. Suddenly she gasped in surprise for she saw Stephen Trancher come in and enter a pew across the aisle from where she sat. Why had he come? She could not explain it, but all through the service his presence there made a strange difference to her. She wondered if he enjoyed the music, which she herself thought very fine. Did he catch the lovely cadence in Isaiah's stirring phophecy? Did he feel the rhythm of that majestic psalm, "The heavens declare the Glory of God and the firmament telleth His handiwork". She noticed that he joined in singing the hymns. She could hear his rich tenor above the others. She did not know that he could sing like that. A deep peace came over her. Here, in this quiet church, they were together and equal. There was no barrier.

Something of the same feeling came to Trancher. He had noticed where Lydia was sitting, a trim little figure in a neat black suit, becoming hat, and furs. It was the first time he had seen her without her uniform. He now saw her from a different angle where he obtained a better perspective, as one of the congregation surrounded by other people. She is a refined-looking little thing, he thought.

He followed the service dreamily as glimpses of the Christmas story filtered down to him. "Unto us a Child is born." Angels from the skies proclaimed the event; shepherds came to the humble manger. Orient kings also came there, bringing costly gifts to the Child whose coming was to reform the world, whose birthday was even now being celebrated in lands far away from the Bethlehem stable. Today little children were being made happy with gifts, because of this Child's birth. He remembered with a thrill of pleasure the Christmas tree in his own house that stood ready and waiting for the Wilcox children. He thought again of the kings and the shepherds and the angels who flocked to the lowly manger, and he thought of Lydia, who had planned the festivities of this day for him and yet she would not be his guest. No class distinction had marred that first Christmas Day. No barrier had been raised, no one turned away from visiting that sacred Child. He looked across the aisle at Lydia and found her looking at him. Their eyes met. For one strange transcendent moment they had risen above the barrier, two spirits that floated over the small and futile earth to starry spaces where the angels stand. Then they were

standing again, singing *Come, all ye Faithful*.

When the service ended Lydia hurried home. Trancher lingered by the steps to exchange greetings with Mrs. Marsden. Lydia had brushed past them in the crowd and crossed to the other side of the street. Mrs. Marsden looked after her. "I wonder who that girl is," she remarked. "I have seen her here often before. She interests me; she has such a sweet, expressive face. I can't seem to place her. I thought she was someone in quite humble circumstances at first, but lately she has been wearing that most luxurious fox fur."

Trancher made no comment. Mrs. Marsden did not expect him to. His looks followed Lydia and he noticed the fox fur.

"It is nice to see you at church again, Stephen," Mrs. Marsden chatted on. "Are you dining with anyone this evening? We would be glad to have you join our little family party, if you are not."

"Thank you," he said, "but I am having a party at my own house tonight."

"Are you, now? I am delighted to hear that."

"Only poor old Wilcox and his family," he said, as he escorted her to her car.

"What a lovely thing for you to do, Stephen. All success to the party!"

She waved her gloved hand from the car window and he turned and walked leisurely homeward.

He had come down to earth from the stars and the angels and was thinking about Lydia's fox fur. It did not seem like Lydia to go in for such extravagance. She had certainly never earned the price of a fox fur in his employ. Someone might have given it to her. The memory of Oscar's remark about the boy friend stabbed him with painful anxiety. Oh, well, what did it matter? Why should he care what the girl wore?

Trancher entered his house and opened the door of the living-room just to take a look at the tree. He felt considerable pride in its tinseled magnificence.

Lydia smiled as she saw him come out, carefully closing the door behind him. He took off his hat and coat and settled down by the library fire. When Lydia entered the room she was in uniform again.

"You will have to take your lunch in here," she told him. "Maggie is coming over right away to help me extend the dining-table. I don't understand about it. You see, we have never had a party here since I came."

"Very well, then. Bring me in a frugal meal on a tray. I only want enough to sustain life until Wilcox carves the turkey. I am trying to be as unobtrusive as possible."

"What time are they coming?" Lydia asked.

"Early, I think about five. They want to come then on account of the children. They can't stay late."

"We had better light up the tree as soon as they arrive, then. You can give out the presents and we can have dinner about six."

"I must not be left alone to engineer that tree ceremony."

"I don't see why not, but I will come in and help if you wish. Maggie can watch the dinner cooking. Everything else will be ready by that time. I can stand by the tree and hand you the presents and you can present them to the guests."

"Yes, I could do that much."

When Lydia brought in his lunch she said casually, "I saw you in church this morning, sir."

"Yes, I saw you there, too. You looked very grand in your fox fur."

She looked at him apologetically and said, "I only wore it to keep me warm. I did not mean to look grand. Would you rather I did not wear it?"

"No. Why should I mind?"

"If you think it looks pretentious I will not wear it again. Pretention is the only form of vulgarity. But it is really not a good fur; it did not cost me anything."

"It must have cost somebody something."

"Really, it didn't. I come from the land where they raise foxes. My grandfather went into it for a time. I don't think it paid very well, and he sold out after a few years. The fur I have was a defective pelt. Grandfather worried over it a lot. You see, it had a few red hairs in it and he feared it might lower the value of his breeding stock, but after he got rid of them he let me have it and I made it up for myself."

"You always seem able to explain things, Lydia," he said with an unaccountable feeling of relief. "I have lived in the precincts of New York for so long that I seem to be ignorant of many things, and one of them is foxes."

She laughed at him and changed the subject by asking if he had enjoyed the service.

"Yes," he said, "they have good music in that church."

"Why did you go?"

He looked at her with his whimsical half-smile. "I felt I needed the atmosphere of 'stained glass and chants' to give me the proper Christmas spirit."

"Did it work?"

"Like a charm. I am all ready for the tree now. I can hardly wait till five o'clock."

"I am far from ready for five o'clock and I hear Maggie rattling round in the kitchen," Lydia said and hurried away to grapple with the dinner table.

Trancher finished his lunch and sat by the fire quietly thinking. He felt at peace

with the world. He thought of Lydia as he had seen her in church. She had been just one of the congregation then, not his little maid in a white apron. He saw her in a hallowed light amid the strains of exultant Christmas music. In that atmosphere they had met on an equal footing, this girl who served him and whose alert mind he had discovered and so keenly admired. That tense moment when their eyes met seemed to have revealed incredible things. What were they? He had best leave it at that. Music was apt to affect him strangely. He returned to earth slowly when it was finished. He thought of playing his violin to fill in time, but decided he could not concentrate on it in the presence of the Christmas tree. Later on he went out for a walk. He turned westward, where the sun was lowering to the horizon. It shed a pale, ethereal light. The air was very still and full of frost. His sense of peace deepened and he returned in a mellow mood, ready for the party.

CHAPTER XI

The guests arrived promptly at five. Lydia took Mrs. Wilcox and the children upstairs to the guest room and helped them off with their wraps. Mrs. Wilcox was a timid, sweet-faced little woman with tired eyes. Lydia helped her adjust her lace collar, saying, "That is a lovely piece of Irish lace."

Mrs. Wilcox looked pleased. "I had it when I was married," she explained. "I got it out to wear tonight. I wanted to put on something extra nice and I never have much to wear for a party."

"It looks extremely well," Lydia said. "One so seldom sees real lace now; it gives any dress a distinguished look." Mrs. Wilcox was much relieved.

"The children have been so excited about coming here," she said. "I am afraid they may bother Mr. Trancher. He is not used to having children around and it was so kind of him to invite us all."

"Don't you worry," Lydia told her. "He is just as excited as they are. He said that if the children did not make a noise he would think they were not enjoying themselves."

"He is always so kind," Mrs. Wilcox murmured.

The two little boys, Bobby and Tommy, were bright sturdy little lads. Lillian, the oldest girl, was like her mother, pale slight and rather shy. Little Mary was a sweet, curly-headed little fairy in a pink dress. "See my new dress," she said, displaying it with pride. "Mother made it for the party."

"Beautiful," Lydia said. "You have a very clever mother. Be sure you show it to Mr. Trancher when you go down."

She ushered them all downstairs into the library where Mr. Wilcox, in his best black suit, was talking to the master. He was a lean, ineffectual-looking little man, Lydia thought, with a rather sad face. She left them and went on to the pantry and watched through the slide to see what happened. The master, with polished politeness was shaking hands with them all and saying Merry Christmas. When he came to Mary she obediently repeated, "See my pretty dress Mother made me".

He examined it with elaborate interest and pronounced it the prettiest dress he had ever seen. "You look like a pretty pink flower," he told her.

Mrs. Wilcox admired the huge pot of pink azaleas on the table. Trancher had remembered to order flowers. "Look, children," she said, "isn't that a lovely plant, all covered with blossoms?"

"They have little pink frills on their dresses just as Mary has," Trancher said, and Mary rewarded him with a beaming smile.

Lydia waited until these preliminary pleasantries were over and then went to the door and said the fire was lighted in the living-room and everything was ready for them there.

Trancher led the way. At the door he called, "Come, Lydia, we need your help here," but she had already slipped in before them and was putting in the plug for the lights. Suddenly the tree blazed forth in all its glory as she stood up, half hidden by the branches, and listened to the exclamations of wild delight. "Oh, Mother, did you ever see such a lovely tree!" "Mother, do look!" and "Oh, Mr. Trancher, we never expected to have a Christmas tree!"

"See the pretty star on top," Mary cried in shrill childish glee.

"I put that star up there myself," he told Wilcox in confidence, and the sedate Wilcox actually laughed.

"No! I can't see you doing that kind of work. What will Tony say when I tell him?"

"You men at the office don't realize how capable I am in my own house."

"Say! you were good to do all this for my kids," Wilcox said in a burst of grateful enthusiasm.

"I had my reward after placing that star up there. When I came down to earth I felt all the exaltation of a man who has just descended from the stratosphere. Hurry up, Lydia, can't you find some presents under that tree?"

She passed them out to him, one by one, and he distributed them with an appropriate remark to each. Off came the dainty blue and silver wrappings amid squeals of delight and cries of "Oh, Mother, look!" and "Oh, Mr. Trancher, this is just what I wanted," as they ran to thank him.

Lydia, watching by the tree, felt as though she were realizing a dream come true. It was strange to see the master in the midst of all this happy confusion. The look on his face was one that she had never before seen there. Once he caught sight of her and smiled, a wistful smile that she could not fathom. She saw Maggie come to the door to see the fun, and Wilcox shaking hands with her. Little Mary, with childish abandonment, was on the floor, turning the pages of her fairy book. The boys were also on the floor, discussing their games.

Lydia left and went to the kitchen. She opened the oven door to look at the turkey, brown and sputtering, then to the dining-room to light the candles and fill the glasses, then back again to the kitchen to help Maggie dish up the dinner.

When everything was ready she returned to the living-room to tell them dinner was served. She took her place standing beside Wilcox while he carved the turkey with neat precision and passed the plates as he filled them with clean-cut slices of

white meat and a little dark meat, adding a spoonful of dressing. She strove to be the perfect waitress unnoticed by the guests.

Maggie, who was passing the vegetables, had no desire for oblivion. "Now, Mrs. Wilcox," she said, "will you just help yourself to cranberry sauce and pass it along? Let me cut your meat for you, darlin'," she said to little Mary. "That's the girl, let Maggie have the knife a minute. Now we better tie the napkin round your neck so you won't spot your pretty dress."

When she passed potatoes to the master she told him to please look how well Mr. Wilcox was doing with the turkey.

"Maggie," he replied, "I am lost in admiration. It is a work of art. Such talent is wasted in a business career."

"It comes in handy for my career as a family man," Wilcox explained from the other end of the table.

Lydia had poured brandy over the plum pudding, lighted it, and brought it in flaming, with a sprig of holly on top. This was a new surprise for the children, who felt they were living in a world of wonders. They finished with nuts and raisins and cheese and celery. Then Lydia brought coffee into the library for the elders.

She sent Maggie to collect the children for games in the living-room while she stacked the dishes in the sink. There would be plenty of time to wash them in the morning.

When she joined Maggie and the children they were all waiting for her to play the piano for "Musical Chairs". The chairs were arranged in a row and they all started gaily marching around them while she played the *British Grenadier*, and *The Irish Washerwoman*.

When they were quite exhausted with Musical Chairs, Maggie made them place the chairs in a circle and they played stage-coach. Everyone had to represent some part of the coach, and when Maggie told the story they had to get up and turn around when their special part was mentioned. If they forgot, they had to pay a forfeit which, she explained, meant that they would have to do something to entertain the company. It might have been rather a dull game, but Maggie told such a thrilling story of highwaymen and robbers and the funny coachman and the nervous passenger and the black horse that kicked the white horse and fell into a mud-hole and the wheel that came off and rolled into the duck-pond, that she kept everybody laughing and turning until they were quite exhausted by the time the coach arrived safely in London town.

When they were all trying to decide about the forfeits, Lillian slipped quietly into the library. "Oh, Mother," she said, "do come and see the children. We are having

such fun."

Mrs. Wilcox was comfortably seated in a corner of the sofa enjoying the pleasant warmth of the open fire with happy contentment. She thought of the excellent dinner that had been served to the family with no effort on her part. So rarely had she sat down to a Christmas dinner that she had not struggled to prepare beforehand. She was happy just to sit there listening, while the two men talked together, and knit. Proud that her husband could converse so freely with this dignified gentleman, his employer; happy, too, hearing the merry voices of her children in the next room. But at Lillian's request, she laid aside her knitting and went back with her to the living-room. After a time the two men joined them, lured by the sound of young voices singing carols. They were all gathered around Lydia at the piano.

Trancher stood at the door watching them. Lydia was still wearing her starched white apron; the butterfly had now alighted at the piano, he thought. It surprised him that she could play so well. Presently, with Wilcox, he joined the group at the piano, and Lydia heard again his fine tenor blending with the voices of the children. Wilcox was singing too. It was all very lovely.

Everyone had a favorite carol that had to be taken in turn. Mary wanted *Away in a Manger*, Mrs. Wilcox asked for *The First Noel*. Finally, Trancher put in a request for *Brightest and Best*.

"A grand old tune," he said, when they had finished singing it. "You play it very well, Lydia."

She looked at him and smiled. She was completely happy. The party was a success.

The two boys begged Maggie to play stage-coach all over again so that father and Mr. Trancher could play too.

"Very well," she agreed, "they can be two passengers."

She set them all in a circle and assigned them their parts. Mr. Wilcox was to be the Irishman and Mr. Trancher the Scotch passenger. "Now don't, on your life, forget to turn round when I mention you, or you'll have to entertain the company with something, and I'm sure I don't know what either of you could do."

This time Maggie surpassed herself in telling the story. The children watched eagerly for their parts and gaily whirled around when they were mentioned. When the Scotch passenger insulted the Irishman and they started to fight, both gentlemen did the part nobly. But when the coach was approaching London town and the front wheel bumped on a stone and both passengers fell out, only Mr. Wilcox remembered to turn around. The children called out delightedly, "Forfeit! forfeit! You

forgot to turn round, Mr. Trancher."

"No," Trancher said complacently and with remarkable presence of mind, "I did not forget, only I did not want to get into another whirl with that Irishman."

"Excuses like that don't get you anywhere," Maggie informed him with the severity of a judge of the Supreme Court. "Everyone else remembered. Now, what are you going to do?"

"You are not following the correct form of procedure, Maggie. What you should do first is to prove me guilty, then pronounce the sentence and then ask the prisoner if he has anything to say."

"I'm sure I don't know what to do with you after you sitting there and letting Mr. Wilcox do all the whirling for you, and him company, too."

"That's just how it is at the office, Maggie," put in Wilcox.

His more timid wife feared the remark was not quite in order, but was immediately relieved when Trancher, with a friendly twinkle in his eye, said, "Wilcox, my friend, I am afraid that is the sad truth."

Lydia, who was putting the chairs back and straightening the room, marvelled at the ease with which he adapted himself to the situation. She had expected him to be bored by these childish old parlour games. He was always the perfect host with his whimsical wit and quick retorts.

"Maggie," she suggested, "why don't you make Mr. Trancher read us a story out of little Mary's fairy book?"

Everyone thought this was a splendid idea, as they were all tired with so much whirling round. Mary, who had been carrying her precious book all through the perilous journey of the stage-coach, took it over to Trancher and, looking into his face with wide serious eyes, enquired, "Can you read?" To her mind, reading was a wonderful accomplishment.

"Well," he told her, "it is a long time since I read a fairy story, but I can try. Let me see your book, little girl." She opened it on his knee and slowly turned the pages.

"You choose the story," he said.

"What does that picture say?" she asked.

"*Cinderella and the Fairy Prince.*"

"Not that one. I know that." She turned the pages, slowly deliberating.

"There, read that," she said finally, and flattened down the page with her plump little hands. The picture showed two little children approaching a sugar-plum cottage in opalescent colours among gnarled and twisted forest trees.

"That is *Hansel and Gretel*," he said. "I remember my mother reading me that story when I was a very small child. I think I should like to read it again."

Mary looked up at him with incredulous eyes. She found it difficult to believe that this tall, silver-haired gentleman had ever been a small child.

Trancher read the story well, in his pleasant, cultivated voice. He was even dramatic at times over the alarming actions of the crafty old witch. Little Mary shuddered and he put his arm about her and whispered, "Don't be afraid. It will be all right. I know this story." She leaned against him, her curly head resting on his dark coat-sleeve. Lydia thought that she had never seen a more charming picture. The little fairy-like child leaning so trustfully against the quiet, austere man with silver hair and in the background the festive Christmas tree.

She stood in the doorway, aloof from the party, never forgetting her part in this drama where the action had become slightly complicated.

Maggie, less susceptible to barriers, sat squarely on a chair. She wore her best dress and she had left her apron in the kitchen. Long service in that house had given her unquestionable rights and privileges. She knew when they should be taken advantage of and when left. Lydia could not take advantages. They were not in the role she had set herself to play.

Wilcox sat quietly watching his little daughter, whom he adored, and his employer, who, through long years, he had served with faithful devotion. His wistful smile might readily have been changed to tears. He thought of past adversities, the pinch of poverty, the worry and anxiety he had expended in rearing his little brood, and felt that in this one rare moment he received rich dividends.

Mary drew a deep sigh of relief when the story ended happily. "Oh," she said, "I was so afraid the old witch would cook the children."

"I knew she wouldn't," Trancher told her, stroking the golden curls. "In those days people had a lot of trouble, but they always came out of it and lived happily ever afterwards. Now you go and show the picture to everybody. I doubt if anyone of them ever saw a sugar-plum cottage before."

Mrs. Wilcox said that they must go home soon, as it was long past the children's bedtime. Lydia brought in ginger ale and cakes and Trancher telephoned for a taxi to take them to the ferry. While they were waiting in the hall for the taxi, Trancher discovered a small package in his pocket. "Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "I have nearly wrecked the party. I forgot this. It's your present, Wilcox, and Lydia warned me not to forget it. I don't know what she'll say when she finds you got nothing on the tree."

"But I did," said Wilcox, who expected very little from trees. "I got candy and a Christmas cracker and a monkey that climbs up a stick."

"But this is *my* present to you."

"You have already given me a present." Wilcox thought of the substantial cheque that had come enclosed in the master's perennial Christmas card.

"That was only a token of esteem from the office, but this was for the party. By rights it should have been done up in blue and silver paper and placed under the tree. I know enough for that, even if I am not a family man."

"I don't mind accepting it even if it is done up in store paper," Wilcox said, holding out his hand for the package.

"Then you may have it, but I trust to your honour to destroy all price marks without looking."

"I will give you my word for that," Wilcox promised, as he undid the wrappings and disclosed a handsome leather pocket book.

"Tony said you needed a new pocket book," Trancher explained.

"I certainly did need one badly, although it seems incredible that I ever had money enough to wear one out."

"Oh, Albert," said his wife, "you had that old pocket book before we were married."

"That accounts for it. I had more money in those days."

Trancher laughed pleasantly. He enjoyed seeing Wilcox like this.

The taxi was at the door and they said goodbye. Mrs. Wilcox said, as she shook hands, "You will never understand, Mr. Trancher, what this has meant to us all. It was just perfect. That's all I can say."

The two little boys said they wished they could stay longer, and little Mary, with a muffler around her neck and still hugging her precious book, was carried out on her father's shoulders, calling "Good night, Mr. Trancher, I had a lovely time." And they were gone.

Jenkins was in the kitchen waiting to take Maggie home. "He thinks I can't walk two blocks without somebody running off with me," she said scornfully.

"Oh, I wouldn't mind that," said Jenkins, "only I could not wait another minute to hear how the party went off."

Trancher, still in festive mood, had joined them in the kitchen. "Well, Jenkins," he said, "I don't wish to appear boastful, but I think my party was an unqualified success."

"My wife has been talking all along as if it was her party."

"Your wife is an accomplished entertainer. She has a theatrical flair that I never suspected. Will you have a glass of sherry, Jenkins, just to wind up the day? Maggie, find me a wine-glass."

When the Jenkinses had gone, Trancher found Lydia still trying to restore order

in the living-room. The fire had burned low and the lights on the tree were out. The party was over.

She smiled at him. "It went off very well, don't you think?" she said. "I hope you didn't mind all the noise and confusion."

"I never enjoyed a party as much in my life. This is the best Christmas I have known for a long, long time."

"I am so glad," she said.

"You did it all, Lydia. I really did not want to have a party at first, only you seemed so keen for it I could not refuse. Now I am glad we had it. I never saw Wilcox in such good spirits. I have always felt sorry for him on account of his large family, but now, do you know, I believe he has something there."

"That little Mary is a beautiful child," Lydia said.

"Now isn't she? Such a friendly little thing, and lovely to look at."

"They are all nice children and so easy to entertain. They were pleased with everything."

"That dinner, Lydia, was a delicious affair. It was quite perfect."

She was touched by his appreciation, but said modestly that Maggie had helped her with the dinner.

"Maggie never made that turkey dressing. I've tasted Maggie's dressing and I know what it is like."

"Yes, I'll take all the credit for the dressing. I can make good dressing, I'll say that for myself."

"What in the world did you do to it?"

"I put in some celery and raisins and some sweet herbs. I raised them in the garden last summer. I don't like the stuff they sell in the stores."

"Well, of all things! I would never know what kind of herbs poultry dressing was supposed to contain."

"You are not a farmer," she said. "I use summer savoury or sweet marjoram. I don't care for thyme."

"I begin to think that farming is a highly specialized profession."

"It is, but most city people don't know that, so whenever they visit a farm they start telling the farmer what he ought to do. They are quite funny sometimes. Just as funny as I would be if I tried to tell you how to run your office."

She was still moving about, picking up scraps and putting things away.

"Don't work any more tonight, Lydia," he said. "You must be very tired. Do sit down."

She never sat in his presence—she knew her part too well. She had allowed

herself a little scope for the party, but he must not think she was going to take advantage of it.

"I *am* a little tired," she said, as she collected the ginger-ale glasses on a tray. "I won't do any more tonight."

She stood in the doorway and they chatted for a few minutes longer about the party and then she was gone, before he could think up something to detain her. He wanted to go over every detail of the party with her.

Trancher sat on alone by the smouldering fire, thinking it all over. He remembered going to church that morning and wondered why he had gone. It seemed far away now, like a dream—stained glass and chants. He was glad he had gone. He had enjoyed everything that day, even his walk in the afternoon. Poor old Wilcox, how pleased he had been. It was not so much after all, just the expense of the dinner and a few presents and fixing a star over a tree—all very simple. He might have done it any Christmas.

Then he thought of Lydia. She had been the guiding spirit through it all. How could he have done it without Lydia? It was she who always had a way of making things come out right. Who was this white butterfly that had flitted into his house and turned into a fairy with a magic wand like something in Mary's fairy book?

He wished that she had sat down and talked with him for a little while. A wave of loneliness struck him like coming back to a cold and empty house after a summer holiday. He thought of the children singing carols. Lydia had been the guiding spirit then, too, and how well she played! How had she ever learned to do these things, brought up on a little farm in some wild northern country? The strange thing was that she never flaunted these accomplishments before people. He felt that invariably she rather tried to conceal them. She did not use long words or appear over-educated or adopt the "I am as good as you" attitude. He had a faint suspicion that she was the one who was keeping him in his place.

He wondered if she could play his accompaniment for the violin. He wanted to try it with the piano. Why should he not ask Lydia to play it? She might try it, anyway. The situation would be somewhat unusual, but most situations were unusual with Lydia. It was unusual to be discussing the Victorian poets with one's maid. Of course, that was just helping her with her education. Then, too, it was unusual for a maid to arrange one's Christmas party as Lydia had done. After all, he was a single man keeping house by himself and that was more or less unusual, anyway.

Then the question returned to him: would he ask Lydia to play for him? He knew that he would not. Why? He was afraid she would think he was trying to remove that invisible barrier that forever rose between them. Why, then, did this barrier exist?

Was it the dregs of feudalism still present in an age where it did not belong? Oscar had bluntly stated that he could not treat Lydia like a human being because she did his housework. Was that true? Oscar lived on a Western ranch, under different social conditions with the result that he had married the dumb and impossible Hulda who had borne him three husky sons, and he seemed completely satisfied. Oscar never had had much sense of the fitness of things. Moreover, he *did* treat Lydia as a human being. She did exactly as she liked. She never seemed to be doing anything she should not do. She had fine instincts. In other words, she knew her place and kept it.

He suddenly realized that he would like to treat Lydia more like a human being. She had been too self-effacing at the party. It rather distressed him that she had taken so small a part in it when she had done so much to make it a success. Maggie had been much more to the fore. Strange that the barrier idea had never troubled him in Maggie's day. Why was it so in his mind with Lydia? It was she herself who never consented to cross it.

Finally, she decided she was right from her point of view. He had been a perfect stranger to her when she came to live in his house. She was far from her home and friends. Had she been a girl of his own class the arrangement would have been impossible. She was a wise little woman. From now on he would leave the initiative in her hands. He only hoped that this little white butterfly would never flit away forever. He thought uneasily that Lydia with her youth and good looks would be more easily lost to matrimony than Maggie, and he had lost Maggie. Well, he would not worry over it till the time came, and, anyway, it had been a grand Christmas.

CHAPTER XII

It was on the twenty-second of February that Trancher first realized that his opinions and Lydia's might definitely clash. He had taken advantage of the holiday to visit an ancient church some distance from the city which, he had been told, contained some very old records and memorials. He spent the entire day among these interesting relics of the past and returned home still immersed in the misty atmosphere of the eighteenth century.

He told Lydia about it when she came in at ten o'clock. He had not found the information that he was searching for, but had had a most interesting day. The old church was a perfect specimen of the Revolutionary period.

"I think you would have liked it, Lydia," he said. "Washington once worshipped there. It was quite impressive, seeing it on his birthday. The rector was most kind and showed me everything. He allowed me to examine all the records and showed me the pew where Washington sat and the prayer book he used."

"The old rebel!" Lydia said with considerable venom.

Trancher removed his pipe and looked up at her in surprise.

"Why, Lydia," he exclaimed, "Washington was a very fine man and a great general."

She returned his look with fire in her eyes. "If someone turned you out of your home," she said defiantly, "and let people insult you and rob you and sent you out of the country penniless, would you think he was very fine?"

"No, I don't think I would."

"Well, that is what George Washington did to my people. They were Tories and stood by their King and country."

"Were they indeed? You must remember, however, that George the Third was the cause of most of the trouble. He did not understand the situation in the Colonies."

Her eyes blazed. "He was the one man in England who did understand it. The King knew what we would have to suffer if the rebels got the upper hand. He would have fought the war to a finish to save our homes for us."

"This point of view is new to me. Why did he not do it?"

"He could not stand out against the Whigs and the pacifists and his lazy, incompetent generals. They did not want to fight, they wanted to use us to settle the land they had just won from the French. You see, they could not get British people to go there and live with the hostile French and Indians and endure the cold climate. But we were forced to go because there was no other place for us. It was a

wonderful thing for the country, of course; otherwise Canada would have been just a French colony under British rule today."

"How many Tories went there?"

"Between thirty and forty thousand. The dear old King gave us grants of land and made England send us supplies until we became established and gave us compensation for the property we had lost."

Her defiant look surprised Trancher. This was a Lydia he did not know.

"I never heard anyone speak so affectionately of George the Third before."

"He is the most misjudged monarch in all history," Lydia said with conviction. "Would not you think kindly of a king who gave you a farm?"

"I believe I would think kindly of anyone who would give me a farm. But I see that I shall have to teach you something of the true history of the Revolution."

"A true history of the American Revolution has never been written. They give only one side of the story," she said with dignified assurance.

"Whoever told you all this?"

"My grandfather," she said, more humbly. Her fingers felt the frill of her apron. She was forgetting the barrier—but this was a situation that required prompt action.

"Have you any old churches on your river where I could look up records?" Trancher asked calmly.

"Yes, there are a few."

"Some day I am going there to find out about all this."

"You will find out a lot of things that you don't know."

"I have already found out some things I did not know, and one of them is that you are a little spitfire."

She smiled at him. "I hope I was not rude," she said, "but I must always stand up for the dear old King." She had again assumed the attitude of demure respect.

"I will forgive you," he said.

She was disappearing through the door and he called after her, "Thanks for the history lesson," but the butterfly had flown.

"Amazing little person," he thought as he lit his pipe.

Lydia returned to the kitchen and read again a letter she had received that morning from John. There had been some correspondence between them since her first letter and he had been able to sell some of her pulpwood for her. Prices had been poor, he told her, but were coming up again. He advised her to engage her own manager to do the cutting the following winter, when she would be at home to make the necessary arrangements. The money he had received he would put to her account at the bank. This unexpected windfall would, with her present savings,

amount to more than the thousand dollars she required. There was now no need for her to remain at work any longer. She was free to go home whenever she wished.

The middle of April would be the time that she should return, just before the planting season began. John evidently expected her to come then. Her heart sank. How could she do it? She shrank from the thought of even suggesting the subject to the master. It was foolish—she felt that. Almost anyone could perform the simple duties for him as well as she did. She could not go on with this kind of life forever. It had been only an interlude. She must get out of it, be up and doing things and meeting people, making her place in the world. How could she escape? She would wait until March came in, that would give her time enough, she might have more courage by then. She would forget about it till then.

John had told her that he was going to be married in the spring to Elsie Dines. She was pleased about that. John needed a wife and Elsie would do very well. She would keep his house and rear his children and take care of his old mother. It was a relief to her to know that John would have someone to look after him. She knew that at one time John had wanted her, but it would never have been a success. He was a grand friend and they had had lots of fun together, but marriage with him would have been impossible.

She was quite happy about John's marriage and wrote her congratulations before she went to bed. It was a sincere and friendly letter. She found it much less difficult to write to John now that he was engaged to Elsie.

She would love to be at home again. She longed for a sight of the river and the old house and Jake and Janet and all the people she knew and cared for. She would invite John and Elsie to come over for supper when she got home and they would tell her all the things that had happened while she was away. Yet how could she leave this place? She would miss it, she knew. She had found it a sheltering haven when she was alone and friendless and now she was just using it to suit her own convenience. She could never explain it to the master. Suddenly she realized that she disliked the thought of another woman being there in her place, waiting on him, doing the things that she had been accustomed to do. What was there about this man that made people want to stay with him?

The problem became more difficult as the year advanced. She noticed with some anxiety that the master was evidently worried about something. He grew nervous and preoccupied and had no appetite. He became worse as the weeks passed. The youthful freshness had gone from his face and he appeared worn and haggard.

Lydia watched him with increased uneasiness. She spoke to Maggie about it and

Maggie said he should have had sense enough to take a holiday during the summer. "No one," she said, "can stick in an office year in and year out without going to pieces some time. That's a worrisome business, anyway, winding up estates and the like of that. Every once in so often there'll be a lawsuit and that is liable to get him fussed up."

"Isn't there something we could do, Maggie?"

"All he needs is a change. Get him to go down south somewhere for a month, if you can. It would do him a sight of good."

"I'll suggest it," Lydia said, "but I doubt if he will go."

That evening she brought the suggestion in with the cocoa. "I am afraid you are not feeling well, sir," she began. "You hardly ate anything for dinner."

"Oh, I am well enough," he told her, "but I have been a good deal worried about a matter that has come up at the office lately."

"Maggie thinks you should take a month's rest. Couldn't you go South for a change?"

"No, I couldn't possibly leave just now."

"But you do need a rest. You didn't take a holiday all summer."

"I sometimes think that taking a holiday is the hardest way to rest. I can rest better in my own home than anywhere else."

"Well, will you do that? Just tell them at the office that you won't be back for a week or so and stay at home and do what you like."

"Not now. I couldn't. I have to be on the spot. It would worry me more to stay away and not know what was happening. I must see this thing through myself."

"Then will you do it later on?"

"Don't worry about me, Lydia. I will pull through somehow."

But Lydia did worry. She knew, too, that she could not tell him she was leaving when he was already troubled with business worries. The spring planting must go on without her supervision this year. She must not add to his troubles. If she stayed she could do things for him that another person, coming in, would not think of. He seemed to be on the verge of a nervous breakdown and if he became really ill she certainly could not leave.

She wrote to Janet telling her that she was obliged to change her plans and could not say definitely when she would be home, and gave a list of directions that she hoped Jake would attend to. She felt greatly relieved when she had done this.

The days passed and the master did not improve. Lydia watched him anxiously. Something must be done.

One evening after dinner she went to answer the front door bell and noticed that

he was sitting by the telephone in the living-room. He had not changed to his smoking-jacket, but was wearing his grey business suit.

"Who was that, Lydia?" he called to her, nervously.

"Only a man with some books Mrs. Marsden returned. I will leave them in the library." She was shocked to see how ill he looked.

"Can I do anything for you, sir?" she inquired anxiously.

"I am expecting a telephone message," he said. "Wilcox is still at the office. Things have gone badly there today. Stay with me, Lydia, I may need you."

His hands twisted nervously, he seemed like a man at the end of his endurance. She sensed the fact that he did not want to be left alone.

She went over and stood beside him, laying a cool, firm hand on his arm. "Do you think," she said, "if you were to tell me just what is troubling you it would help?"

"It might."

"Then tell me, and I will——" She hesitated. "You know that I would hold anything you said like a sacred trust."

"I know. You don't have to tell me that, Lydia."

Instinctively he patted her hand resting on his arm. With quick instinct she clasped his hand in a firm and friendly handshake, as though they were sealing a compact. Then she perched on the piano stool and said, "Now, what is the trouble?"

"Lydia," he began, "I have done a wrong thing and it haunts me. I have betrayed the trust of my best friend. You know I had a friend who died?"

"Yes, you told me once."

"Well, he left me sole executor of his estate. He came into my office one day and we went into everything. I think he knew then that he was doomed. He had been working very hard, so that his wife would be provided for in case anything happened to him. We talked for a long time. It was the last time we ever had a talk together. Among other things, he spoke of some bonds he had. He was always buying bonds, from the time he first began to earn money. He had great faith, he used to say, in good, safe bonds. He advised me to keep them, but to invest his life insurance and other securities as I saw fit. 'But hang on to those bonds', he said. 'I'm sure of them'. Then he added, 'I have implicit faith in your judgment. You know more about these things than I do'. At the time I felt he was right. In his will he left me full control."

"The last time I saw him was in the hospital. The end was very near. I can see his face now, so white and drawn. He could only speak in a whisper, but he told me never to let his wife have anything to do about handling the capital. 'She is a child about money matters', he said. 'She would go through it in no time. I want to be

satisfied that Cora always has enough to live on'. That was the last word he ever said to me."

"Well, I did the best I could, investing the life insurance money and watching the other securities pretty carefully, but I kept the bonds until last summer. Some man told Cora that bonds were a poor investment and advised selling them and buying mining stock. Of course I refused to do it, but the woman pestered me continually. She would come to my office every few days till I was nearly distracted. She is an impossible person. Finally, I looked into the mining company and found the reports were excellent. Cora was always pleading poverty and an investment in the mining stock would certainly increase her income.

"Wilcox advised it. He thought it a good buy and he often has more insight than I have. I never felt right about it, though. However, it seemed all right for a while. The stock paid good dividends and the reports were good when other mining stock had slumped. About a month ago, I heard rumors that made me uneasy. I tried to get rid of the stock then, but I couldn't. There were meetings and investigations. Hobbs, the man who promoted the company, was very plausible and he assured everyone that they were perfectly solvent. He was a clever rascal. We discovered that he had been making false reports and the investigations continued. Today we heard that he had left the city. His wife does not know where he is and rumor says he has left her penniless. There is a meeting going on now with the auditors and shareholders. Wilcox insisted on going in my place. It seemed like shirking, but he can do better than I, and I had stood about all I could endure. I am waiting now for him to telephone me the result of the meeting."

"I understand how you must feel," Lydia said sympathetically, "but I think you blame yourself too much. As I see it the woman is to blame."

"Yes, but I was told never to let her have anything to do with the disposal of the capital. In any other case I would feel exonerated from blame, but this is different. I have betrayed the trust of the best friend I ever had. Always his white face haunts me and his words come back to me again and again whenever I am alone. They haunt me at night when I cannot sleep. There is no escape. I think they will haunt me always, as long as I live."

"Try not to feel so discouraged, sir," Lydia said gently. "Don't let it down you. There must be a way out. You will see things more clearly when you are feeling better. Tonight you are completely worn out."

"I don't know how the woman will ever manage with nearly a third of her income gone. She never thought she had enough to live on as it was."

"Could not she do something to earn money? She would probably be happier if

she had work to do."

"No, she is the most helpless creature I ever knew. If I could afford it I would gladly pay her the interest on those bonds, but, as things are now I don't see how I could possibly do it. Business has not been very good lately and my own private income has dwindled considerably. At present the expenses of the office and this place are about all I can keep up. I don't go in for expensive luxuries, and I cannot see how I could economize enough to make up all that interest."

"If you could do that, would you feel relieved?"

"Yes, I think I would. If I could make any sacrifice I would have a feeling that I was expiating my sins."

"There is always a way out," she repeated.

"I hope there may be," he said hopelessly, "but I can't think what it might be. My mind refuses to think. All I can remember is that haunting face."

He shuddered and dropped his head on his arms at the desk where he was sitting in an abandonment of tragic misery.

Lydia was distressed. She had never seen him like this, he was always so calm, so self-sufficient, so detached. She knew he was suffering from a form of nervous exhaustion brought on by anxiety and lack of food and sleep. He could not go on like this much longer. What in the world could she do? She went into the dining-room and poured out a glass of port and brought it in to him.

"Drink this, sir," she said. "It will help you."

He raised his head and took the glass, sipping it mechanically as though he were unconscious of the act. Then he seemed to revive and said, "Thank you, Lydia, you are always so thoughtful. I don't know what I should have done if you had not been here tonight. I felt for a moment that I might be losing my mind."

"Lack of sleep will make you feel like that sometimes. Now drink up the rest of the wine and you will feel better."

He drank it obediently and handed her the empty glass. She carried it out to the kitchen for want of something to do.

"Don't go, Lydia," he called after her.

"I will be right back in a minute," she assured him.

She built up the fire in the stove, hoping that she could persuade him to take something hot later on. She poured soup into a saucepan and set it at the back of the stove.

When she returned she stopped short in the doorway, hesitating whether to retreat, for in his hand was the little red case and he was gazing at its contents with deep, pathetic eyes. Her one instinct was to disappear as quietly as possible. She

could not believe that he would want to be caught crystal-gazing. Rather surprisingly, however, he said, "Come here, Lydia, I want to show you something."

This was so unexpected that she felt embarrassed as she went forward, with the feeling of one entering forbidden ground.

"Look," he said, "is not that a beautiful thing?"

Now, at last, the mystery that had puzzled her for over a year was to be solved. Her hand trembled slightly as she took from him the opened case and held it in her palm. What she saw was a portrait, painted on ivory, of a very lovely young woman dressed in eighteenth-century costume. The eyes were dark and mysterious. The firm, imperious little mouth suggested a touch of defiant humor. The hair was dark and unpowdered, with a delicate lace cap set back from the face. One slender hand held her *fichu* in place. Her dress was of rich copper-coloured satin, exquisitely painted, with touches of yellow in the highlights, and shading to deep crimson in the folds. The portrait gave the impression of youth and gaiety combined with dignity and poise.

Lydia gazed at it intently. The face so vivid and yet so calm seemed like one she must have known in some far-off childish dream.

"You like it, don't you?" he asked.

"It is beautiful," Lydia replied. "Who was she?"

"She was the black sheep of the family in Revolutionary days. I discovered her in an old leather trunk in which my father kept old papers and documents. I had to look over them after he died, and when I had taken them all out of the trunk I noticed that a very old newspaper covered the bottom. I took it out to read and then saw this little red morocco case hidden underneath. I opened it and found it contained this lovely miniature. I could not understand why anything so beautiful had been hidden away for so many years."

"Did you ever find out?" Lydia asked.

"Yes, my mother told me the story. It seems that this little lady, at the age of seventeen, eloped with a young captain in the King's forces on the eve of her wedding day. The marriage was not to her liking and had been arranged by her parents, after the manner of the times. So she took the law into her own hands and ran off with the man of her choice. Her father was a strong Revolutionist and had threatened to disinherit her if she had any further intercourse with the captain, who was an enemy to the cause of liberty. The story goes that she got ahead of her stern parent by taking with her a handsome silver tankard that was to have been part of her dowry."

Lydia was still gazing at the miniature. "I could never imagine this imperious little

lady submitting to the wishes of her family if she wanted to marry the captain," she said. "What was his name?"

"That I don't know. I wish I did, but I can find no record of it anywhere. For years I have tried to find some trace of her or of their descendants. Not knowing the captain's name has made it practically impossible, but I have never given up hope.

"My grandfather made an intensive search for the tankard, I believe, but never found it. He left a paper describing it minutely. It was of plain Dutch design with a circular handle ending in a round disc on which were the initials C.B.T. The little lady left a note to say that she had a perfect right to take the tankard as her dowry, but the old man pronounced her a common thief and her name was never afterwards mentioned in the family."

"I feel that she had a right to the tankard, don't you?"

"Yes, certainly she had, but I am the only member of my family that ever thought so. I have given her absolution, and I always carry her picture in my pocket. I like to take it out and look at it sometimes. It is such a companionable little face and the whole story appealed to me strongly in the days of my romantic youth."

He seemed quieter now and more normal. Lydia hoped that the story had taken his mind off his troubles.

"What was the lady's name?" she asked.

"Strange to say it was Lydia—Lydia Trancher."

"Now I understand why you did not want to call me Lydia. You need not have done so. Why did you?"

"I know I need not have done so. What I don't know is why I did. I could not seem to call you anything else."

He leaned back in the chair and closed his eyes. He seemed limp and tired now, but she was thankful to see him calmer. She felt that he did not care to talk any more, yet she did not want to leave him. She closed the red case and left it on the desk beside him. Then, unmindful of barriers, sat down again on the piano stool. There seemed nothing further that she could do.

She swung around on the stool and facing the piano looked at the sheet of music on the rack. It was Beethoven's minuet. Her fingers fell upon the keys. Very softly she drew from them the first plaintive notes of the minuet. Then on till they were gaily tripping in soft cadence. She thought, as she played, how gracefully the little lady in the miniature would have danced that minuet. How lightly would she "tread a measure" to such music.

She next realized that behind her the master was reaching for his violin that lay on top of the piano.

"I will begin again from the first," she said, deftly changing to the accompaniment, as he drew his bow across the strings. They played the minuet through, both lost in the soothing enchantment of its harmony. Trancher replaced the violin very quietly.

"Where did you learn to play like that, Lydia?" he asked.

"Oh," she said, "my old grandfather got the idea that I was divinely gifted, though I don't think I was, and he had me take music lessons."

"You certainly profited by them."

Suddenly the telephone rang loudly and he snatched the receiver nervously. Wilcox was speaking. She recognized the intonation of his voice, but could not distinguish the words. The news was evidently not good. She saw the drawn and anxious look return to Trancher's face as he talked. "Yes. Yes, very well," he answered. "Yes, I can come in. No, it is not too late. No, I think I had better come tonight. I want to talk to you. Can you wait at the office until I get there? Thank you, Wilcox. Goodbye." He rang off.

"You are not able to go back to the city tonight, sir," Lydia said with real concern in her voice.

"Wilcox thinks I should be there, and really I would rather go. I don't wish to leave all the dirty work to him. I can stay at the club tonight and then I shall be there early in the morning. Some of them think we should see the man's wife. The detectives have interviewed her already. It is a nasty business, but we may unearth something."

"She must feel terribly," Lydia said.

"They say the poor woman is perfectly innocent and anxious to do all she can."

"Do you really feel able to go out tonight?"

"Oh, yes, I feel much better. You have helped me a great deal, Lydia."

"Wait," she said, "don't go till I get you something to eat. You had hardly any dinner."

"I don't feel in the least hungry."

"That does not matter. You must eat something. You will feel faint if you don't."

She brought him a cup of hot soup and sandwiches and he ate them to please her. She followed him to the door, turned on the porch light and anxiously watched him go out into the night alone.

She called after him, "Please telephone me before you leave the office or I shall be worried about you."

"Yes, I will," he called back as he walked down the path. "I won't forget."

As Stephen Trancher, on his way to the city, stood by the ferry railing, looking

out on the harbour lights, he experienced a temporary rest from the remorse that had haunted him. Calmer and happier things seemed to be floating over his weary mind. He thought of Lydia's keen appreciation of his beloved miniature, of the minuet they had played together and the relief he had felt in talking with her. He also remembered the touch of her hand on his arm. Somewhere in life there might be something worth the effort of living.

CHAPTER XIII

Lydia remained by the telephone that evening waiting for him to call. She felt dazed and limp, as though she had been caught in a storm. She had dropped into a large armchair and sat there dreamily trying to fathom the chain of circumstances that had shaped the character of this strange man whom she now served.

She pictured him as a child with his beautiful and devoted mother who read him fairy tales. Possibly the memory of those fairy tales had lured him through his college days towards the classics and a wider understanding of the best in literature. He had a fantastic mind, she thought. She saw him drawn into a business for which he had no especial liking and when still young taking the responsibility for an ailing father and later carrying it on for the sake of his widowed mother. And when she, too, was gone there was nothing left for him to do but live on in the large, empty house filled with memories and the companionship of books. A life solitary and detached, but sometimes lighted by the picture he so greatly admired, the picture of a young and beautiful woman who had lived in a bygone age. She had heard of people falling in love with a picture, even as Pygmalion and the beautiful ivory statue. She recalled the rapt, intent look of the crystal-gazer. That was just a kind of substitute for romance, she thought, now that she knew what he saw in the crystal. She felt that she began to understand his strange, elusive, almost fantastic, mentality.

On the desk beside her lay the miniature in its red case where she had laid it. For once the master had forgotten to replace it in his pocket. She took it up and looked at the lovely face again. The wide, mysterious eyes, the imperious little mouth, the elfish look that suggested mischief. There was witchery in that face—one never really fathomed it. I don't blame him, she thought, if he did fall in love with it. It is different from an ordinary photograph. The artist has idealized it. That is the thing that captivated him. It is the same with poetry. He likes it because it idealizes life and nature and the classics. The radio and the movies give him too much present-day New York stuff, so he despises them.

Lydia leaned back in the chair and closed her eyes, thinking of the minuet that at last they had played together. The evening wore on and she dozed off into unconsciousness. Suddenly the loud ring of the telephone beside her brought her startled to her feet. She hastened to answer it.

"Is that you, Lydia?" the master's familiar voice came through to her.

"Yes. Are you all right, sir?"

"Yes, I feel much better now. I am just leaving for the club."

"Try to get some sleep tonight. How are things going?"

"Rather badly."

"Never mind, there will be a way out. Don't worry, just believe what I tell you."

"I will try to do that, Lydia. By the way, are you afraid to stay alone in the house?"

"No. What is there to be afraid of?"

"Are you sure you don't mind?"

"Quite sure."

"I could come home if you were."

"No, don't think of it. I won't mind in the least."

"Very well, then. Good night and thank you for all you have done for me."

"I don't feel that I did very much."

"You played the minuet for me."

"I loved doing that. Good night, sir."

"Good night, Lydia."

When she hung up the receiver she remembered that she had heard something drop to the floor when she had jumped up to answer the 'phone. What was it? She looked down and to her horror saw the red case lying there open, and beside it the little gold frame that held the miniature, face down on the rug. That was the crash she had heard when only half awake she had made a startled dash for the telephone. The case had been on her lap when she closed her eyes. Oh, why had she ever touched it? Suppose the thing had broken! Her heart beat with tragic terror. She stood for a moment afraid to investigate. She turned on the desk light. It lit up a circle of the floor and revealed little highlights of broken glass fragments scattered around the frame. The sight sickened her. In despair she sat down on the floor and picked them up, one by one. Evidently the thing had hit the leg of the desk and been shattered on the brass castor. How could she ever face the master when he returned. How tell him that she had destroyed his most treasured possession, when he was already suffering from other anxieties? This was the last straw! She had no business to touch it. If she had only given it back into his hand he would then have placed it safely in his pocket. With a sinking feeling of dread she lifted the tiny gold frame. It was empty save for a scrap of old and yellowed paper with some words written in faded ink. The glass had broken in three main pieces; the rest was in slivers on the rug. The lady herself seemed to have vanished altogether.

Lydia set the lamp on the floor and finally discovered the small ivory disc face downward under the piano stool. She picked up all the fragments of glass and placed them in a paper on the desk. Then she sat down disconsolately looking at the wreckage. She saw with thankful relief that the picture itself was uninjured. The ivory

was unbroken and the painting not even scratched. She tied up the fragments of glass in her handkerchief. They were no good now, she knew, but they were the broken crystal, the lens through which Stephen Trancher had for years gazed—not into the future but into the past. They were a kind of sacred symbol—she could not throw them away.

She took the gold frame in her hand and tried to make out the writing on the paper. It had been written with a very fine pen and she could decipher only a word here and there. The paper had been doubled and turned down at the corners to fit the frame. She took it out and smoothed the wrinkles. Still she could decipher only a few words at a time. She found a magnifying glass and tried again. Bit by bit it began to make sense. She reached for a pad and pencil and wrote the words as they became clear to her. Soon she realized that the broken crystal had revealed the past to her. With amazement she read over the words she had written down.

> "*My erring daughter Lydia whose portrait is depicted within this frame, did, in the year 1783, wantonly and against my strict commands, leave my house with one Nathaniel Allen, a Captain in the King's forces and a Tory, the enemy of our country. Moreover these two persons did unwarrantably remove from my possession a valuable silver tankard, to which they had no lawful right, and for such unpardonable deeds I do now declare that this my daughter be cut off from the heritage of any portion of my property and estate and from all connection with my honourable family.* (Signed) *Bartholomew Trancher*."

Lydia, dazed and dumbfounded, sat looking at the paper with incredulous eyes. So the crystal that had so long concealed the name of the missing captain had, when broken, revealed it. But, as she gazed at the name Nathaniel Allen, another and more astonishing fact was revealed to her, for it was the name of her own ancestor who with his wife Lydia, for whom she herself had been named, had come with the Loyalist exiles to the River Saint John and had received as a royal grant the land that was now her heritage. They had reclaimed the land from the forest and built the house which was her home. Slowly she began to grasp the full meaning of the situation. It meant that she herself was the one and only direct descendant of this Lydia Trancher for whom Stephen Trancher had been searching for so many years. Of course, there might have been two Nathaniel Allens. It was not an uncommon name, but it was unlikely they would both have wives named Lydia. Then she

remembered, like a flash, the silver tankard that ever since she could remember had stood on the sideboard at home. Could it be the same that the runaway bride had stolen for her dowry? She remembered there were initials on the disc at the foot of the handle. What were they? She had polished the old tankard often enough to know, but she could not remember. Initials had not meant much to her then. They would mean so much now. That were the initials he had told her about?—C.B.T. If her tankard had the same, it would prove everything.

Faint memories came back to her—stories her grandfather had told of a lady in the olden days who let herself down from her chamber window by clinging to the vines and alighted on a pillion behind her lover. There were other memories, too. As a tiny child she had seen her mother dressed for a masquerade ball given in Fredericton. The dress she had worn was copper-colored. She had a faint vision of seeing her take it out of an old hair-covered trunk in the attic. She remembered the trunk, it was studded with brass-headed tacks and covered with calf-hide. Janet had always held it in great respect and as a child she had not been allowed to open it. The trunk was still there in the attic at home. She wondered if the dress was still in it and if it could possibly be the same as the one in the miniature. She really could not recall any of the details. It might not look at all the same if she saw it now.

It might be less difficult to make the confession about the broken crystal if she could at the same time tell the master of the secret it had disclosed. He had searched for years trying to find some clue that would give him the name of Lydia Trancher's husband and the whereabouts of their descendants, and now she, by accident, had discovered it for him. She would have to tell him of the accident, but, after all, the painting itself was not damaged, and if a crystal could be replaced in a watch it ought not to be a difficult matter to replace one in the little gold frame. It might not be such a calamity as she had at first thought.

Then another side of the question loomed up. Could she tell him her side of the story? Would he like it? How would he feel if she, his maid, presented herself as a descendant of the Lydia Trancher he had long been seeking? She thought it all over as she sat there alone in the empty house. She thought of her own Janet. Supposing by some strange circumstance it was revealed that Janet had a distant connection with her own family, would she herself be very pleased about it? No, she reflected, she certainly would not. The discovery might create an uncomfortable situation. She loved Janet dearly. Janet had brought her up, but such a revelation would tend to disturb the happy relationship that now existed between them.

She would not tell him, not yet, at any rate. Some day after she had gone home she might write and say that she had found some records that would interest him and

suggest that he come and see them. Some day, when years had dimmed the memory of her servitude and she could meet him on her own ground, she would tell him then, but this was not the time or the place. Better let him go on with the search. After all, it gave him an interest in life.

She looked again at the broken fragments on the table. She folded the paper in the worn creases in which it had remained for so many years and replaced it in the gold frame with the ivory miniature over it. Then she looked ruefully at the broken crystal. He would have to be told about that. Suddenly it came to her that she might take it into the city early in the morning and if they could replace it at once she could wait for it to be done and bring it home before he returned in the evening. He need never know of the accident if only she could have the necessary work done at once.

She put the miniature back carefully in the red case and took it up to her room. Now she could go to bed and sleep in peace. Tomorrow she would take it to the city.

CHAPTER XIV

Returning on the ferry next day, the miniature safe in her handbag with a brand new crystal that would tell no tales, Lydia still enjoyed that exquisite feeling of relief. It had all been quite simple. She had taken it first to a jeweller, a very nice man, who said that undoubtedly the crystal could be replaced, but recommended her to another shop where they made a specialty of framing miniatures. "They'll fix you up all right there," he said, and wrote the address for her on a card.

The man at the next place also had been very kind and said, "This is an extremely fine eighteenth-century miniature. Some ancestor of yours?"

"Yes," she had answered, hesitatingly, and wondered if she had told the truth.

"It resembles you," he said pleasantly, and she had replied, "Does it really?" He asked if nobody had ever told her so before, to which she replied that nobody ever had.

She watched him while he hunted among several small oval crystals until he finally selected one that was the exact fit. He had polished the crystal and replaced it in the frame. She had paid him and left the shop rejoicing.

Now she sat looking out at the harbour and the busy little tugboats with their rings of black smoke trailing from the funnels. Strange that anything so flimsy as steam could have such power.

She had other things to think of besides the miniature. The master need not now be told about the revelation of the broken crystal. The urgent problem was to find some way to ease his mind of the remorse that he suffered on account of the fatal investment. She felt convinced that if he continued long under the nervous tension which he was now suffering, a complete breakdown would follow. Something must be done to avoid that. Surely there was some way out. She had told him so, but he was too distracted then to look at things calmly. She would have to think it out herself. But when the ferry docked at Staten Island she had found no solution.

Her first act after entering the house was to place the little red case beside the telephone where she had found it. All day, as she worked about the house, the problem was still with her. Late in the afternoon she picked up the morning paper and sat down to rest. The paper had once solved her own problem, it might guide her to the way out of the present difficulty. She turned to the advertisements instinctively. People seemed to be advertising for houses, furnished houses, outside the city. That gave her an idea. Before she heard the master's latch-key in the door she had formulated a plan. She was laying the table when he came in to the library and she noticed that he had changed to his smoking-jacket and hoped it meant that

he would not have to go out again.

"Lydia," he called to her, "did you see anything of the red case with the miniature I showed you last evening?"

"Yes, sir, it is on the desk in the living-room."

"Oh, I am glad. I was afraid I might have lost it somewhere. I usually carry it in my pocket."

When he came in for dinner he looked tired and haggard. Lydia urged him to eat something, which he did to please her.

After she had cleared the table she took the paper in to him.

"You were not here to get your morning paper," she said. "I had it out in the kitchen. I thought you might want to see it." Then she inquired if he had found a way out of his troubles.

"There is no way out," he said. "I have had an awful day. There is absolutely no hope. Everything has gone. If there is anything left, the lawyers will get it. Nothing can be done, nothing. I have gone over the case again and again till my mind refuses to work."

"Try not to worry about it to-night," she suggested.

"I can stand worry," he said. "There is always something to worry about in business, but I cannot stand being haunted." He looked at her with a weary pathos in his sunken eyes from which the youthful look had vanished completely.

"Would you let me do a little thinking for you?" she asked gently.

"You are always thinking for me, Lydia." He looked up at her with a wan smile like a ray of sunlight that tries to penetrate the fog.

"I have a suggestion to make," she began bravely. "Now tell me, did you mean it when you said that if you could afford it you would make up the amount of interest on those bonds yourself?"

"Yes, I meant it, but I don't see how I can do it; not as things are just now. A few years ago I could have managed it, but just now all business is in a precarious state. Our own overhead expenses at the office are sometimes greater than the returns, and my private income has gone down considerably. At present my hands are tied. I cannot meet any more obligations than I already have."

"How would it work out if you took rooms in the city and rented this house? Just for a time, you know, until business improves or until you can think of something better."

Trancher looked at her blankly. Lydia went on rapidly, "You could get a good rent for this house. People are trying to get places near the city where they can go back and forth to their businesses. Look at all those advertisements for places like

that. I noticed them in the paper this afternoon and that gave me the idea."

"Very true," he murmured, rather indifferently. "There is always a demand for houses here during the summer and the rents are high."

"I have figured it up," she continued, "and I believe you could board in the city for what you pay for keeping up this place. You would not have to pay me, or the chore-man, or the grocery bill or for light and fuel and water and lots of other small expenses that mount up in the course of a year. Now would the rent for this place be enough to pay the interest on those bonds for Mrs. Farquhar?"

"It would go a long way to help and I might manage to make up the difference."

"Then why don't you try it? You won't like it, I know, but it might restore your peace of mind."

"I'd hate it," he said, and sat for a time in silence, looking at the fire. The silence lasted so long that she feared his words were final. She dared not press the subject any further.

At length he sat up straight and, looking at her with something of his old forcefulness, said, "I believe you are right, Lydia. I hate the thought of any change, but I would feel that I was doing something to make amends. I have done a cowardly thing, betrayed the trust of a friend, just because I could not stand that woman eternally bothering me. This would be a kind of burnt offering and sacrifice for which I pray I may receive absolution."

"I hoped you would see it like that, sir. Now we had better get the thing settled before you have too much time to think about it."

She took up the paper again. "There are one or two of these ads that I thought looked quite promising. One gives a telephone number. Would you like me to call them up and you could talk to them?"

"No, not tonight, Lydia. I had better make a few inquiries about the value of rents out here. I can get Tony to write these people after I find out and can name the price. Let me look at the paper."

She handed it to him, saying reassuringly, "You need not have a bit of worry about moving. I can go into the city tomorrow and look up rooms for you, or would you want to stay at your club?"

"No, that would be too expensive. I would not save much. Besides, the accommodation at the club is more for transients. I might give up the club if I stayed in the city. That would be another saving. I only belong to it because it is a convenient place to stay if I have to remain in the city overnight. And if I am to practise rigid economy, I must not be tempted to entertain my friends at a club. All I need is some inexpensive little room, a kind of cell in which I can do penance."

"Very well, I'll find one for you and you can come and inspect it when I get something I think is suitable. We can make it look quite home-like if we take in your desk and chair and some of your books. It may not be as bad as you think after you get used to it."

Lydia tried to speak cheerfully, but she realized painfully what the wrench would mean to him.

"Then when I get you settled I can stay on and clean the house and put things away and make it ready for tenants. You need not have any bother about it at all. Maggie will help me if I need her."

"You rather take my breath away, Lydia."

"I suppose I do, but it is the best way really. Get it over with right away. You will just keep on being haunted until it breaks you if you don't do something quite drastic at once. You will be better off doing what you don't like if only it brings you peace of mind. It may be just a temporary exile till you can see things more clearly. At the moment it seems the only way out."

"You are a wise woman, Lydia. I may do it just without thinking about it as you suggest. This place is a luxury. I don't need to live in a big house all by myself, especially when I have squandered money that did not belong to me. I believe," he said, looking at her with the old twisted half-smile, "I really believe you have found the way out."

"I am so glad you think so," she said triumphantly. "I will go in tomorrow morning and look for your room."

"Very well," he said resignedly. "Let's see what the paper has to say about bachelor apartments."

He took up the paper and looked over the list of rooms for rent. "No use," he said, "to look in a fashionable quarter of the city, the rent would be too high. Just get some place that would be clean and fairly comfortable. The more I have to sacrifice, the better the cure, according to your idea."

"That was your idea."

"Was it? Well, it is a good idea anyway." Again he smiled at her and then asked suddenly, "If I lose this house, Lydia, where will you go?"

"I can go home."

"Yes, I see."

He gave her a searching look with his sad, deep-set eyes, a look that she could not fathom. She did not want him to question her about home, so quietly slipped away.

Home! Now, at last, she was free to go home. She had hardly realized that the

plans she had been making for him would solve her own problem as well. She had not done it for herself, in fact she had fully resolved that, for the present, home was out of the question. The realization came to her more fully as she sat alone in the kitchen. Home—it would be April at home by the time she got there, if arrangements here could be made as quickly as she hoped. The ice would be going out of the river and the snow melting, with patches of bare ground showing through, growing wider each day. There would be colour returning to the leafless branches in the swamp, yellow to the willows and red to the alders and squaw bush. Birds would come hopping about the dooryard in search of crumbs. Little fox sparrows and juncos. The spring ploughing would soon begin. She could plan the crops herself this spring and Jake would probably grumble about it, but she had studied about rotation of crops and she knew best. Some day, when the weather grew warmer, she would invite John and Elsie over for supper. By that time the new rhubarb stalks would be up in the garden and Janet would make them a rhubarb pie. She could go to Fredericton for the dance at the college closing. She would begin to really live again. This life that she had spent here would fade away into a strange dream, a very interesting dream, but not reality.

She arose from her reverie and began washing the dinner dishes. When putting them away in the pantry she stole a glance through the open slide and saw the man whom she had served in the garb of a servant for over a year, so alone, so reserved, and, in a way, so helpless.

Every man is helpless without a woman, she thought, remembering the many months that had passed, during which it had been her chief care to look after him, cook his meals, keep his house in order, mend his clothes, and send them to the cleaners, press his dress suit and bring him cocoa in the evening. What would he do without all that? Sit during the evening in some small room in a city skyscraper, away from his books and his fireplace, doing penance like some lone anchorite, his only consolation the fact that he was paying for a mistake that had been forced upon him.

She had long ago noticed that he had a fantastic imagination, bred of youthful fairy tales read to him by a doting mother and later fostered by an intimate knowledge of the Victorian poets, and now haunted by the accusing face of his dead friend to whom he continually would offer the burnt sacrifice of a penitent exile. It was better, perhaps, but her heart went out to him and she felt a sharp pang of regret at the thought of leaving. But there was nothing that could be done about it. All she wanted now was to get things settled and over with and then—home!

The next morning she went to the city and spent weary hours looking at rooms. She had in mind what she wanted, but it seemed difficult to find. The nicest rooms

were all too expensive and most of the others were too awful to be considered. Finally she found one that she felt might do. It had possibilities and was within walking distance of the office. The wallpaper was dark and rather dingy, but the landlord said he was going to have the room repapered, and if she liked she could choose the new one. He had a book of samples, and they looked over them together. Lydia chose a pretty, light, lattice-figured paper in tones of cream and grey. She asked if she might move in the desk and chair and some books and was told that it would be permissible and, if needed, a bookcase would be supplied. She left, saying that she would have the gentleman look at the room and, if satisfactory to him, he would take it.

That evening she learned that Tony had found a favourable prospect in the way of a tenant, and Trancher promised to move into the city as soon as the room was ready. Lydia went to see Maggie to ask if she would render help and advice about getting the house ready for tenants.

Maggie was highly indignant on hearing of such drastic changes in the master's affairs and wrathfully denounced Mrs. Farquhar as a she-devil. Lydia explained as much of the affair as she thought she should be told, and Maggie finally conceded that the new arrangement might be best for the present. She promised to come and help when she could.

CHAPTER XV

Three weeks later Lydia was on the train travelling homeward. They had been the busiest three weeks she had ever experienced. She was thankful now to rest idly on the plush seat in the speeding train, her travelling bags beside her, and revel in the thought of seeing again the river and the fir trees and the old home. She had worked hard to make the master's new room look cosy and home-like, and to a certain extent she felt she had succeeded. The new wallpaper was a great success and made the room look larger, though it still gave the suggestion of a cell after the wide and pleasant library. The chair and desk seemed to overcrowd it.

When she had established him there she and Maggie had tackled the house, which was a more difficult job than she had anticipated. There were so many things to be sorted and stored away and other things that needed replenishing. Maggie had been invaluable and they had got through with it somehow.

That afternoon she had telephoned Trancher at his office to say goodbye. He sounded fairly cheerful and, much to her surprise, he inquired what time her train left and said he would see her at the station. He came, bringing her a book to read on the journey and sat with her in the car until it was time to leave.

Barriers did not matter so much now that she was leaving the white apron behind forever.

"You have been very good to me, Lydia," he said, "and I appreciate it all more than I can tell you. I don't know what I shall do without you. I suppose that it is part of the penance. I wanted to tell you this so I came to see you off."

"I have been very happy working for you, Mr. Trancher," she replied.

"And I have been very happy having you work for me. I don't like to think of you going off alone like this into some far country."

"But I am going home!" she said exultantly. "It is my own country and my own people that I am going to."

"I suppose so," he said wistfully.

They were silent for a time, as people are who momentarily expect the whistle of a train to separate them. The time is too short for all that could be said and the precious minutes should not be used for trivial talk.

Then Lydia said, "I hope you won't be lonely in your little cell. Remember it is only temporary. We can stand anything if we know it won't last forever. I will worry about you if I think you are not contented."

"Oh, I feel quite resigned at present. Don't worry about me, Lydia. I brought this on myself and I am willing to pay the penalty. I fear, however, that this situation may

last for years. I cannot consider it as only temporary. It is permanent unless I have a change of fortune."

"Don't think about it too much. Remember life is for the living not for the dead. They are in peace."

He did not reply, only looked at her with his slow twisted smile, which meant to her far more than words.

A boy came through the car selling papers and he bought one for her. A distant whistle sounded and there was the stir of impending departure.

"I suppose I had better go," he said, rising. They shook hands and he said, "Will you let me know if you arrive safely? I hate to see you go. Everything has gone from me and now you are going, too."

"I will be sure to write you."

"Yes, do. Goodbye, Lydia."

"Goodbye, Mr. Trancher," and he was gone.

The train wrenched itself to a start and soon was pounding on and on, leaving the great city far behind and bringing her mile by mile, and hour by hour, nearer home.

Lydia opened the book Trancher had given her. It was not poetry this time but a new novel that had gained considerable popularity. She had seen it reviewed and had been anxious to read it. Inside the cover was a slip of paper on which he had written, "I read this book the other day and liked it, though I don't often admire modern fiction. This seems well done and above the average. The heroine reminded me of you. She could always find a way out of difficulties. Best wishes for the journey. Stephen Trancher."

Lydia was thrilled. It certainly was good of him to be so thoughtful for her. She cherished the warm happiness that it brought her as the train sped on into the evening and the daylight faded and the lights came on.

She glanced over the headlines in the paper he had got for her, then opened the book and started reading. It was a strong, forceful novel with a good plot and pleasant romance running through it, with touches of humour and a rather unusual philosophy of life and short, vivid descriptions.

She read on with absorbing interest until the porter came round to make up her berth. She thought about the story before she went to sleep, remembering certain passages that she would like to discuss with him. No more talks on books, now. Never again would she carry in his tray of cocoa at ten o'clock. She would miss him; yes, she would miss him very much. She had hardly realized it until now. She might never see him again. With a pang of regret she thought that the train which was

bearing her hourly nearer home was also widening the distance between this man who had not only been her master but her friend.

She recalled some of the tender love scenes in the book he had given her and wondered how he had taken them. Would he understand what it was all about? Perhaps he had just skipped that chapter. She wondered what he would say if she could ask him. Probably treat the subject with a bit of whimsical humor and refer to his fixed disapproval of matrimonial alliances. Oh, would there never be a happy chance that she would some day meet him again? Well, anyway, she could write to him, and he would surely answer the letter. It might develop into a pleasant correspondence. She could tell him about the books she was reading and about her lovely country and the farm and the river, and perhaps some day he would want to come and see it. Then she could show him a portrait of his lovely Lydia Trancher, painted when she was older and tell him this was the spot where she had lived and died and she would make full confession about the broken crystal and what it had revealed.

That was how it could be done. She would write him some day in the distant future, when their former relationship had faded into the past, and tell him she had found a clue that might interest him and suggest that he come and look into it. Meanwhile she would look up the family records in the old Bible and the initials on the tankard and make quite sure that she was not mistaken. If only she had paid more attention to the old stories that her grandfather used to tell.

She fell asleep with the delicious thought that soon she would be sleeping in her own bed at home.

When she arrived in Saint John she found that the ice was out of the river and the boat on the route again. It would have shortened the journey to go by Fredericton, but she had business in Saint John. She wanted to visit the market and find out what vegetables and fruits were in greatest demand, and also inquire the price of some farm machinery she required. Then, too, she longed to take the trip up the river by boat once more.

She telephoned Jake to be on the lookout for the little steamer and come out to meet her in the rowboat.

Starting on the slow journey up the river, she chatted with Libbey, the deck hand. Libbey knew everybody and regaled her with the latest news and wild tales of the spring freshet which had been very high that year.

Some friends came on board at Gagetown, giving her a cordial welcome. It was joyous to be travelling through the familiar country again, and now she was no longer acting in a play. The role she had taken for a year and a half could be put aside

forever.

The farther up the river they went, the more the sweet feeling of kinship overwhelmed her. This was her land. She belonged here. She knew all the old homes on either side of the river and the people who lived in them. They were her people and she was returning to be one of them again.

At last her own house came in sight and there was Jake pulling out from the shore to meet her and Libbey was preparing to let down the steps over the side, having assembled her luggage on the lower deck.

CHAPTER XVI

Home again! Lydia was entranced by the exultant joy of her returning. Each familiar sound and scent touched her free spirit with renewed delight. The call of a bluejay, the bleating of a lamb, the fresh spring air, bringing to her faint fragrance of fir trees and damp moss, the perfume of early mayflowers, all filled her with a wave of ecstasy.

She threw herself into the work of the farm with all the enthusiasm and energy of her capable young mind and body. She knew what she wanted to do and had made a rough map of the farm, marking the fields, woodlands, and pastures. On this she made notations about crops and their treatment and dates of planting, evolving a scheme by which she hoped to produce the greatest abundance for the smallest expenditure.

Jake and Janet watched her, adoring but anxious when they saw old methods wantonly disregarded. Lydia made concessions to them when she could.

John and Elsie came for supper. It was a pleasant reunion and Janet made the rhubarb pie and they had home-cured ham for supper.

They sat through the long spring twilight looking out on the quiet waters of the river, listening to the piping frogs and the evening call of robins. Elsie talked about the improvements they had made in the house and what they hoped to do in the future and then listened happily while Lydia consulted John about her own affairs.

John urged her not to undertake too much the first year, but approved of her methods in general. Together they planned on forming a co-operative group to purchase the more expensive farm machinery, so that several farmers could have the use of the same machine, and considered other ways of co-operation in transportation and marketing.

Lydia wanted to go in extensively for poultry and John thought that would be profitable if rightly managed. Women were often more successful than men with poultry as they understood better the temperament of the capricious hen, whose maternal instincts had to be reckoned with.

It was very pleasant to be talking with John again. More than ever before she felt the value of his strong, kindly nature. She was glad he had married Elsie. When they had gone she felt elated with a more abundant confidence in the work she had undertaken.

Lydia was so busy and absorbed in all her many activities that ten days elapsed before she finally settled down to write the promised letter to Trancher. She had been thinking about it at intervals and wondered if he would be looking for the letter

or if he had forgotten about it. She set herself to the task on a Sunday afternoon.

There is nothing more serene than an old farmhouse on a Sunday afternoon. Peace and tranquility seem to settle there with folded wings for the day of rest. The idle plow rests in the furrow and tired horses graze in cool pasture lands. Jake, in white shirtsleeves, sat on the back porch while Janet, in her Sunday dress, read to him improving paragraphs from the Sunday page of the *Family Herald*. Cloud shadows played over the greening hillsides beyond the wide river.

In the front room Lydia sat at an old mahogany desk by the window, a blank sheet of writing paper before her. She was looking out of the window. The country is too beautiful for words, she thought. That might be a good sentence with which to begin her letter, so she wrote it down. Having got that far her pen continued to flow readily as she described the delicate springtime landscape. She wanted the letter to be as nearly perfect a piece of composition as she could write and decided to make a rough copy first and then write it over, smoothing out the sentences and leaving out all but the best. The letter must not be too long, not the first one anyway. Four pages of notepaper would be enough and it must not be too flowery.

She wrote of the greening fields and the cloud shadows and the sheep on the pasture lands. She told him she always brought them home to the fold at night herself; she wanted them to get to know her. And told of finding the first mayflowers hidden beneath their shiny leaves in the wood. Then she spoke of her journey home and of the book he had given her, and how she wished she could talk it over with him for she missed his help with her reading. She hoped he found his new quarters comfortable and that everything was going well with him. She would never forget his kindness to her.

Finally the letter was written and rewritten and sealed and stamped and placed in the letter-box for the mailman to collect in the morning. She had revised it many times, cutting out passages and adding others to make a more rhythmic swing to the lines.

She wondered if he would answer it. She thought, on the whole, it was a rather good letter and hoped he would like it. She would not look for an answer for at least a week or perhaps even a fortnight. What kind of a letter would he write her, she wondered, or would he answer it at all? Surely he would write, for she had asked him to let her know how he was getting on. If he took enough interest in her to see her off at the station, she might reasonably expect him to answer a letter.

That evening, as she sat watching the afterglow of sunset fade beyond the river, her thoughts wandered from the problems of fields and flocks and herds that had lately been absorbing all her interest, and there came to her a vivid memory of the

lone man with iron-grey hair who sat reading by the fire and looked up from his book to greet her with a twisted half-smile. An intense longing to see him again swept over her. His presence with her there would make that lovely twilight hour still more perfect. She would love to have him see her home. How he would enjoy the peace of it all and the sunset light on the river. Some day it might happen, but now she could only wait patiently for his letter, and a week seemed a long time to wait.

The week passed and no letter came. Each day she watched eagerly for the postman but watched in vain. By the end of a month she gave up hope and watched no more. He would not write her now. He had forgotten her. She had only been his maid. After all, the letter hardly required an answer. Yet she had been so sure he would write. Why had she so set her heart on getting this letter? He was out of her life now and better forgotten.

Walking down the pasture lane to bring the sheep home at close of day, Lydia waited by the pasture bars to think it over. She had been so happy about coming home, so full of delightful interest in carrying out her plans for the farm. Everything was going well. Why, then, should she suffer this intense disappointment? Why should this poignant longing for a letter overshadow everything? She buried her face upon her arms on the topmost rail. The lovely June evening deepened into night and stars came out one by one. A frail new moon lingered above the tree-tops. The sheep were waiting for her to let down the bars, bleating occasionally to remind her that it was getting dark.

A feeling of deep loneliness crept over her, obscuring all else. If only he would write to her! She wanted to be told that he missed her in the same way that she missed him. Her thoughts carried her far away into a strange dreamland, more beautiful than the lovely afterglow of evening, more remote than the crescent moon sailing above the tree-tops. A land where they two could be together again beyond disturbing barriers. A land wherein they could wander through dim, fragrant woodlands and she could talk to him openly and freely; show him the value of companionship and life and love and a perfect understanding. The thought lured her on through unimaginable dreams as the fading twilight obscured the world. How did it all happen? she asked herself as the dream faded.

There in the soft, sweet-scented dusk, she went over everything from the day she had sat alone on the bench in Madison Square when the wind of fate had blown the paper to her among the fallen leaves, then the evening that she had asked him to lend her a book, and the pleasant talks they had had together, his brilliant understanding and keen appreciation of the best in literature. His whimsical way of putting things and his genuine pleasure when he found that she understood and

enjoyed the books he recommended. Then there was the Christmas party and that wonderful and terrible evening when she had broken the crystal.

She knew now without a doubt that she was descended from his Lydia Trancher. She had found the initials C.B.T. on the tankard and had looked up the records in the family Bible. There could be no shadow of doubt about it. She could solve the mystery for him with absolute proof, but she would not do it. No, if he did not think enough of her to answer her letter, he need never know that she was connected with his family. She would never tell him. Never! she thought stubbornly. And letting the sheep through the bars she followed them down the lane in the starlight.

That night, before she went to bed, she collected the two books he had given her and placed them in a box. She took off her wrist watch and laid it beside them. She opened a small drawer in the table by her bed and took out a crumpled paper containing the fragments of the broken crystal. This also she put in the box, closed the cover, and tied it up firmly. There was in her room a dark closet, where one of the floor-boards was loose with a hollow space below it where the rough old rafters showed underneath. Lydia remembered, as a child, she had buried an old doll there, pretending it had died.

Grimly she lifted the loose board and dropped the box into the dark space below. "Dead and buried," she murmured to herself. "It is the only thing to do. I must forget."

Through the long night, as she tossed sleeplessly on her bed, she felt as though she had buried something that was part of her life. "Dead and buried. Dead and buried." The words kept recurring again and again to her tortured mind, like some mournful requiem. Then the refrain changed to, "Buried alive! Buried alive!"

She sat up and cried out in the darkness as though some answering call had caught up the words "It is not alive, I have killed it! It was meant for love, but I have buried it!" Then she sank down exhausted till blessed sleep soothed her distress.

Next morning her buoyant spirit reacted to the vigorous joy of youth and life and work. She resolved to put the whole matter out of her life forever. It was all past and over. She would forget about the letter and look for it no more. If it should come, she would be interested to read it, but it had better not come. Perhaps he had realized that. He was a gentleman of the old school and she had been his maid. He could never think of her in any other light. She was foolish to look for anything else. Just what had she expected, anyway? Life was full enough for her here and now. Plenty to interest her, plenty of friends. She was living a normal, happy existence. That evening she and John and Elsie and an old college friend of John's were going to Fredericton for the dance. What more did she want? She loved to dance.

Valiantly, with determined effort, she put the thought of Stephen Trancher out of her mind completely.

CHAPTER XVII

One evening in early summer Stephen Trancher returned to his room exhausted. The day had been excessively hot. Things were not going well at the office. Wilcox was away on a much-needed holiday and it always worried him to have Wilcox away. Then poor old Chadwick had been seized with a stroke. Tony had found him slumped in his chair unconscious. A doctor was summoned and later Chadwick had been removed to a hospital where he subsequently died. After all this excitement no one seemed able to settle down to the daily routine. Everything went wrong and the sight of old Chadwick's helpless, vacant face was a ghastly memory. And, to crown all, Cora Farquhar had paid one of her periodic calls at the office.

Cora was more exasperating than ever.

"I don't understand, Stephen," she said plaintively, "why you should think it necessary to give up your house in Staten Island. Surely it could not have cost you much to live there when you have no family to support and no social expenses. I think you would get on better if you were not so penurious."

He had never told Cora the sacrifice he had made to save her investment. She had asked no questions and he had continued to pay her interest on the worthless stock. It might come up some day. Anyway, it was hopeless to try to explain anything of a business nature to Cora. He only replied wearily, "I get on very well," and waited for the next onslaught.

"I never can understand why Donald did not leave things in my own hands. I feel perfectly sure I could have done more with the estate than you have. I am a very good business woman, though you don't realize it. You are far too cautious ever to get anywhere. One has to risk something in order to get good returns. Everyone in business knows that."

The air of vast superiority with which she proffered this advice exasperated him almost beyond endurance. His long, sensitive fingers, that could readily have choked her, grasped tightly the arms of his office chair. He looked away from her out of the window where a small patch of sultry blue sky showed between the dingy buildings.

Cora continued, "I only wish you could meet some of the people at Southampton where I am staying. Why, you would not believe the chances they take. There is Mr. Cohen. I have seen a lot of him lately. He started with simply nothing and now he is many times a millionaire. The trouble with you, Stephen, is that you never go anywhere to meet people like that. You just stick in the same old rut." She placed a cigarette between her peevish scarlet lips and hunted nervously in her bag for a match. He handed her one without offering to light it, and she gave him a

withering look, saying, "You are so different, Stephen, from the men I am accustomed to meeting."

"I am pleased to hear you say that."

"Then I hope you will be pleased to hear what I am going to say now."

"I probably won't be, but I would be glad if you would come to the point as quickly as possible. I am rather busy today."

"Well, it is just this. I wish you would turn over some of my securities to Mr. Cohen and let him reinvest them for me. He thinks he could soon double my income. It is a simply wonderful chance. Will you do that, Stephen?"

"No, I will not."

"Why not?"

"I know nothing about Mr. Cohen. I was entrusted with your affairs and I mean to keep that trust."

"You don't realize, Stephen, how hard you make things for me. I associate with people who have everything they want, while I have just the bare necessities of life. I don't think Donald would like what you are doing."

With patient control Stephen Trancher arose and opened the door, saying, "If you have no further business, I would like to continue my work."

Cora rose pettishly and turned toward the door, but delayed long enough to take out a compact and apply a few ineffectual dabs to her perspiring nose, drew on a pair of white gloves over her claw-like red fingernails and finally departed.

Trancher returned to the paper he had been examining, tingling with indignation. He found it difficult to concentrate on his work. Why should he care what this fool woman said? He was annoyed at himself for getting so upset over it. He was working on the details of an estate for which one of the heirs, long supposed to have been dead, had suddenly appeared in the flesh to claim the lion's share. This reincarnated gentleman was coming to see him in the morning and he must get the essential facts clarified before he came. Wilcox had been working on it, but Wilcox was away. He tried desperately to master the problems involved, but Cora's visit had completely unnerved him.

He heard the men in the outside office preparing to go home and worked on for half an hour after they had left. It was no use. He would tell the man that he did not have the necessary information and ask him to return in a week's time. Wilcox would be home then. He could do no more with it now.

Trancher left the office, stopping for a light meal at a stifling restaurant on the way to his room. It was too hot to eat, too hot to do anything. He dragged himself wearily up the two flights of stairs and entered the little cell-like room, threw off his

coat, dropped into his chair, and tried to forget about Cora. The horrible pathos of Chadwick came back to him again, dying alone in a hospital, no home, no friends. Poor old chap, death was a blessed deliverance.

What a day it had been!—and probably just as bad tomorrow, and a whole hot summer to be lived through. He longed to be back in the Staten Island house. It would be hot there, too, but not like this, and at least it would be quiet. The continuous noise from the street below was getting on his nerves badly. The rasping cry of newsboys, the rumble of cars, and honking of horns. Worse still, the open windows gave forth a continuous jumble of radio voices. Somewhere a lady with persistent enthusiasm was recommending two eggs and a cup of sugar, while, on the floor below, a man's voice was persuasively extolling the most infallible cure for colds. From another quarter a coarse-voiced comedian was valiantly trying to be funny.

Trancher wondered how long he could stand it and sadly realized there was no escape. It was too hot to go for a walk and there was nowhere to go to avoid the incessant din. Depression settled over him like a cloud. This is my penance, he thought, and wondered if Lydia could realize what it meant, this self-imposed penance that they had planned together, all for the benefit of a contemptible woman who would never know or appreciate it. He would not think of Cora any more, but of Lydia. Would the day ever come when she would be back with him again and they could dismiss the tenants and return to the house once more? He might reasonably expect that much of life.

He reached for his coat and drew from the pocket the letter Lydia had written him. He read it over, as he had done many times before. He thought it a remarkable letter, well-written and well-expressed, with a fine literary quality. He seemed to see vividly the things that she described. As he read them again he felt that she must be in some other world from the one wherein he now found himself. She was happy in her own home, she told him. That gave him a slight twinge of pain, though he did not understand why. Had she not been happy in his home? She had been gathering fragrant mayflowers in the woods. There were cloud shadows on the hills; swallows were building nests under the eaves; the orchard trees would soon be in bloom; some of the buds were already showing pink. She drove the sheep to pasture herself and brought them back at night; she wanted them to learn to know her. She wished he could see how playful the lambs were. She hoped his room was comfortable and that he had everything he needed and would he let her know how he was getting on for she was sometimes anxious about him.

Lydia, his beautiful Lydia! And he had not yet answered her letter and it was

now nearly a month since he had received it. He had intended to write her at once. Why had he not done so? Such a delightful letter. Like the fresh scent of the woods, fir balsam and damp moss, reminding him of the old days when he and Donald were camping in the Adirondacks. He wanted to write her, but what could he say? What had he in life but the daily routine of the office, the noise and heat of the city? What adequate words could he use to match a letter such as she had written? If Lydia were there with him he could talk to her; he knew that. He would tell her all his troubles. But why write about them? Why trail a dark cloud across her sunshine? She said she would be anxious about him. Why make her more anxious by saying he hated it all? That was all he had to say in answer to her joyous spirit, her delight in life and youth and nature, content with the sweet, simple things of life. He longed to be rid of the city and everything connected with it. He wanted to fly to that land of orchards in bloom and swallows and pasturing sheep and hills across the river where cloud-shadows played. He wanted to be with Lydia.

A great, overwhelming loneliness enveloped him. Everything he had cared for had gone from him. His mother, Donald, then Maggie, his home was possessed by strangers, and now Lydia, too, had gone.

"I wonder if I might have done better if I had married," he mused. His thoughts went back to the young woman that his mother had, rather too obviously, selected for him. Margaret was a very nice person, good-looking and intelligent. She often came to the house in the old days to see his mother. Occasionally they went to things together, usually at his mother's suggestion. Once they went to hear Lohengrin and Margaret had chatted pleasantly about music on the way home. He had enjoyed the evening, but he was quite sure he never could have spent the rest of his life with her, not even to please his mother.

Where was Margaret now? He had not heard of her for years, but seemed to remember hearing that she had married. How far away it all seemed, everything was drifting with the years! Was it because he was growing old? He had only turned forty, in spite of his greying hair. Life should hold more for him than this. He was not old, not like Chadwick. At the thought of Chadwick he shuddered.

He was still holding Lydia's letter. She, at least, might come into his life again, in her black dress and little white apron, and stand at his door with her fleeting smile and her dreamy eyes and talk to him.

The sounds of the noisy city rumbled on relentlessly. Then something faintly familiar was wafted to him on the stifling air. A gentle sound mingled with the din, pleasant and soothing and reminding him of Lydia. Ah! he had it now—Beethoven's minuet. Some radio was playing it. Now faint, now clear, the notes came to him like

little dancing steps pricking the chaos of discordant noise. Trancher closed his eyes and remembered Lydia's slim white fingers moving over the piano keys that night when they had played the minuet together. It all came vividly back to him now, that evening and the touch of her hand on his arm and her assurance that everything would be all right again some day, there was always a way out.

He turned suddenly toward his desk, switched on the light, felt in his pocket for his fountain pen and placed a sheet of notepaper in front of him. He would write to Lydia tonight. Quickly he stabbed the heading and date at the top of the paper and began, "My dear Lydia," hesitated, and wondered why one always began a letter with that endearing term. He would use the same when writing a business letter to a client. "Thank you for your letter," he went on, "I have read it over many times. Always it brings me a picture of a lovelier world than that in which I now find myself. I would have written you before but felt that I could make no adequate reply to your beautiful letter. My imprisoned eyes behold only brick walls and hurrying crowds, and my mind is forever chained to the routine business of the day.

"I miss my own home and wish that things could be as they once were. I long to be back at the Staten Island house and to have you with me there. You can never know how much I miss you. I close my eyes and see you in your little white apron, but when you come back we will throw away the apron for ever. I want to see you dressed like a fairy princess. I want to have you with me always. Always waiting for me when I come home at night, always mine, never to leave me again. I want to discover the hidden thoughts that lie behind your elusive smile, I want to feel your hand again on my arm and to hear you bravely telling me that everything will be right again . . ."

Trancher stopped writing. "What on earth am I doing?" he said, looking severely at the reckless pen. "I must be going insane. I can't send the girl a letter like that. Well, if I don't send it, I can write what I please. For once in my life I will do what I want to."

Again he stabbed the paper and continued with nervous frenzy. "I am lonely, Lydia, lonely. I never knew what it was before. I shall always be lonely when you are not with me."

The pen flowed on over the spotless sheet, leaving a trail of hot, reckless words of devotion and longing, the pent-up desire of a man past forty who finds the woman he could love, but finds her in a world to which he does not belong. Page after page he wrote until the frenzy of his desire had spent itself and the pen slowed down to the signature: "Yours devotedly, Stephen Trancher."

Why had he written like that, he asked himself soberly, not daring to read it over.

No man should write like that to a woman unless he was married to her. He folded the letter and placed it in an envelope, sealing it quickly. I must remember not to post it, he thought, with his old whimsical smile. He felt more normal now and could ridicule this sudden outburst. It seemed to have done him good. He drew the envelope toward him and addressed it to "Mrs. Stephen Trancher" and added the address of his Staten Island house. That would make sure that no one would ever receive it, in case it should get posted. Lighting a stick of sealing-wax, he sealed it with his signet ring. That dismissed the matter. He had written a letter to his unknown wife. "One hour to madness," he murmured. Who had written that? He thought it was Walt Whitman. He picked up the letter and dropped it into the pocket of his discarded coat, turned the coat around and took from another pocket the red morocco case, and lay back exhausted in his Morris chair.

"I believe," he said, "I must be suffering from a touch of heat." Lydia had been his maid, a very lovely woman, but still his maid.

A quick turn of memory brought to him unpleasant recollections of his cousin Oscar's ignoble alliance and some forceful arguments he had used when discussing the matter with his mother. He could not repeat Oscar's indiscretion. It was an impossible thought. Although Lydia was a very different type from poor, stupid Hulda.

He unclasped the miniature case and looked intently at his ideal of feminine loveliness. "Beautiful spirit of the past," he said, "you will save me from this folly."

But the quiet eyes that answered him were the eyes of Lydia.

He then realized he was very tired, undressed, put out the light, and went to bed. Before he slept he detected another sound above the eternal noise of the city. It was the distant grumble of thunder high above the skyscrapers. Next a dash of rain splashed the window pane. "Thank God," he said, "it will be cooler tomorrow."

CHAPTER XVIII

All through that long hot summer Stephen Trancher endured life as one walking on a treadmill. He felt weary in mind and body and it was an ever-recurring effort to face each day the work that awaited him at the office. He had lost interest even in reading. His mind would not concentrate on anything more important than the daily paper or a short magazine article. He missed his library at home and the cooler air of Staten Island, but more than these he missed Lydia. He had tried to put her out of his mind, but it was a fruitless effort. When all other interests failed he took out her letter and read it over. Sometimes his fantastic mind pictured her as dwelling in Elysian fields in a land so remote it had no contact with the world he knew. He had visions of her as a sylvan shepherdess bringing home her flocks from violet pasture-lands under trees garlanded with blossoms, or gathering mayflowers as wood-nymphs plucked the asphodel in the days when earth was young. Then he would wake with a sharp realization of the present, the drudgery of the office, and the heat of the city.

Wilcox and Tony watched him with increasing anxiety. His deep-set eyes grew more and more sunken and a look of wistful sadness showed in his ashen-grey face that distressed them greatly. They urged him to take a holiday, but he did not want to take a holiday. He did not want to go away alone, and there was no one he cared to ask to go with him. And where could he go? Donald had always settled questions like that. They told him they would find some nice quiet place in the country and Tony would make all the arrangements, but he only answered, "I am better just staying where I am. It is less of an effort."

Tony once boldly suggested that he should mix more with the business men that he knew who were still in town. "You used to do more entertaining than you do now and when you get an invitation you turn it down."

"I don't feel much like meeting people, this heat seems to stupefy me. And I do not entertain because I have given up the club. As things are I can't very well afford it and I don't feel like accepting hospitality that I cannot return."

This admission worried Tony. It did not seem like the master, but he said no more.

A few days later, however, Trancher did accept an invitation. He had just left the office on his way to lunch when a very well-dressed young man strode past him on the street. His whole appearance gave Trancher the impression of youthful energy and prosperity. He watched him with a slight feeling of envy. His own youth seemed so remote at the moment. To his surprise the man hesitated, then turned back and greeted him with an outstretched hand.

"Mr. Trancher!" he exclaimed. "I would hardly have recognized you if I had not noticed that you came out of your office building. I'm awfully glad to see you. Don't you remember me?"

"I'm afraid I don't, though you have a familiar look that I feel I should remember."

"Lindsay, Bob Lindsay. I worked in your office once. Used to work there in the holidays during my last two years in law school."

"Oh, yes, I remember now. You were the boy who got married. Yes, yes—Lindsay. I hope the matrimonial venture turned out a success."

"It sure did."

"I am pleased to hear that. What are you doing now, Lindsay?"

"I'm a small-town lawyer now. Won a couple of cases that put me on my feet."

"Very good. It is sometimes uphill work at the start for a young lawyer."

Trancher was moving on and Lindsay fell into step and walked beside him.

"I'm awfully glad that we met, sir," he said. "I am only in the city for a few days and I wanted to have a talk with you but was afraid to call at the office for fear of bothering you. I was always afraid of you, you know."

"Yes, I know," Trancher said with a grim smile.

"Just the same I liked to work for you. I often think of the way you ran that office. We were all afraid of you and yet we would do anything in the world for you. I never worked so hard in all my life, but I loved it. I can never quite figure out how you got us like that. I always think of it as the ideal way an office should be run."

"I'm afraid it is not up to the standard now, Lindsay. I'm slipping."

"You are not looking very fit, sir." Lindsay looked at him anxiously.

"This continuous heat has got me down a bit, that's all."

"Are you working too hard?"

"No, I am not. I can't work as I used to. I seem to be getting old before my time."

Lindsay sensed a tragic pathos in this tall gaunt man who walked beside him and who had once won his youthful devotion.

"Would you care to come and have lunch with me, sir?" he asked suddenly. "They serve a good lunch at my hotel. It is uptown, but we'll get a taxi."

"Thank you, Lindsay," Trancher accepted. He began to feel drawn to this friendly youth whose open admiration for him seemed to lighten the gloom that enveloped him.

The large hotel dining-room was cool and airy and rather empty. There were carnations on the table and a spotless damask cloth. Trancher found it a pleasant

contrast to the crowded little restaurant where he was in the habit of taking his noonday meal. It was very restful, he thought, as he unfolded the large dinner napkin and Lindsay ordered luxurious food.

"This is extremely kind of you, Lindsay," he said.

"It is a great pleasure, sir. I have been wanting to talk with you for a long time. It was great luck that I happened to meet you."

"Why should you want to talk with me, Lindsay?" Trancher asked, looking at him over the carnations with his whimsical smile that had a tinge of wistful sadness.

"Well, I wondered if you would mind advising me a bit," Lindsay replied, moving the slim silver vase so that there would be nothing between them. "You see, I have always remembered your business. I liked it so much when I worked there and I have been wondering lately if I could not work into something of the sort myself. It would require a lawyer to do that kind of work, wouldn't it?"

"A knowledge of law is necessary. You would have to either understand law yourself or employ a lawyer. I never finished my law course, owing to my father's illness and subsequent death. I know enough to carry on the business, however, but I thought you told me you had a successful practice."

"So I have, but I don't like it. It's interesting and all that, but somehow I can't stick it. One has to be hard as nails with some poor devil in the witness box, and often as not it is some terrified woman I have to try to trip up if I want to win the case. The last client I defended was a dastardly villain. I did not know it when I took the case, but found it out toward the end. I got him off, but I never felt right about it. You see, a young lawyer can't pick and choose. I have to take what comes."

"Yes, I know."

"That is why I would like to get into something like what you are doing."

"It would take some time for you to work up a paying business. Have you any capital to start with?"

"No, nothing, but I have a kind and wealthy father-in-law who would, I think, help me out if I saw a good opening. I was thinking perhaps I could buy a business that was already established. It occurred to me that you might come upon something of the kind, in connection with settling up an estate."

"Yes, I might at that. People in business occasionally die or grow old and the family want to sell out the business."

"If anything like that turns up, would you mind letting me know?"

"I should be glad to."

Lindsay drew a card from his pocket and handed it to him. "That is my address and telephone number. You could write or call me up. Wait a minute, I will put down

my home address too, and if you are ever in our neighbourhood we would love to have you come to see us."

Trancher thanked him and they sat chatting leisurely over coffee and cigarettes. Lindsay inquired about the other members of the office staff and retailed amusing incidents of the days when he worked with them, occasionally exclaiming, "Did I ever think I would be talking to you like this?"

"Why not? I am enjoying your conversation immensely."

"I used to be so afraid of you in the old days. I used to think of your private office as the dwelling-place of an oracle. I approached your presence with awe and reverence."

"What were you afraid of?"

"I don't quite know. It was not what you call craven fear. I think I was afraid I would say or do something that would not measure up to your standards."

"You are not afraid of me now, are you?"

Lindsay looked thoughtfully at the end of his cigarette for a moment, then said slowly, "No, the fear has vanished, but the respect remains." Then, looking up with a smile that was full of youthful charm, he added, "I would like to think that it might grow into a real friendship some day."

Trancher's deep-set, wistful eyes looked steadily into the open young face before him. "It pleases me to hear you say that," he said. "I cannot see where my friendship could be of any great value to you, but I feel that yours would mean much to me."

They left the hotel, Lindsay got a taxi, and they drove down town together.

As they parted at the office door Lindsay said, "Remember if you ever want to sell that business of yours to give me first chance."

"I would gladly hand it over to you if I were twenty years older."

Lindsay replied, with a laugh, he was sorry he could not wait that long.

"It has been good to see you, Lindsay. I think I must be getting to the age when I like to be flattered. Come and see me when you are in the city again."

That evening in his room Trancher thought pleasantly of his encounter with young Lindsay. He also played with the idea of selling out the business—just sell it and forget about all the irksome worries connected with it. A young and energetic man might make a huge success of it. But what could he do without it? The thought of endless days of idleness alarmed him. There was nothing for him but to continue in the treadmill.

CHAPTER XIX

One day in late August, just before closing time, Wilcox came into the private office. Trancher looked up at him with some apprehension. A visit from Wilcox sometimes meant more trouble, and his nerves were at breaking point. Little things worried him now.

"Sit down, Wilcox," he said. "What is it?"

Wilcox sat down. "I am very anxious about you, sir," he began. "You don't seem like yourself these days."

"Oh, is that all? I feared by the anxiety of your expression that it might be another bankruptcy case."

"I could stand a bankruptcy case better than I can endure seeing you look as you do."

"Oh, I'm all right. The heat tires me and I find I miss the Staten Island house more than I thought I should."

"It is a crying shame that you had to give it up, sir. I don't feel you should have done it."

"I'm doing penance, Wilcox, for the good of my soul. It is very good for me."

"I'm not worrying about the good of your soul. It's the good of your health I am thinking of. If you have a breakdown it will lay you up for months. And then what will we all do?"

"I'm not as far gone as all that."

"You have not taken a holiday for two years and you should get away from things for a bit. No man can go on working day in and day out forever without any rest."

"I don't work so very hard, Wilcox. I leave most of the drudgery to you and Tony."

"You have the worry and responsibility."

"I would have that even if I did go away and there would be more piled up for me when I got back. It isn't worth it, Wilcox. I would really rather just keep on the way I am doing now."

"I suppose you know best," Wilcox sighed, "but please think it over. Tony and I would do everything we could to keep things going here."

"I know you would, Wilcox, but I just don't want to be bothered moving. I can rest well enough in my room."

"I still feel you ought to have a complete change," Wilcox said as he rose to go.

Trancher rose too and, looking at him affectionately with a ghost of his old

twisted smile, he said, "Haven't you got worries enough of your own without taking me on too? I will feel all right when September comes. I may take a week off then. I do appreciate your thought for me, Wilcox, just the same. I don't know what I would do without you."

He took his hat and the two men went out to the elevator together.

"How is my little friend Mary?" he inquired.

"Oh, she's fine. She is the joy of my life. She still talks about you and the Christmas party and treasures the book you gave her. None of us will ever forget that party."

"I am glad you enjoyed it. It gave me a great deal of pleasure having you." How far away that party seemed now!

The elevator boy called out, "Going down!" and they parted at the street door.

The next morning Wilcox came to his office early, before Tony brought in the mail.

"Good morning, Wilcox, are you bringing me information of a Cook's tour?" inquired Trancher in his whimsical way.

"No, only an invitation from my wife. We were wondering if you would like to have supper with us next Sunday evening. We thought it would make a little change for you, though, as you know, we live in a very simple way. It would please us so much if you cared to come, and the children would love to see you again. In fact, we all would."

Trancher was deeply touched. "I accept with pleasure," he said, "only are you sure it will not make extra work for your wife? I told you I thought you had enough on your shoulders without looking after me."

"No, she would be pleased if only you don't mind coming to our little home. She is in much better health now and Lillian is a great help. Things are easier for us all round now. My eldest boy has a good job in Chicago. He has been promoted twice since he went there."

"I am glad to hear that, Wilcox. I can see you settling down into peaceful middle age."

"I hope so," said Wilcox, making way for Tony with the morning letters. "We will look for you on Sunday, then."

"Thank you. I will surely be there."

Trancher found that he was looking forward to Sunday with real pleasure. It would break the monotony of his life and he felt it would be pleasant to be in a home again, even if things were "very simple", as Wilcox had told him. He had never visited their home and had pictured it to himself as being a bit squalid. Poor Wilcox

was always so hard up. Perhaps it would be stuffy and crowded and untidy. He wondered if, after all, he really did want to go. It might be less of an effort to just keep on with the monotony. But he knew he would go because not for the world would he disappoint them. He liked meeting Wilcox out of office hours, and the occasion required no special effort to tax his weary brain. He wondered just why he preferred living like a hermit, or if he really did like it. What was the trouble? Even at Staten Island he found it pleasanter to stay at home in his library than go out for the evening. But there he had had Lydia. Why did he always think of Lydia? Sometimes he thought of writing to her, but did not dare to after that night of madness. If he could not write as he wanted to, why write at all? Yet he would have liked another letter from her. It never occurred to him that Lydia would wait for his answer with tragic disappointment. She was so young and lovely, full of joyous life. He was just a man much older than herself with greying hair, for whom she had worked. Probably she was glad to get away from it all. He found this thought depressing.

On Sunday afternoon he left early so that he could walk. It was some distance, but he felt the need of exercise and wanted to get away from the ceaseless wailing of radios. He did not mind walking in the city if he had some object in view.

He climbed the three flights of stairs to the Wilcox apartment, where he was joyously welcomed by the family. He shook hands all round and patted Mary's golden curls.

"How is my little fairy?" he asked.

"Mary has been talking about you all day," her mother said. "We are all so pleased that you could come."

"I have been looking forward to it myself," Trancher said with his usual politeness. "I greatly appreciate your invitation, Mrs. Wilcox. A lone bachelor, you know, likes to see the inside of a home sometimes."

"That is splendid," said Wilcox, with beaming hospitality, relieving him of his hat. "Come right in and sit down. Light your pipe and we can have a chat while Mother and Lillian get supper."

It was a pleasant little home, quite different from what Trancher had pictured. Everything was beautifully clean, with white window curtains freshly laundered, and gave the impression of order and comfort. He and Wilcox sat in two comfortable armchairs by the open window, smoking and talking intermittently as they always did, without effort and with a restful feeling of intimate understanding. He knew that Wilcox liked to have him there. He could always be the perfect guest, just as he was the perfect host in his own house.

He enjoyed the supper, too. It was a simple, unpretentious meal—cold meat and

a salad, hot biscuits and a light dessert with home made cake and coffee. For the first time in months Trancher felt really hungry.

"I am greatly ashamed of my appetite," he apologized when urged to take a second helping, "but everything tastes so good after restaurant fare."

"Think of the wonderful dinner you gave us at Christmas," Wilcox reminded him.

"Think of the artistic work you did on that hand-carved turkey!"

"That was a pleasure."

"Oh, Mr. Trancher," put in Mrs. Wilcox, "I have been meaning to ask you, what became of that nice young woman who was your housekeeper? I liked her so much. She was very kind and thoughtful for us that evening."

"Yes," Trancher said, somewhat vaguely, "Lydia, oh yes."

"You know," continued Mrs. Wilcox confidingly, "I am apt to be a little afraid of people like that, they sometimes seem to look at me as if I ought not to be there. But she was so sweet and helped me with my wraps and the children, too, and said you would not mind if they made a noise. Then she told me that my dress looked very nice, and that was a great comfort to me."

"So it did," said Trancher. "I remember thinking so myself."

"Oh, I am afraid it didn't really, but just having her say that gave me a feeling of confidence. You see, I go out so seldom."

"Lydia had the knack of giving people confidence," he told her, feeling that he liked this simple, gentle, motherly little woman. Also he liked to talk about Lydia.

"We must have made such a lot of work for her," Mrs. Wilcox went on, "with so many of us and everything was perfect."

"Lydia enjoyed it. She planned the whole thing, got the presents and arranged about the dinner and everything. I never could have managed it without her."

"She must be very capable—and so pretty and gentle, too. I think she is a born lady, Mr. Trancher, even if she did do your housework."

"Yes, Mrs. Wilcox," he said absently, "I think you are right."

"Where is she now?"

"She went home to a farm on a river where she had always lived." He hesitated a moment, then said, "She is a little Arcadian shepherdess now. She wrote me that she drives the sheep to pasture every day."

"It must be lovely to live in the country," sighed Mrs. Wilcox.

"She always tells me," put in Wilcox, "that the next time she marries she'll choose a farmer."

"Well, it is a lovely life, and my children know so little of the real country. The two boys had a chance to go to a camp last week. They are there now. I was so

glad we were able to let them go, for they love it."

"I was going to ask where the boys were. I missed them."

"They will be sorry to miss you, too. That party was like a glimpse of fairyland to them."

"It is good of you to say that, Mrs. Wilcox. It pleases me very much."

Trancher felt happier than he had for a long time, in this home where they had so little and yet possessed so much. Wilcox, he thought, had far more in life than he himself had.

After supper, when they had returned to the sitting-room, Mary brought out her fairy book and, climbing up on the sofa beside Trancher, asked him if he would read to her.

"I might," he said. "I don't think I have forgotten how."

He read *Hansel and Gretel* again and then some of the other special favourites and he discussed them with her quite seriously as though she were a grown-up person, which delighted her. He said he liked *Hansel and Gretel* best, but she preferred the *Sleeping Beauty* because she liked the ones that had a fairy prince in them. So they entertained each other until Lillian came and carried her off to bed.

The two men sat talking by the window in the twilight, recalling old days at the office when Trancher's father was alive and when, as a boy, Stephen had come in during the holidays to learn the rudiments of the business.

"Where were you that first summer I worked for your father?" Wilcox asked.

"That must have been the year I went to England with Donald Farquhar."

"That was a grand thing to have done."

"It was. It is still one of my most delightful memories."

Wilcox led him on to talk of it. "I have always thought I should like to travel and see other countries," he said, "but of course I have never had the opportunity."

Encouraged by the interest of his sympathetic listener, Trancher talked of that wonderful summer of his youth, giving vivid descriptions of cathedral towns, ancient castles, reminding one of knights in armour and crusaders, of the green parks and country lanes with hawthorn hedges and quaint farm houses and old taverns where they had sometimes spent the night. Wilcox listened with quiet interest, interrupting at intervals to put a question or to make some comment. He saw with pleasure that Trancher was completely absorbed in his narrative. He grew more relaxed, his eyes brightened, his smile was more frequent, and a slight tinge of colour had replaced the ashen greyness of his face.

Finally Trancher looked at his watch and arose, saying he had no idea that it was so late. Mrs. Wilcox who had sat listening unobtrusively but taking no part in the

conversation, came forward. "Don't go yet, Mr. Trancher, I want to give you something to eat first."

"What! after all that good supper? You will kill me with kindness."

"Wouldn't you have a glass of ginger ale or something?" she insisted, wishing to lavish on this honoured guest all the hospitality the house afforded.

"Well," he said, "there is one thing I would like, but I fear it would give you a lot of trouble. But if you don't mind that, I would love a cup of cocoa. You see, I feel so much at home here, I am demanding things."

"Why certainly! It would be no trouble at all. I often make cocoa for the family." She hurried off to the kitchen, delighted that she could provide refreshment that he liked.

"This is a great treat," he told her when she brought it in. "Lydia always brought me a cup of cocoa in the evening, and I have missed it, along with many things that one can have in one's own home."

She replied that they hoped he would always feel at home in their house.

Lillian came in and told them that Mary thought Mr. Trancher must be a fairy prince in disguise.

"Very well disguised, I fear," said Trancher, "but I am pleased that the child feels that way about it."

Wilcox walked with him to the subway. They did not say much on the way, but when they shook hands at the subway entrance Trancher said, "This has been a very enjoyable evening and I feel better for it. You are a good friend to me, Wilcox."

As he walked slowly home Wilcox thought that the long years of faithful service he had given to this man were more than repaid by those few sincere and kindly words.

CHAPTER XX

As September advanced and the weather grew cooler, Trancher became more alert and was less exhausted after the day's work. He still was very lonely and tired of the cramped quarters at the rooming-house. They were noisier than ever now that people were returning to the city and he still missed Lydia.

One morning he found among his mail two letters which he picked out and laid aside until he had attended to the routine business. One was from his tenant in Staten Island and the other a large, square envelope in Cora Farquhar's handwriting. He looked at it with grim foreboding.

His tenant wrote that, owing to some unexpected turn of affairs, he was leaving for the South and would be absent for some time. He was therefore giving up the house. He regretted the circumstance that called him away as he liked the house and had hoped to stay there during the winter.

This piece of information troubled Trancher considerably. It might be difficult to find another tenant at this season when people were moving back to the city. Also the house would have to be made ready for a new family. Perhaps Maggie could look after that, but, anyway, it was an infernal nuisance.

He tore Cora's envelope savagely and then gasped as he glanced at the contents. It was an elaborately engraved gilt-edged wedding announcement, stating that Mrs. Cora Farquhar and Benjamin Schwartz Cohen had been united in marriage at Southampton on September twentieth and would be at home at the Plaza Hotel, New York, after October the first.

"Good Heavens!" he ejaculated, "what does this mean?"

He sat staring at the card and wondering whether his troubles with Cora had ended or only just begun. Cohen might be less difficult to talk with, or, at least, less exasperating. He would likely want to get hold of Cora's money and possibly be tricky about it; worth watching, at any rate. In the end he would probably divorce Cora or walk out, leaving her penniless. It was unlikely that any man would wish to marry the woman without some prospect of personal gain. What an ungodly mess it would be, but he must hold his trust to the end.

Trancher sighed and looked at the calender. Today was October the second. They would have returned from their honeymoon. He rang for Tony. He had better know the worst at once.

"See if a man by the name of Benjamin S. Cohen has an office in the city, Tony," he said. "If he has, make an appointment for me some time today. Ask him if he will come to my office, or I can go to him if he prefers it. If he has no business telephone

try to contact him at the Plaza."

"Yes, sir," said Tony and departed. In a few minutes he reported that Mr. Cohen would come to the office at half past ten that morning.

Mr. Cohen, when he arrived, turned out to be an ordinary little man, approaching middle age, and radiating brisk business ability. He did not give the impression of the evasive craftiness Trancher had anticipated. The appraising look he fixed on him was open and direct, the keen black eyes honest and not unkindly.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Trancher," he said. "I have heard about you from my wife."

They shook hands and sat down.

"I have heard about you, also," Trancher began. "You know that I have charge of your wife's financial affairs?"

"Yes, she has told me that."

"I know she has. She did not tell me, however, of your approaching marriage, so when I received the announcement this morning I was considerably surprised."

"Well, to tell you the truth, Mr. Trancher, I was a bit surprised myself. You see, after my first wife died, about ten years ago, I never thought much of marrying again. My business obliges me to be away from home a lot and I am better off without family ties."

"I can understand that," said Trancher.

"But I'm a rich man, Mr. Trancher. You may not think so, but I make more money than I can spend. I don't make much of a parade, don't spend much on myself. I'm a good-living man. Society don't interest me anything special. I wouldn't want to keep one of those big estates like some rich men do. No, I prefer to be free of things like that. Some of those large establishments are a big responsibility, like managing a small hotel. I say a good hotel gives me all the comforts I want without any bother or worry."

"I understand," said Trancher again.

"So you see, Mr. Trancher, I never gave any thought to marrying till I fell in with Cora about two years ago. I don't care a hoot about getting in with these society people. Cora, now, would like to be right in the swim and she couldn't always get there. It takes money to make the grade."

"Quite true," agreed Trancher.

"That set she falls for down on Long Island, they hit the high spots and Cora can't do it and she gets the cold shoulder sometimes."

Trancher felt that this astoundingly frank statement shed a new light on Cora's delightful friends.

"That's how her and me came to be thrown together. First we'd sit on the veranda and she'd tell me her troubles. I was sorry for her. Then we'd have lunch together, or I'd take her for a car ride. It used to nearly kill her when she knew there was some kind of a time going on that she wasn't invited to. Now this is my point, Mr. Trancher. I began thinking it over and, thinks I, what is the good of me having all this money just for myself? Why don't I marry this little woman and give her a swell time? So we fixed up things and now she can have everything she wants. We are going to stay at the Plaza this winter and maybe go South for a spell later on. It may work out all right. Of course, it's not like my first marriage, but I don't expect much of her and she don't look for a great sight in me. I like to make the money and she likes to spend it. So what more can we ask for?"

"It sounds like an ideal arrangement," Trancher said drily.

"Well, if it don't work we can separate, but we are going to try it out, anyway."

This further explosion of confidence quite stunned Trancher. He had been thinking of it as an almost inevitable conclusion of Mr. Cohen's romance, but had schooled himself to avoid any hint of such a thought on his own part.

"Mr. Cohen," he said, "I asked you to come here today as I wished to speak to you about your wife's affairs. She has not a very good understanding about business matters."

"None whatever," admitted Mr. Cohen.

"I believe," Trancher continued, "that you advised her to sell certain bonds that I had in trust for her and invest in Mining Consolidated. I made the transfer as she insisted on having it done."

"How did that turn out?" he asked promptly, fixing his keen little eyes searchingly on Trancher.

"It crashed."

"I know it did, but I always hoped you had not bought the stock or that you managed to get out from under before the crash came. Cora never said anything about it and I didn't inquire. Thought it better to let well enough alone."

"She never knew. I told her I would make the transfer, but I did not tell her about the crash. I felt that I should not have yielded to her entreaties to sacrifice the bonds, which were a good and perfectly safe investment, so at some personal sacrifice I have up to now made up the amount of the bond interest myself and forwarded it to her."

"That was mighty fine of you, Mr. Trancher, mighty fine. But legally you were under no obligation when she had insisted on having the transfer made herself. Did you advise her against it?"

"Yes. I was very unwilling to make the change and flatly refused at first, but she was very persistent and at the time Mining Consolidated looked fairly safe."

"That's so! Who would ever have thought the thing would blow up the way it did? Why, it looked like the best buy on the market at one time. That man Hobbs was a clever rascal! Fooled the directors, fooled the auditors and then fooled the police. Hanging's too good for a man like that. It was the worst fraud I ever got caught in."

"Did you have anything in it yourself?"

"Yes, I bought some of their shares for myself. Not such a great amount, but one always hates to get stung."

"It certainly appeared to be a good thing when we looked into it at the time, but one never knows what may happen to an investment of that nature. The bonds I sold were perfectly sound. I never should have sold them."

"We got to take risks sometimes," Mr. Cohen remarked consolingly.

"Yes, but it was wrong in this instance. Your wife's first husband was my friend and just before he died he advised me to keep those bonds for her. He felt they were a safe investment and could be used if necessary for collateral."

"It was my fault, Mr. Trancher. I can see how you feel about it, but I was to blame. That estate was your job and it was none of my business to interfere. I should have advised Cora to leave everything in your hands. To tell you the truth, Mr. Trancher, I somehow got the wrong idea about you from Cora. I admit I thought you might be trying to take advantage of her."

"I can fully understand that," Trancher said grimly.

"I see now that I was wrong and I hope you will pardon me. You know we sometimes hear of chisellers in your business."

"I understand," Trancher again replied.

"Now, since I was to blame, I am going to take the responsibility about those bonds. I can see where this thing must have caused you a lot of worry. Just don't you give it another thought. You look after the rest of the estate just as you always have done and I will take some securities that I have salted down and put them in Cora's name to the amount of the bonds you lost. That will square us, won't it? I want to tell Cora what you did, for I don't think she appreciates how well you look after her interests. You won't mind if I tell her, will you?"

"Not at all. I would have explained the matter myself only I was timidly apprehensive about getting involved in another business argument."

"That's right, too. You can't talk business with women; it's not in their line. But I'll make Cora understand about this, and don't you worry no more about it."

"Your offer is most generous, Mr. Cohen. I hardly feel I should accept it, but will let the matter remain as you suggest for the present, at least. At the moment it is a great relief to my mind as I learned only this morning that one source of income which I counted on for paying the interest is soon to be cut off."

"Glad to know I could step into the breach. Well, I must be going. I'll drop in again and get everything settled up right so you won't have any more trouble. Good day, Mr. Trancher."

When Mr. Cohen had gone Trancher sat at his desk in bewildered contemplation. He did not feel comfortable about accepting a favour from this little man. But, after all, he thought, Cohen had been at the root of the trouble; but for him Cora would never have known about Mining Consolidated. The woman was Cohen's wife now and the transfer of a few securities to her name would mean nothing to him, whereas for himself it would be difficult to meet the interest in view of the fact that his house might remain tenantless for some time. He decided to let the matter rest for the present. Business was improving, and later on he might do something about it.

He picked up the letter from his tenant and read it more carefully. Though he expected to vacate the house at once, a cheque for the full month's rent was enclosed as he had engaged the house to the first of November. Well, Trancher could keep that cheque for himself now. After all, Cohen was a good sort—far too good for Cora—and, as he was her husband, Trancher felt he could shift the responsibility that Donald had left with him.

Suddenly he realized the possibility of going back to the house. He could get Lydia and go home! The pattern of his life seemed to be changing with the speed of a kaleidoscope.

He put on his hat and went out for lunch. Seated at a small table in an obscure corner of the lunch room, he tried to grasp the significance of this new development. He would send for Lydia, they would open the house. His exile was over and life would begin again! The penance was ended. Would Lydia be willing to come back to him? Would she leave her Arcadian fields, the river, and the mayflowers, and the sheep-fold? Surely she would, she had always tried to do the things he wanted. Winter was coming soon and it would be bleak and cold in her northern country—there would be no mayflowers in winter. She might at least come for the winter, he could reasonably expect that much of life.

While he was eating the meagre lunch he had ordered, another thought struck him like a sudden gust of wind, scattering his plans. Would it be wise to have Lydia back? He thought of the letter he had written and never posted. That letter should

never have been written. "One hour to madness," he thought. "I was foolish with the heat." But, having written the letter, could he feel right about asking Lydia to return to her former position?

Stephen Trancher resolved to face the facts squarely. He sent the waitress for a package of cigarettes. He preferred a pipe, but he had left his pipe at the office and cigarettes were an aid to contemplation. He lighted one and leaned back in his chair.

Would he have married Lydia had he met her under other circumstances and on an equal social footing? He was conscious of the fact that he had evaded the question for weeks. Now he must answer it truthfully once and for all. He could not always put that mad love letter down to a sunstroke. There were times when he was alone in his room when he had had visions of what their life might have been had things been otherwise. He closed his eyes and thought deeply for a time. Yes, he would have wooed and married Lydia, unquestionably he would have married her without doubt or hesitation. She was the only woman he had ever seen that made the thought of married life attractive to him.

Facing this fact, was it wise or safe to ask Lydia to come back to him, live in his house, serve his meals, and wait on him? Was he tempting Providence, playing with fire? Would he yield to another hour of madness that would involve more complications than the last? Lydia, he thought, would protect him from that. She would keep him in his place. In her little white apron she would dole out to him a few quiet moments of conversation and then flit away beyond his reach, like a white butterfly.

He felt rebellious when he thought of the white apron. Lydia was too refined, too lovely, too superior intellectually, to wear the garb of a servant. Could he ban the uniform and give her a somewhat higher status in his house? Other privileges, such as might be enjoyed by some kind of superior housekeeper? Have her join him at meals and sit with him in the library in the evenings? No, it would not do. She was too young and too lovely. His Victorian training quickly vetoed that arrangement. "Good Heavens," he thought, "the next thing I'd be reading her the Portuguese Sonnets and I'd be sure to marry her after that. Lydia would not consent to any such plan, and poor old Maggie might wonder why her years of faithful service had received no similar recognition. No, if Lydia came back everything would have to be as it was before."

With this final decision he left the lunch room and walked back to the office. Seated at his desk again he decided to write at once to Lydia and ask her to return and let her answer decide the matter. He could do nothing further until he heard from her. If she refused to come, what then? Blank despair, as far as he was concerned.

He took out a sheet of paper and looked at it apprehensively. "After all, I believe I am rather a fool," he said to himself. What could he say? All kinds of fantastic phrases tempted him. How could he write an ordinary business letter to his Arcadian shepherdess with a fountain pen that was more unruly than the tongue? He drew her letter from his pocket and read it over. That did not help him in the least, so he put it back in his pocket, keeping out the envelope, as it gave her address. He tried again, but got no further than the date—October the second. The mayflowers would be withered and the swallows flown. Surely she would come to him when he needed her so! If only she knew what he had lived through, she would leave everything and come. How could he tell her in any words that would sound reasonable? If he used the words that were dripping from his pen she would not be likely to come at all. She would think him senile—just a foolish old man with grey hair. He must seem like that to her.

He read the address on the envelope. He had never found out exactly where Lydia lived—it was always just "on the river". She was apt to be reticent and vague when speaking of her home life. Who was she living with? Had she brothers or sisters? Were her parents living? She had only spoken of a grandfather who had died. Strange how little he knew about her. Perhaps if he once saw her in her home surroundings he would be cured of this eternal longing for her presence, completely and forever cured.

He again read the address. He had copied it out on a card—Elmwood, R.R. No. 1 (that meant Rural Route—he knew that much, anyway). Then there was an unpronounceable name that began with an O, probably of Indian origin. Then New Brunswick (that was the Province, he knew). Then Canada. It all seemed very far away. He must get his letter off at once. He pushed the paper from him and rang the bell impatiently.

"Take down this letter, Tony," he said, "and get it posted as soon as you type it. I want to get it off this evening." Then, by way of explanation, "It is to Lydia, the girl who formerly worked for me. I want to see if she will come back to me. I am returning to my own house."

"Yes, sir," said Tony. "What is the address?"

"Here, I have written it on this card. I can't imagine what that place is that starts with an O, but they may know at the post office. It does not look to me like an address that would ever get anywhere. Better put Saint John River on it, too. I know that is where she lives."

"Yes, sir." Tony stood with pencil poised above an expectant notebook.

"Dear Lydia," the master began dictating "Circumstances have made it possible

for me to return to my Staten Island house. I want——" The master sat for a moment with wrinkled brow. "Scratch that out, Tony."

"The whole of it, sir?"

"No, just 'I want'. Now go on. 'Would you be able to return to work for me as formerly for the coming winter? Your services in the past were always so satisfactory that I shall be greatly disappointed if you cannot come to me again. Yours very sincerely.' That is all, Tony."

"Yes, sir. I will get it off at once."

Trancher felt that the letter was far from satisfactory, but at least it was non-committal.

In a few moments Tony returned for his signature and took the letter to the post office, singing as he went his usual song:

"*Oh, I loved her in the springtime*
And I loved her in the fall."

Trancher smiled grimly, "What would Tony think if he knew?" Then he grumbled to himself that he was a fool, and an old one at that.

Tony, however, strongly disapproved of the letter. He liked Lydia and felt that she deserved a more friendly invitation to return. "Mr. Trancher always has to be so formal," he complained to himself. "Nothing but frigid air, after the way she worked to get his room fixed up." Tony knew, for he had been sent down to help her. He felt that Lydia was above her job, and besides she was very pretty. "I bet she won't come when she gets that letter." Only a rigid sense of business etiquette prevented him from showing it to Wilcox and finding out what he thought of it.

Tony's surmise was right. Lydia's reply was negative. Trancher looked daily for the letter, and when it came he put it aside until he had attended to the business mail. Finally he tore open the envelope with fingers that he was vexed to find were trembling.

The letter was very brief and quite definite. Lydia was sorry not to be able to comply with his request, but her place was at home and she must remain there. She was sure he could find some other woman to work for him, one who would be quite as satisfactory as herself.

He read it through twice, staring at the words in blank amazement. Could this be his Lydia? His Arcadian shepherdess, his little white butterfly? Even if it was impossible for her to come to him she might at least have softened the blow, explained her reason for not coming, expressed more genuine regret than could be wrung from those few formal words. She must know that he needed her, that no one

else could ever take her place. Then it dawned on him that his letter had been just as formal. How could she know, when he had not told her, all the longing that was with him day and night? How could he tell her that, without saying too much?

Now what was he to do? It did not matter much where he spent the rest of his days without Lydia. All the loneliness and depression of the past summer seemed to settle down on him afresh with shackles that he could not break. "Life cannot do this to me," he repeated bitterly, "yet I deserve it." That was a miserable letter to send to a girl like Lydia, he thought, and she has paid me in kind. If only I could see her I could explain, make her understand. Lydia always found a way out. "I *will* see her —life owes me that much."

He stood erect, determined, unshackled, and rang the bell for Tony.

"Did you save the card I gave you, Tony? The one with Lydia's address on it?"

"Yes, I filed it with a copy of the letter, sir."

"Then destroy the copy and take the card and find out if you can get me a ticket for that place with the unpronounceable name." The occasion seemed to demand an explanation, so he added, "Lydia declines to return. I am going to try a little personal persuasion."

Tony could not resist saying, "I thought she would not come back."

"Why?" The question was asked quietly, but the master's look was terrific.

Tony's blue, honest eyes frankly returned the look. "Because," he said, "she was too fine a girl for that job."

The terrific look faded from the master's face. "I believe you are right, Tony. Tell Wilcox I want to see him."

In a couple of hours Tony returned with the information that there was no station listed that had even a remote connection with the place on the card. He had interviewed various ticket agents who thought it was just some small country postal station and advised getting a ticket to Saint John, as that was at the mouth of the Saint John River, and he would be able to get better information there.

"I wonder if I *am* actually getting senile," Trancher thought, as he packed his bag in preparation for taking the train that evening.

CHAPTER XXI

On the evening following, Stephen Trancher sat in the lobby of an up-to-date hotel in the grey old city of Saint John. He sat in an armchair under a branching palmetto and wondered what he should do next. He felt somewhat bewildered. This modern hotel seemed as far removed from Lydia as his New York office.

What was he doing here? Why had he come, anyway? He knew very well why he had come, but found the answer embarrassing. The adventure seemed somewhat quixotic now. He pondered on the situation for some time and then consulted the man behind the desk, who seemed resourceful and encouragingly optimistic.

Trancher showed him the card with the address and laid the facts before him. He was looking for a girl named Lydia Allen who lived on a farm somewhere on the Saint John River, and all the address he had was just what was on the card—Rural Route No. 1, and a name that began with O.

"Yes, Oromocto," said the man without the slightest hesitation. "That is some distance up the river, near Fredericton. The train connections there are not good, and Rural Route might mean that the lady lives some distance from Oromocto. One never can tell about these mail routes. Has she lived there long?"

"Yes, always." Trancher was sure of that.

The clerk said there were several families of Allens on the river and asked if Trancher knew the name of Miss Allen's father.

No, he only knew she had had a grandfather, but he was dead.

Did he know the grandfather's name?

No, he did not know even that.

The man at the desk considered the problem for a moment, then said, "I would advise you, sir, to take the river-boat which leaves early in the morning. It is a beautiful trip and you will enjoy the scenery. In fact, you should not miss it if you are a stranger here. When you go on board, get in touch with the captain. He knows the whereabouts of every farmer on the river and will be able to put you off at the right place. Or you could get off at Oromocto and consult someone at the post office. You might get a chance to go with the mail driver, maybe. It's not likely there would be a taxi available."

These instructions seemed complicated to Trancher, much more so than locating one's train at the Grand Central Station. However, it would be delightful to be sailing up Lydia's river.

At an early hour next morning he awakened and from the window saw that the city was enveloped in the densest white fog he had ever encountered.

"How shall I be able to see the beautiful scenery on the river?" he asked the man at the desk when he paid his bill. "No one could see anything through this veil of tears."

"Oh, it will clear up as soon as you get away from the coast," the man assured him.

It seemed like a miracle to Stephen Trancher that the taxi driver could find his way through the all-pervading whiteness, but they finally reached their destination, the dripping, ghost-like wharf where the little white river-boat was awaiting them, while a pitiful fog horn moaned incessantly. Trancher went on board and before long the boat gave a hoarse whistle and slowly moved out into nothingness.

"For all I know," Trancher thought, "I may be crossing the Styx. I wonder what will happen next."

He sat in the cabin, protected there from the dripping dampness, and read the morning newspaper. After a time he became conscious that the cabin was filled with pale sunshine and, going out on deck, he found that the fog had changed to the faint, delicate haze of an Indian summer day, a haze through which the sun shone gently and the gorgeous colourings of the October woodlands were softened to opal tints. To his city-wearied eyes, they seemed as beautiful as the jewelled gates of Heaven.

The delicately tinted shores were reflected in the still waters of the river, the outlines less distinct, smudged like a crayon drawing. It was like an enchanted country and vaguely reminded him of something he had seen before. Then he recalled the illustrations in little Mary's fairy book. These were the same opalescent tones, softened by the blue haze.

Trancher felt he was sailing on in some bewildering dream, uncertain of his destination. He might be landed some time on those ethereal shores and wander far away, lost in his vain search for Lydia, and, like Hansel and Gretel, be lured to destruction by some crafty witch.

He consulted the captain about his prospects of finding Lydia and was inspired with confidence. Lydia Allen? Yes, they would pass her place. The old gentleman was dead, but the girl still lived there. She had been away to the States for a year or two, but was home again now. There might be a chance to put him off somewhere near her farm. If not, he could go on to Fredericton and find someone to drive him down from there.

It was indefinite, but there was nothing to be done about it at the moment, only wait patiently and in the meantime enjoy the ever-changing loveliness through which the boat was gliding. The little white cottages beside their ripening orchards gave him the impression of homelike peace. Would he find Lydia living in some such white

cottage? He wondered what he would say when he finally found her. Perhaps he would never find her. Still, he was getting more hopeful. This certainly was her country, so beautiful, so remote from the noise and heat of the city. It would be heavenly to go on just like this for ever, like the lotus-eaters in "a land where it is always afternoon." He surrendered himself to a vast contentment, to which even the thought of confronting Lydia seemed a bit disturbing.

Sometimes it amused him to study the few fellow passengers occupying camp chairs on the deck near him. They seemed for the most part to be belated tourists. Two ladies with pleasant voices, evidently from Boston, he thought, chatted cheerfully to each other. Libbey, the deck hand, came and went busily attending to the needs of farmers who hailed him to stop at the landings and collect their produce or brought it to the steamer's side in wide flat-bottomed boats. Libbey knew them all by name and gleaned what local gossip they had to offer. No city reporter could have extracted more news in those short intervals allowed him or retailed it with more embellishments than Libbey in the course of a day's run.

A lean man with a very fat wife questioned Libbey about the river and he grew expansive. "This is the aggravatingest river, mister. It's terrible shallow in spots and if we aren't contending with the ice, it's the log-booms. In the fall, it's liable to freeze up on you without warning, and in the spring the ice breaks up and there's a freshet. But just go away from this here river and stay away five years or more and you'll get such a hankerin' to come home that back you come, whether or no, and start cussin' it all over again."

"Who were the first settlers in this country?" asked the lean man.

"Well, mister, they was mostly Loyalists who settled that side of the river, the side you're looking at. The other side was settled by what they call pre-Loyalists. They came here first. The two sides never got on very well, so it's a blessed good thing the river came between them."

"What is a Loyalist?" inquired the fat lady, who had planted herself squarely on an inadequate deck-chair. She stared at Libbey with wide, rather vacant, eyes. Her large, flabby face seemed to be in process of melting into her neck and the chin had almost disappeared.

"Loyalists, ma'am," answered Libbey, "are kind of historical characters something like refugees. They settled round here and most all over the Province after that there Rebellion you put up in the States. They didn't take to the idea of being under a president, they wanted to be under the King. So old King George, he gave them grants of land and they came up here to live and started farming the land, and their descendants are living here still."

"Is that so?" said the fat lady.

The two ladies from Boston moved nearer and listened with eager interest to the conversation.

Libbey was in his element. "There used to be great goings on along this river in the old days," he told them. "When the military was stationed at Fredericton and a new Governor would be sent out from England, there would be balls and parties and sometimes horse races on the river."

"How could they race horses on the river?" asked the fat lady.

"Well, ma'am, you see it was froze."

"Is that so?" she said again. It was difficult for her to visualize conditions that were unfamiliar to her in her native state of Texas.

"And who were the pre-Loyalists?" asked one of the Boston ladies.

"The pre-Loyalists came from New England before the war, and when the fighting started some of them sent word to George Washington that they favoured his side, and when the Loyalists came along they said that was no way to behave, and I guess they're fighting over it yet."

"How very interesting," said the Boston lady.

"Anyway," continued Libbey, "them pre-Loyalists got the worst side of the river. It's all low intervale land and most every spring the freshet strikes them and they have to move everything up to the second floor. Sometimes they even take the hens and the pigs up—everything except the piano, and that's too big to get up the stairs. That's why pianos on the other side of the river all sound kind of queer, but they play 'em just the same."

"Is that so?" the fat lady repeated her usual refrain.

"The freshet," Libbey continued, "is the worst feature of this river, but the people has got so used to it that they miss it when they don't get one. You see, it makes a little excitement for them. I've seen school-kids going to school in boats and on Sundays there'd be a whole flotilla of boats tied up round the church steps. I've even heard of folks sitting in boats while they was milking the cows."

"Well, now, is that a fact?" came from the fat lady, who was making mental notes of these strange conditions with which to astonish her friends at home.

Libbey suddenly disappeared, his services being required on the lower deck.

Stephen Trancher looked on dreamily as at some playhouse scene. The idle hours stole by him uncounted. He did not look at his watch. Time meant nothing. He knew neither when nor where his journey would end in this land of lotus-eaters. But at last Libbey appeared at his side and inquired if he was the passenger who wanted to be put off at the old Allen place. Trancher said he was and experienced a curious

feeling of excitement bordering on alarm. What would happen now?

"We'll be able to put you off there all right," Libbey explained. "There is a man coming to get some mill-feed we got on board for him. You can go ashore with him and he'll show you the house. He goes right past it."

So at last he would be landed on those enchanted shores! He began to feel more like Ulysses than the lotus-eaters.

"I will put myself entirely in your hands," he told Libbey. "I am a stranger in a strange land."

Libbey posted himself at the railing, watching till he saw a little rowboat shoot out from under a clump of alders.

"Here he comes now," he announced. Then, turning to Trancher, he said, "You better come down below so as to be ready when we put off the mill-feed." He picked up Trancher's suitcase and led the way to the lower regions.

"Hi there, Bill," Libbey called out as the little boat came nearer. "I got a passenger for you."

"Did you bring my feed?" Bill called back.

"Sure," said Libbey, "would we be slowing up if we hadn't?"

The boat came close alongside and Libbey lowered a primitive ladder.

"Here's your passenger, Bill," he said. "This gentleman wants you to show him where the old Allen place is."

"All right, sir," said Bill, taking the suitcase. "Get in and sit up there in the stern."

Trancher obediently did what he was told while the two men threw in the dusty bags of feed.

Soon they were speeding over the quiet waters, lovely now in the light of the declining sun. He admired Bill's quick, dextrous strokes that were bringing the shore ever nearer until at last the prow of the little boat nosed into the deep shadows of the alders. They landed at the foot of a steep, muddy path, with a clearing beyond where a team of horses stood harnessed to a truck wagon.

"You go sit in the wagon, sir, and I'll be with you as soon as I bring up these bags."

Trancher took up his suitcase and asked if he could help Bill with the bags.

"Bless you, no, sir. Them few bags aren't nothing to heft."

It astonished Trancher to see the way Bill strode up the path with a feed-bag slung over his shoulder and dumped it on the cart, as though it were a feather pillow. He waited for Bill to dispose of all the bags before he mounted the cart, apprehensive lest the horses might decide to go home without their driver. Then he climbed up beside Bill on the driver's seat and they bumped along over the deeply

rutted road until they reached the highway.

Travel by truck-wagon was a new experience for him, though Bill seemed to take it all as a matter of course.

"Nice weather we're having lately," remarked Bill, by way of making conversation.

"Beautiful," agreed Trancher. "This is a lovely country of yours. I am seeing it for the first time."

"Glad you like it," Bill said, after which remark conversation flagged, not that that seemed to matter.

Finally Bill pulled up the horses and stopped. "This is the Allen place," he said. "Wasn't that where you wanted to go?"

Trancher looked at the house and hesitated. "Do you know if a girl by the name of Lydia Allen lives there?" he asked.

"Yes, she lives in that house."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure as I'm livin'," Bill said, handing out the suitcase and gathering up the reins.

"Wait a minute," Trancher said, feeling for his pocketbook, "I want to pay you. This has been most kind of you and a great convenience to me. I don't know what I should have done if you had not turned up. Now, what do I owe you?"

"Nothing at all. I couldn't take money just for a small obligement to a stranger. This ain't no taxi," he added, turning his head to indicate the truck cart.

"It suited my purpose just as well," Trancher told him pleasantly as he searched for a package of cigarettes. "Here, will you accept these and thank you very much. I come from the city where they don't do things for an obligement—they just wait with their hand out for a tip! I won't forget you. Will you tell me your name?"

"Lawson is my name, Bill Lawson. And thanks for the cigarettes, sir." He drove off and Trancher turned and walked up the driveway to the house.

CHAPTER XXII

The house was set some distance from the road and was over-shadowed by tall elms. It was a large, square, and beautifully proportioned building. Five wide windows with brown shutters stretched across the second story; above the veranda the roof-tree rose gently like the obtuse angle of a classic pediment, enclosing a half-moon window that lighted the attic. Four tall chimneys stood at the four corners of the roof. The veranda, about whose graceful posts drooped ragged festoons of scarlet creeper, sheltered the lower windows and the massive front door. Although large, the house gave the impression of having stood there for a very long time. It seemed to have settled unobtrusively into the landscape, dwarfed by the enormous elm trees. Once it must have been painted yellow, but time had mellowed it to a silvery cream colour.

Trancher viewed it all with admiration tinged with apprehension. This was not the kind of place in which he had expected to find Lydia. This was a mansion. Could there be, by chance, two Lydia Allens on this wide river? The man at the hotel desk had told him that Allens were fairly numerous. He walked more slowly. What in the world would he do in this lonely place if he encountered the wrong Lydia? Night was coming on and there was no other house in sight and no conveyance of any kind.

Another thought occurred to him. Perhaps Lydia worked for the people who owned this mansion. Perhaps she liked working for them better than for him and might refuse to leave them. In any case, he could not go in and carry her off at short notice. The suspense was terrible. He must know the worst.

He walked quickly and boldly up to the door and applied the heavy knocker formed of an iron ring held in the mouth of a ferocious-looking lion. The sound echoed through the stillness. He waited in uneasy expectancy till at length the door was opened by a tall, angular woman in a neat cotton dress, her rather severe features surmounted by wisps of thin grey hair. This might be the witch, Trancher thought, only the features, though severe, were not crafty. He stood looking at her, fascinated.

"Do you want anything?" she asked with frigid dignity. She had noticed the suitcase and suspected an agent of some sort.

"Yes," said Trancher, "I want a girl named Lydia Allen. Does she live in this house?"

"She does."

"May I see her?"

The woman hesitated for a brief moment, looking him over carefully, then said,

"Come in and I will call her."

Trancher entered a wide hall, the walls of which were hung with swords, muskets, and other military relics of bygone days. At one side a tall clock ticked with slow deliberation.

He was ushered into a large, low-ceilinged room, seen dimly in the fading light and closing shadows. The elderly woman left him there, but soon returned and said, stiffly, "Miss Allen will see you shortly."

It was the strangest room he had ever been in. As he sat looking about him, he felt in the presence of things long passed away. The massive mahogany bookcases contained very old books, leather-bound with faded gilt lettering. Everything was brown, like a drawing in sepia. The heavy curtains of brown brocade were looped back with huge brass clips representing clusters of grapes. The carpet covering the entire floor was patterned with scrolls of the Paisley type in brown and tawny ecru. The furniture was all of dark mahogany, scarred in places from long use. Two comfortable chairs, upholstered in brown leather, stood on either side of the fireplace. Above the mantel-shelf hung a handsome bull's-eye mirror, in which the room was reflected in miniature. Old portraits of faces aloof and dignified looked tranquilly down from their tarnished gilt frames. At the farther side a french window opened on to a lawn that sloped to the edge of the river.

It was not a room that had been restored by an interior decorator, but one that had marvellously survived through the crumbling ages. The ancient desk near the window was strewn with writing materials. A sewing-basket and books lay carelessly on a drop-leaf table beside a plate of apples and a bowl of yellow marigolds. A bright fire was burning in the fireplace. The place was evidently inhabited. It was, in fact, a cosy, home-like room, not a museum.

Waiting there, in the deepening shadows and the flickering firelight, Trancher felt enveloped in an atmosphere of harmony and peace. What was Lydia doing in a place like this? What was her position in this old-world mansion? He remembered Libbey's account of the Loyalists. This must have been the home of one of those banished exiles who preferred to be under the rule of a king. He recalled that Lydia had once spoken in terms of love and respect for that (according to her) much-maligned monarch, George the Third. It would not surprise him if the original owner of this house should suddenly appear in periwig and scarlet coat to order him off the premises as a rebel.

The clock in the hall broke the silence by slowly striking the hour of five, and he heard light footsteps approaching. A moment later Lydia stood in the doorway. She wore a scarlet sweater over a gingham dress—yellow, softened by darker lines of

red and brown plaid, and her cheeks were still glowing from her recent work in the garden in the cool autumn air. He noticed that she was browner than formerly, tanned by healthy exposure to sun and wind. For an instant she did not see him in the fading light. Then she recognized him and the color faded slowly from her face.

He went to meet her. They shook hands and stood looking at each other without speaking. When the silence became unbearable Trancher said quietly, "Are you surprised to see me, Lydia?"

"Yes," she answered. "Very much surprised."

Lydia moved toward the fireplace and perched on the arm of one of the brown leather chairs. Trancher took the chair opposite. As he looked across at her she seemed such a strange contrast of glowing life and color in that dim room, against the background of the worn brown chair, as if a gaily coloured autumn leaf had alighted on a ploughed field. Lydia returned his look and then, lest the silence should again overcome them, inquired, "How did you come here?"

"I came up an enchanted river in a phantom ship. I was ferried to the shore by a man bearing meal sacks, and finally arrived at this place on a truck-wagon."

"Oh, I know," she said. "You came by the river-boat and Bill Lawson brought you over when he went for his mill-feed."

The old whimsical smile flitted across his face and he said, "Would you mind telling me by what sorcery you know these things?"

"I know because Bill Lawson came here this morning to borrow some feed. He said he was completely out, but was expecting to get a load by the boat this afternoon. It's as simple as that. There was no other way you could possibly get here if you came on the boat."

"I see," he said. "Things are always so simple with you, Lydia. Tell me, does everyone on this river know everybody else?"

"Yes, more or less." Then, fixing questioning eyes upon him, she asked with sudden directness, "Why did you come here?"

"To take you home," he said.

She looked away from him and slowly shook her head. "My place is here," she said. "I wrote you quite definitely that I could not go to you."

Trancher tried to conceal the stab her words gave him. They seemed to wipe out with a single stroke the sense of enchantment the day had held for him.

Lydia noticed for the first time how worn and haggard his face was. She was sorry for him, but she intended to be quite firm. She looked past him, through the french window and far out to the opal lands beyond the river. She was thinking that the time had come to tell him of the broken crystal. He must not leave without

knowing, though the telling would be hard. And Stephen Trancher continued to watch her, still wondering what was her place in this house.

After a pause he asked, "Who owns this place?"

"I do," was the amazing reply. "My grandfather left it to me."

"How did he get it? Did he buy it?"

"No, he inherited it from his grandfather. The land was a royal grant. You see, my people were Loyalists."

"Lydia," he said rather severely, "why did you never tell me all this?"

"All what?"

"That your home was a grand mansion, like some baronial hall in a fairy tale."

"It is not so very grand now. It used to be grand in the old days, but not now. I told you I lived on a farm, which was quite true."

"Lydia, why did you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Work for me all those months."

"I needed the money, and, besides, I liked working for you." Her look was as balm to heal the wound she had just inflicted.

He was silent, and then, suddenly noticing that the sun had sunk beyond the fir trees, he asked abruptly, "By the way, is there a boarding-house or hotel near, where I can put up for the night?"

"No," she said, "there isn't."

"Good Heavens! Then what can I do?"

"You will have to stay here."

"But I can't bother you to that extent."

"It won't bother us."

"It seems like an imposition."

"Do you mind staying at an old farmhouse?"

"I think I should like it very much, Lydia."

"Very well, then you stay. Excuse me for a few minutes while I tell Janet."

"Is she the witch who let me in?"

"Janet is not a witch. She is the dearest old soul that ever lived. She has always worked here for my grandfather and it was she who brought me up. You see, I was only twelve when my parents died. They were both killed in an accident. Janet has been like a mother to me."

Lydia found Janet in the act of giving Jake his supper in the kitchen.

"Janet," she said, "that gentleman, Mr. Trancher, is going to stay here tonight. He is someone I met when I was away. Have we anything good for supper?"

"We might use one of those chickens we got ready to send to the market."

"Won't it take too long to cook?"

"No, I can fix it so that it won't take no time." Janet loved company.

"What else can we have?"

Janet looked at the row of tomatoes ripening on the window ledge. "We might stew up some of them and bake potatoes and Jake can bring in a few ears of corn."

"What about dessert?"

"There is an apple pie," said Janet. "I thought that man was something above the book-agent kind, but I couldn't figure out what he was doing round here with a suitcase."

"He thought he could go to an hotel, but I told him there wasn't one near here and he would have to stay with us."

Lydia went to the dining-room and took a silver tray from the sideboard. As she did so her eyes fell upon the tankard. She picked it up and turned it to look at the initials on the disc. "C.B.T.," she murmured, "tonight you will be returned to your rightful owner." She hid the tankard in the cupboard, then set the tray with tea and ginger-cakes and took it to Trancher, who sat quietly looking out on the river.

"You must be very hungry," she said. "It will be some time before we have supper, so I have brought you a cup of tea." She placed the tray on the table beside him and lit the shaded oil lamp.

"This is very thoughtful of you," he said. "Ah, ginger cakes! Now I know that you really are my Lydia."

"I really am," she told him.

"I am glad to be sure of it. You see, I have been wandering through this strange, unknown land of yours for so long that I would not be surprised to encounter Circe tempting me with her enchanted wine."

Lydia smiled. Always he loved the fantastic. "Don't be afraid," she said, "I won't change you into anything. I like you well enough just as you are."

A warm glow of happiness stole over him as he drank the fragrant tea. It would be wonderful to stay in this charming old house with Lydia.

"I believe I was hungry," he said, but, as in the old days, Lydia had slipped quietly from the room. Leaving the preparations for supper in Janet's capable hands, Lydia ran upstairs to the guest chamber, where she threw open the window, dusted the furniture, and made up the bed. When she had finished she returned to Trancher.

"I ate everything," he told her. "It all tasted so good. I have missed your ginger-cakes, Lydia."

"I did not bring you much," she said. "You must have some appetite left for

supper. Come now and I will take you to your room."

He followed her through the dusky hall and up the wide stairs, carrying his suitcase. Lydia led him to a large, square room, furnished with a dark mahogany bureau, quaint old wooden chairs, and a huge four-poster bed. He looked with admiration bordering on awe at the bedstead, saying, "I never slept in anything like that before."

"You will find it quite comfortable," she told him. "There is a good mattress over the feather bed. If you want more light, there are candles on that table and here are matches."

"It all looks delightfully comfortable," he said. "I feel as though I had been transported into a far-distant age. What a lovely view there is of the river! You don't know what this means to me, Lydia, after the inferno I have lived through this summer. I sometimes think I must have died and gone to Heaven." She left him standing at the window, and ran downstairs.

"I'll set the table, Janet," she called at the kitchen door. She laid out the best damask tablecloth and napkins, then went to the garden in search of a few late pansies for the centrepiece. Returning, she arranged them between two silver candelabra and set out the best silver and old glass goblets and wine glasses with frail stems and the salt cellars almost large enough for sugar bowls, filled a decanter with home-made wine and drew up two Chippendale chairs.

She hurried to the kitchen to give a few last orders. "We will have cheese with the apple pie, Janet, and coffee," she said. "I'll bring you the silver coffee pot, and don't forget cranberry sauce for the chicken."

When everything was ready, she lighted the candles. The table looked really very well, she thought, and went to summon her guest.

He had changed to the velvet smoking-jacket and looked refreshed and more like himself, but she noticed that his hair was a shade whiter and his eyes more sunken than ever.

CHAPTER XXIII

They sat in the halo of light shed from the many-pronged candelabra, which only dimly revealed the rest of the room and the old prints on the walls.

"This is a banquet," Trancher said. "I never tasted such good chicken."

"Janet is a fine cook," Lydia replied. "I am glad you like it, for practically everything on the table was produced right here on the farm."

"Really?" he said. "I thought stewed tomatoes always came out of a can."

"Sometimes they do, but we grew these in the garden."

"What a difference it makes in the flavour. It must be wonderful to live on a farm. I wish I had been born a farmer."

"It has its drawbacks," she told him. "You might not enjoy following a team of horses over a ploughed field all day."

"No," he said, "and I could not shoulder a sack of meal the way your friend Bill Lawson did this afternoon."

"If you had done it all your life, you could. Your muscles would have hardened. Men who work hard every day are not as tired as you would be after a day's work in the office. Fresh air and constant exercise and simple food develop a strong, healthy race; most of them live to see ninety years."

"I never came into direct contact with agriculture before," he said. "The more I hear about this kind of life the more I lose patience with cities."

She told him then something of her plans for the farm and the work she had accomplished since her return home. He listened intently, fascinated by her enthusiasm.

"I can see," he said, "that you are dependent on the Creator for your supplies and quite independent of what man can do unto you."

"We have not much control over the markets," she told him, "but at least we always have enough to eat and enough firewood to keep us warm. And there is another thing I never realized till I came back and that is we can always do our work in beautiful surroundings."

"That must be wonderful," he said. "All I can see from my office window is a small patch of sky."

How strange it was to sit at this delightful table with Lydia as hostess! What had become of the barrier?

Janet came and went quietly waiting on them. She looked less formidable now, but he remembered with some embarrassment the tone in which she had said, "Miss Allen will see you shortly." He should have called Lydia "Miss Allen" when he asked

for her at the door, but how could he have known? He hoped Bill Lawson had not noticed the same error.

Stephen Trancher's wildest dreams of the situation in which he might find Lydia had never pictured anything like this. He had once thought that if he saw Lydia in her own home he might be cured. This kind of thing would never cure him. He was still slightly dazed and bewildered. What would happen next? He would leave the next move in Lydia's hands.

Lydia herself was less disquieted by the change in their positions. She was meeting him now on her own ground, no longer behind the mask of servitude. She wondered why he had bothered to come when he had not taken the trouble to answer her letter. At the back of her mind the thought persisted. He must be told tonight about the broken crystal and her discovery of their common ancestor.

They finished the meal, lingering over the coffee, and then returned to the other room and the chairs by the fire. Lydia suggested that he light his pipe.

"Am I allowed to smoke in these hallowed precincts?" he asked.

"You may do anything you like. You are my honoured guest tonight."

"I still feel rather an interloper," he said.

Jake appeared with an armful of wood for the fire. "Will you be wanting anything else, Missy?" he inquired. "Me and Janet is thinking of going out for the evening. They are having a surprise party for old Mrs. Trundle. It's her birthday today. She's ninety-three, you know, and Janet wants to take her that shawl she's been knitting."

"Dear old Mrs. Trundle," exclaimed Lydia, "I did not know it was her birthday. Wait a minute, Jake. I must send her a present. I'll see if I can find something."

She left the room and returned with a pair of bedroom slippers. "I'll send her these," she said. "They are a bit too large for me and I have never worn them, but they will fit her I am sure." She wrapped the gift in white tissue paper and tied it with ribbon. "Here, Jake, take this to her and tell her I will go to see her soon. We should have made her a birthday cake."

"Bill Lawson's wife is making the cake," Jake said as he took the parcel.

This happy little glimpse of neighborhood life delighted Trancher. These country people did not live dull, colourless lives; even old ladies had birthday parties. He was pleased that he knew the man whose wife had made the birthday cake.

CHAPTER XXIV

Lydia returned to her seat by the fire and picked up her knitting, while Trancher smoked his pipe contentedly.

"You have beautiful things in this house, Lydia," he said. "Your people must have been very wealthy. Why did you tell me you needed money?"

"My people were once wealthy, before the Revolution," she replied, "but they lost all their property and everything then. They brought most of these things with them from their old home and King George made the British Government give us compensation for our lost property though it was nothing like what we had lost. In the old military days, my great-grandfather commanded the garrison at Fredericton and, I believe, he lived with a good deal of style and elegance at that period. The story is told that when he drove to Fredericton on official business he had postillions riding by his coach-and-pair."

Trancher gasped. Was this his Lydia? He saw her now against a background of old-world refinement, this girl who had worked in his kitchen like a little Cinderella.

"How did he get the money for all that?"

"He owned great timber lands and in those days the country was prosperous. Shipbuilding developed at the port of Saint John, and there was a demand for all kinds of timber for the wooden ships they built in those days. Then the intervale lands along the river were rich in hay and there was a good market for that in the days when horses were used for everything. He also had military pay."

"I see," he said. "The automobile came in and wooden ships went out. It must have made quite a difference to your finances." His quick business mind grasped the situation.

"Yes, it did, and of late years grandfather could not adjust his ideas to modern farming methods and the new trend of markets. We always lived very comfortably, though. He had inherited quite a bit of money from his father, but that has nearly all gone now."

"Does not the farm pay, now?"

"It has always made a living for us, but I want to do more than that. If my father had lived, things might have been different, for after his death Grandfather seemed to lose interest in it. Now I want to go in for modern farm machinery, develop the farm, and find new markets for our produce so that it will pay well. You see, for all that I needed more capital than I had. That is why I went to work for you."

"I should think you could not have accumulated much capital working for me."

"I saved a thousand dollars."

"How in the world did you do that?"

"By not spending anything."

He looked at her a little severely, with the bearing of a gentleman of the old school, and asked, "Was there no other way in which you could have earned money?"

"Oh, I went to New York with high hopes and very little money. I thought I could get some kind of position where I could teach music. By the time my money was gone and my hopes had dwindled to despair I read Maggie's advertisement in the paper asking for 'a girl from the Provinces'."

"So that is how Maggie got you? I never knew."

"Yes. I calculated that if I stayed with you for a year and a half I could save the thousand dollars I had set myself as a goal."

He looked at her in blank amazement.

"Are you sorry I did it?" she asked.

"I don't know," he said.

"Wasn't I worth the money you paid me?"

"The trouble is you were worth so much more." He smiled at her, not with the old twisted half-smile that she knew so well, but with a look that she had never seen on his face before and did not understand.

He looked away from her, his gaze wandering around the room, and then changed the subject abruptly by saying, "You have a fortune right here in this old furniture."

"That is what our lawyer told me. He was quite provoked with me for not selling out the whole place and everything in it. He said then I should have enough to live on for the rest of my days. But I plan to have enough to live on and keep the place, too. Anyway, I would rather be poor than sell my home."

"I don't blame you," he said. "Never sell this lovely old place. I can see that farming would be a fascinating occupation. I know now why you cannot come back to me. I might have known, but, then, how could I know? I have missed you so, Lydia, I dread the thought of going back to the city and opening the house without you."

The sad, weary look had come back to his face again. She hated to disappoint him after he had come so far to persuade her.

"Maggie will find someone for you," she said encouragingly. "She will always be near enough to look after things for you."

He shook his head sadly. "It will never be the same again, but I see now quite clearly that you must never come and work for me as you once did. That is decided

forever."

They were silent for a time. Then, as though the matter was definitely closed, he asked about the old lady in the portrait on the wall opposite him.

"That is my Loyalist ancestor," she told him, "the one I was called after."

"She has a fine face," he said. "I think you resemble her."

Lydia's heart beat quickly. This was the time to tell him that he was looking at the same face as in the miniature he carried in his pocket. She did not tell him, however. She rose slowly and quietly slipped out of the room.

Another plan had been forming in her thoughts. She would not tell him—she would show him. She would stage a little drama that would catch his fancy. He would have to be told now after he had come so far to see her.

Lydia lit a candle and, going to the dining-room, took the tankard from the cupboard and carried it up the back stairs, climbing the narrow stairway that led to the attic. There, among the old trunks and broken furniture, the discards of four generations, she found a brass-studded, hair-covered trunk. She set the candle on a box with the tankard, opened the lid of the trunk, and drew out the dress of copper-colored satin, the lace fichu, quilted skirt, and frilled cap that had once been worn by Lydia Trancher.

Her heart pounded now with the excitement of this adventure. Well, she had masqueraded for him in a white apron for a year and a half; this was just another act of the drama—the last act, she told herself.

She found a cracked mirror and set it on a wobbly chair, then swiftly pulled off her sweater and dress and with nervous fingers arrayed herself in the copper-colored satin, adjusted the fichu, and arranged her hair to resemble as much as possible the lady in the miniature. To complete the costume she pinned on the frilled cap. She picked up the tankard and did a bit of rehearsing before the cracked mirror then hurried down the attic stairs before her courage could fail her.

She decided to go out by the back door and enter the room by the french window. The heavy vines about the window, like those which so long ago had framed the original Lydia as she posed for the artist, would make the proper background for her costume.

The autumn air felt chilly on her bare arms and blew out the candle which she still carried. She put the candlestick on the back steps and picked her way in the starlight over the damp grass. She was really frightened now. She stood for a moment looking through the window into the lamplit room where the fire flickered.

Trancher was sitting where she had left him by the fire, lonely and detached as always. He held one of her books in his hand, but he was not reading. As she saw

him there a great wave of devotion to this man came over her. She felt at that moment that no sacrifice would be too great for her to make if only she could penetrate that deep reserve, that lonely silence, and reach his heart so capable of love and friendship.

As quietly as she could she opened the french window and stood there, her hands tightly clasping the tankard, framed by the foliage and the night beyond.

Hearing the slight noise, Trancher looked up and beheld a living vision of the beautiful woman whose picture for so long he had worshipped in silent admiration. He rose to his feet. What was he seeing? Was this a haunted house or was he in a dream from which he would awaken to find himself in that noisy cell-like room in the city? As one in a trance he went to her. She lifted wide, searching eyes to his with a touch of mischief so like the picture, but he knew now it was his Lydia. He took the hand she held out to him and drew her into the room. Together they stepped toward the fireplace and, looking up, saw themselves reflected in the bull's-eye mirror, two tiny, old-world figures; he in black velvet with silvered hair and she a little eighteenth-century lady in copper-coloured satin—Beethoven's minuet.

He looked at her, taking in every detail of her costume with incredulous delight. She looked at him—tall, slim, distinguished, and there was adoration in her eyes. He saw it and rejoiced.

He broke the silence. "What new sorcery is this?" he asked.

"This is not sorcery," she told him, "it is reality. I have brought you back the stolen tankard. Here it is—take it. It is yours by right."

He took it in his free hand and, turning it, saw the initials C.B.T. on the disc at the base of the handle. His fingers tightened around her own. Complete bewilderment overcame him and he stood staring at the beautiful silver thing in his hand.

"Where did you get this, Lydia?" he asked with an element of fear in his lowered voice. The incident was too uncanny.

She wondered if he really knew which Lydia he was talking to. "It belonged to my great great grandmother," she said.

"And where did she get it?"

"She stole it from her family before she eloped from her Staten Island home with her husband who was a Loyalist."

"Where did you get that costume?"

"It was hers, too. I believe it was the dress she was married in. I found it in an old trunk in our attic."

"What was her husband's name?"

"Captain Nathaniel Allen. He was promoted to colonel later on. That is his portrait, and the other one, which you asked about, is his wife. Her maiden name was Lydia Trancher. They went to England when they were middle-aged and those portraits were painted there."

"This is very strange," he said. "Are you sure about all this or did you just manufacture it to ensnare me in some further mystery?"

"I could not manufacture the tankard, could I?"

"No, I forgot about the tankard for the moment, but do you think this ancestor of yours was the Lydia Trancher of my miniature?"

"Yes, Mr. Trancher, I am quite sure of it."

"When did you find this out?"

"Sit down," she said, "and I will tell you."

He led her to a graceful Chippendale sofa that stood near the table by the fireplace and seated himself beside her.

"Did you ever look inside the frame of that miniature?" she asked.

"No, I never did."

"Well, suppose you do."

He took the red case from his pocket and removed the miniature. She took it from his hands.

"It will open quite easily," she said. Taking a pair of scissors from the table, she prised off the gold rim from the casing. "There it is," she said, removing the ivory painting and handing him the frame, where the faded, yellow paper lay. He took it out and unfolded it. There were the words—Nathaniel Allen, Captain in the King's forces, married Lydia, the erring daughter of Bartholomew Trancher. Speechless with amazement, he puzzled out every word of the faded writing and sat staring at the scrap of paper, trying to realize the situation.

"So she was your ancestor. She lived in this very house. That was the very dress she wore. It is amazing!"

"I can show you still more proof," Lydia said, and brought to him a huge Bible, leather-bound and illustrated with curious old engravings. "See, here is our family record on the flyleaf: 'Nathaniel Allen, Captain in the King's regiment stationed at New York, and Lydia Trancher of Staten Island, were married April 28th, 1783.' There is the list of their children and the dates of their births and deaths. The oldest son was my grandfather's grandfather. Now, will you believe it?"

He looked at her with a joyous smile. "Why, then we are cousins!" he exclaimed as he closed the heavy Bible and laid it on the table.

"I have reckoned it up and I think we would be sixth cousins."

"This means so much to me," he said. He picked up the yellowed paper and replaced it in the frame with the ivory miniature and the gold rim which held it in place. He looked at the miniature and then at Lydia, comparing each detail of the costume. His expression was that of some medieval knight who had suddenly discovered the Holy Grail.

Lydia sat there entranced, afraid to break the spell by word or movement. "You are very like her, Lydia, only more beautiful," he said softly, and they were again silent for a time. Things kept coming back to him. This girl who had acted as his maid was the direct descendant of Lydia Trancher whom he had sought for years, and while she had lived in his house he had treated her as a servant, she had obeyed his orders as an inferior. The thought distressed him, and then, as though speaking to himself, he said, "Lydia, you should never have done it."

"Why not?" she asked defiantly, with an imperious uplift of her head, so like the other Lydia.

He did not answer her at once, and she remembered what Tony had said—"It's when he does not say anything that he is terrific."

"You put me in a false position," he said at last, very gravely. He was reproaching himself now for ever thinking that if he saw her in her home surroundings he would be cured. Why had he been so blind? Could she ever have come from anywhere but just where she was, just here where he had found her? He must have realized it all the while, only now could he understand.

Lydia mistook his silence. "He will never cross the barrier," she thought. She had broken the crystal, but the barrier still remained intact.

The strain of the past two years had been greater than she had realized, and his sudden and unexpected appearance had come to her as a shock after her struggle to put him out of her mind forever. The new role she had played in the last act had brought her to the end of her endurance. Her courage suddenly failed, the tension of her nerves was breaking, but, still defiant, she said, "I am not sorry I did it, for otherwise I should never have met you." Her lips trembled as she spoke and, to her horror, she felt her eyes filling and two tears escaped and rolled down her cheeks.

Trancher looked at her in dismay. "Oh, Lydia!" he said, "what have I done to hurt you?"

She could not reply and searched fruitlessly for her handkerchief in the satin folds of her dress, then remembered it was in the pocket of her sweater, left on a chair in the attic.

He took from his own pocket an immaculate linen handkerchief, very large and white. She accepted it gratefully.

To the mind of all men there is only one way of coping successfully with feminine tears. Stephen Trancher put his arm about her and drew her to him till her head rested on the velvet smoking-jacket. She dabbed her eyes savagely with the voluminous handkerchief.

"I feel," she began haltingly, "as if there will always be that barrier between us. We can never forget it, never. I can't quite explain it, Mr. Trancher, but I never intended to deceive you."

"I know that," he said, drawing her closer to him, "and the barrier has gone forever. Thank Heaven! Now, don't you think, since we have close family connections, that instead of saying Mr. Trancher, you could say Stephen?"

The unexpectedness of this request startled her. "Oh, I don't think I could. It would not sound right."

"Try it," he pleaded, "it would sound very right to me. So few people call me Stephen now and those who once did have gone."

The note of sadness in his voice touched her deeply. "Stephen," she whispered, then again with more confidence, "Stephen." She raised her eyes and met his gaze of mystic adoration.

"You can never know what that means to me, Lydia," he told her. "I have longed for you so all summer. There were times when I felt I could not bear it. Now I really do believe I have died and gone to Heaven."

"You always had a fantastic imagination," she told him.

"Yes, but let me tell you something. This morning when I left Saint John I sailed through a thick white mist like a veil of tears and then came out of it and found myself sailing on a still, quiet river with colours on either side like the jewelled gates of Heaven. Then a boatman rowed me to the shore and brought me here and I felt that this was Heaven itself."

She laughed at him. "That is a very pretty story. I hate to shatter the illusion, but, believe me, we are still on earth."

"It is as near Heaven as I ever want to come. All this long day I have been wondering what would happen next and now I think I know."

"What is it?" she asked.

"You and I will get married and I will take you home with me and keep you always."

His arms tightened about her, for she was trembling. She could not speak.

"You cannot deny me this, Lydia, for it is all I want on earth. I cannot face life without you any longer. Tell me that you will come." Still she did not answer. "Don't you think you could be happy with me, Lydia?"

She raised her head and looked steadfastly into his questioning eyes. Then she said very slowly, "Stephen, all summer long I have been fighting loneliness, too, trying to forget you, thinking I would never see you again. I cannot say no to you now."

His kiss was like a benediction and they sat together, lost in the wonder of this great revelation.

At last she said, "Perhaps after all you were right about being in Heaven."

"I am sure of it," he replied, "but how did it all happen?"

"Like a miracle," she said, and they sat silent again.

Later he said, "How old are you, Lydia?"

"Twenty-eight."

"That is not so bad. I was afraid you were younger. I am only twelve years older than you."

"Are you forty?" she asked, somewhat surprised, for she had always thought of him as many years older than that.

"I will be forty on my next birthday. I am too old for you, I know."

"What does it matter?" she said. "Nothing matters. I love you just as you are."

They began to make plans. Stephen said he could not be away from the office for more than a week or ten days. He had left so unexpectedly and Wilcox would be getting uneasy. Wilcox never liked to take much responsibility. He therefore wanted to get married as soon as it could be arranged, that they might have a few days for the honeymoon on the way home.

Lydia suggested they spend it in Nova Scotia and take the Yarmouth boat to New York. She was anxious to see the Annapolis Valley during the apple-picking season. If there was time they might go as far as Halifax. But she was doubtful about leaving the farm on such short notice and begged him to return without her and come back for her when she would have arranged about the work for the winter, but he would not hear of it.

"I won't go without you, Lydia. Don't ask me to," he said beseechingly.

"How long can you give me?"

"Only as long as it takes to get the ceremony over. Tomorrow I must get the licence and find a parson, too, I suppose."

"That seems comparatively simple, thinking of all the things I have in mind at the moment."

"Now what have you got to do that is as important as getting married?"

"Well, tomorrow I must go to see a man about cutting pulpwood for me next winter. Would you like to come with me? It is right in the heart of the woods at an

old logging camp. We could not get there with a car, but we can take Flossy."

"Who is Flossy?"

"My little driving horse. We can go in the buggy. I have no car," she explained. "I will have to get one some day, but there are so many other things just now that I seem to need more."

"I would love to go with Flossy in a buggy. It would be even more exciting than travelling in a truck wagon. But when and where can I get that licence? I am worrying about that."

"I'll tell you what I'll do. I will get John to drive you up to Fredericton in his car tomorrow afternoon. He will know just what to do about it. We can be married in the parish church in Fredericton and take the train from there."

"Who is John?"

"He is a great friend of mine. We were at college together. He and Elsie, that is his wife, live a few miles from here, down the river."

"Very well, I will go with John. That is settled. I won't feel really secure until I get that licence. I will have to get a ring, too, won't I?"

"Don't you think," Lydia said thoughtfully, "that we are doing all this in too much of a hurry? We should think it over and get more used to the idea. Wouldn't it be better if I followed you a few weeks later? We could be married in New York."

"No," he said, "I'm taking you with me and taking no chances."

CHAPTER XXV

Stephen Trancher awoke next morning to sounds new to him, the sweet, far distant tinkling of a cowbell, the crowing of a cock, the bleating of lambs. Through his open window the clear, fresh air purified by the early morning sunshine, seemed a life-giving thing as it blew cool on his face.

"This indeed is the 'jocund morn'," he thought as he lay watching a flock of twittering blackbirds breakfasting off rowan berries on a tree near his window. Where on earth was he? Gradually memory returned to him, obliterated for the time by deep, restful sleep. This was Lydia's home, his beautiful Lydia. This heavenly spot was her home. Her home that he had once thought would cure him. Could anything ever cure him of his desire for her? Now he could see things in a clearer light, he had been a fool, he told himself. He might have known that only an atmosphere as rare as this could have nurtured Lydia. But then how could he know? It was all so different from anything he had ever known or dreamed of. Now he was taking Lydia away from it all. What had he to give her in exchange for this? He liked his home on Staten Island, but what could it mean to her? Her heart would always be here, he felt sure. This place would be his most formidable rival. She would always want to come back. The thought disturbed him.

Well, there was nothing for it. He would have to live near the city if he was to support a wife. Perhaps Lydia would be able to find a way out.

Far off, through the window, he heard Lydia's voice calling to Jake. How sweet it sounded. He had always liked Lydia's voice.

Now she would soon be his always and forever. A sense of peace unbelievable stole over him as he lay in the huge bed in the warm luxuriance of several layers of homespun blankets and a patchwork quilt, with the cool morning air on his face. He breathed it in gratefully, remembering the city heat.

The realization of great happiness came to him. When had he ever felt happy like this before? Marriage really was a wonderful institution. Why had he always been so suspicious of it and why did it so often fail?

His marriage with Lydia could not fail. No, never. Lydia had such a keen appreciation of the things he most enjoyed—books, music, and quiet home-life, all the best things. Lydia, who was so intimate with the primal world, so close to the wholesome land, born and bred in the eternal beauty of it. How wonderful that he should have found her. Could it all be true or just a dream from which he had not fully wakened?

To avoid such an uncertainty he got up, dressed, and went downstairs. Finding

no one in the front of the house, he went out and wandered about until he came in sight of the farmyard. There were lilac trees beside the gate and a watering-trough in the yard, while beyond rose huge grey barns with red doors.

Lydia was standing by the open gate, through which a flock of sheep trundled, followed by their playful, half-grown lambs, eager to reach the pasture lands again.

There was his shepherdess and her flock. Two young lambs waited beside her with expectantly wagging tails. She sat down on a stone near the lilacs, the two lambs rubbing impatient noses against her. "Wait just a minute," she said to them. "Jake is coming with your breakfast."

Jake came out of the barn with two brimming milk pails and stopped beside her. With a cup she filled two bottles with the warm, new milk. Then with a bottle in each hand she fed the waiting and excited lambs.

Stephen stood at a little distance watching her, there in her red sweater where the early morning sun still threw long shadows on the dewy grass. He thought it was the prettiest sight he had ever seen. He waited quietly, not wishing to disturb the feast. When the lambs had finished he came forward and she rose to greet him with some diffidence. The memory of the evening before seemed dim and out of place in the shining light of day. For the moment it was difficult to think of him as her lover, everything had happened so quickly and under such strange conditions.

"Good morning," he said. "Do we take the sheep to pasture?"

"Oh, Jake can do that this morning," she replied, just as if it wasn't anything.

"No," he objected, "I want to go with you. That is one of the things I counted on doing."

She gave him an amused smile. "It's no great treat," she said. "Wouldn't you rather come in the house and have some breakfast?"

"Not till we have taken the sheep to pasture."

"Very well, then, come on."

They followed the flock which had already gone halfway down the lane, the ewes stopping to nibble as they went. The twin lambs trotted along beside them.

The old moss-covered stone wall on either side was overgrown with crimson squaw bush and hawthorn, on whose black twisted branches the red haws still clustered, interspersed with wild blackberry canes with torn and dejected foliage, clumps of yellowing ferns, and a few late asters.

"I am constantly expecting to hear the pipes of Pan," he said. "This is Arcady."

She laughed at him. "It is all everyday life to me. It is just your fantastic way of looking at things."

"It is the only way to look at things in scenes like these!"

He took her hand and drew it through his arm and stroked the slim fingers. She felt his love for her even if she was not wearing copper-coloured satin, and wondered at his keen interest in the farm life. He seemed so foreign to it all in his grey business suit.

The sheep had reached the lowered bars and were hobbling over them into the pasture beyond. He helped her put up the bars and they turned to go home.

"Can you tell your sheep apart?" he asked. "They all look alike to me."

"I know every one of them. Their faces are all different and each one has funny little ways of her own."

"Little shepherdess," he said, "are you still willing to leave your Arcady and come home with me?"

She looked up at him with deep devotion in her eyes and asked, "Do you truly think I could make you happy?"

He took her upturned face between his hands and kissed her. "I have not the slightest doubt about that," he said. "I am only happy when I have you with me."

"I still have a feeling," she said, "that we are deciding everything too quickly. We should give ourselves time to get accustomed to the idea. It does not seem like you to do things in a hurry. Why not let me come to you later? Or you could come back and get me, perhaps about Christmas or the first of the year."

"Don't suggest that again, Lydia," he pleaded. "I want you now. I can't go back without you."

"Then I will go," she said, "if you are sure you really want me."

"Want you! You don't know how I want you. You are the loveliest thing I have ever known."

They walked slowly home together hand in hand, as lovers have walked through country lanes since the world was young.

As they neared the house, she said, "I called up John this morning and he will be here at two o'clock to take you to Fredericton. It is only about ten miles from here."

"Did you tell him what I wanted?"

"No, I said you were a friend of mine, that your business was important, and that I had a piece of news I would tell him when he came."

"It is very obliging of your friend John."

"John is always like that. He said he had to go into Fredericton anyway. We were good friends in the old college days."

"You never told me that you went to college."

"I did not need to produce a diploma or a B.A. degree for the work you required of me."

"And I thought that I was educating you!"

"So you were. I got a much clearer insight into English literature from you than I ever acquired at college."

"I am glad of that," he said. "We had some good talks together across the barrier sometimes, didn't we? Only you always ran away too soon."

"I felt that I should not stay too long."

"And isn't it splendid now to think that I can keep you always with me? Does that make you happy, Lydia?"

"Yes," she said, "very happy."

They entered the house by the back door leading into the kitchen where Janet was frying buckwheat cakes for their breakfast. Jake, in a remote corner, was engaged in the monotonous job of churning the butter.

It was very pleasant to go into the big, warm, sunny kitchen, fragrant with a suggestion of coffee and breakfast.

"Here is Mr. Trancher, Janet," Lydia said.

Janet gave him a keen and searching look, put down the pitcher of batter she was holding, wiped her hands on her apron and came forward with a friendly greeting. Stephen shook hands with her and asked if she knew what he had come for.

"I know," said Janet with a sort of resigned benevolence. "You want to run off with our little Missy."

"Does it surprise you that I should want to do that?" he asked.

"It's a bit sudden and something of a shock, but I knew it was bound to come some day."

"I do feel rather like a kidnapper," he confessed, "but I can't get on without her any longer."

"And how do you expect us to get on without her?" Janet eyed him narrowly.

"I'll bring her back," he promised. "I love this place already. I only wish we could stay here, but you see I have my work in the city."

"We might be giving you a job here," put in Jake from his corner.

"I would like to accept that offer some day, Jake. What are you doing over there now?"

"Making butter."

"Do let me see how you do it. I have no idea how butter is made. It has always been a miracle to me that butter could be produced from milk."

"Us that lives on a farm," said Jake, "sees so many miracles in the course of a year that we just don't pay no attention to them."

"I can well believe that. What have you got in that machine you're turning?"

Jake took off the cover and showed Stephen the contents of frothy cream.

"Is that milk?" asked Trancher.

"Jake don't know much about butter-making," Janet told him, coming up to inspect the performance. "I just let him do the churning and I do the rest. That's cream you see there now. After Jake churns a while longer it will separate and the butter will come in little yellow lumps. What is left will be buttermilk."

"May I see it then?"

"Yes, after breakfast I'll show you. Now you go in and get your breakfast while the cakes are hot."

They sat down together in the old dining-room, enjoying Janet's buckwheat cakes.

"Were these produced on the farm?" he asked.

"Yes, we raise our own buckwheat and also the maple syrup came from our own maple trees."

"Wonderful! I can understand what Jake means about miracles. I want to learn everything about the farm before I leave. It is all so interesting."

"Jake can take you around for a while this morning before we start for the woods. He likes to show off a bit and I have things I must attend to before we leave." It surprised her that he was so interested in the simple, everyday occupations, so familiar to herself.

"Do you know what your kitchen made me think of, Lydia?" he asked.

"No, what?"

"That poem of Roberts that you recited for me one evening about the

> '*Wide warm kitchen with beams across the ceiling*
> *Thick-hung with red-skinned onions*
> *And homely herbs of healing.*'"

"Did you remember that?" she said, surprised.

"Yes, I remembered. And, moreover, I discovered a volume of Roberts' poems in a book-store last summer and I have been reading them."

"Did you enjoy them?"

"Yes; they reminded me of you." Then he said, "I wonder if, when you came to live at my place, things seemed as new and different to you as they do to me here."

"Some things did. Of course I had been in cities before, but I never had kept house anywhere but at home. At first it seemed very strange to me to have to buy at the store such things as apples and potatoes and butter. As to store-eggs, I was

always suspicious of them."

"Well, it seems delightfully strange to me to live on the spot where all such things are produced, like a gift from the gods. It fascinates me. No matter what happened you would never be without food."

"No, nor fuel, not on a well-managed farm. There is often a lack of ready money on a farm, unless we can plan for a good cash crop, but there is usually enough to live on in comfort. I think good management is the thing that counts most."

"It counts in all business."

She looked across at him and smiled. "The thing that puzzles me most is how I am going to manage a farm and manage you at the same time."

"That's bothering me, too, a little," he told her. "You seem so much a part of this place I feel guilty about taking you away."

"Perhaps later on you can arrange to leave your business so that we can stay here all summer and I can come back sometimes at other seasons to see after things."

When they had finished breakfast, Stephen returned to the kitchen, where Janet was waiting to show him the various stages of butter-making. After which Jake took him out on a tour of inspection. They went through the barns, where the sweet-scented hay was piled high in the mows. Jake showed him with pride the young calves, the pigs, and the poultry. He was so interested in everything that he won Jake's complete approval, as he told Janet later. "Of course, he don't know much yet, but he's awful intelligent and he'll learn." And Janet's comment was that you mustn't expect too much from a man who had lived all his life in a place like New York.

Lydia joined them in half an hour's time and Jake harnessed Flossy to the buggy and they started on their expedition to the woods.

"I think I like this mode of conveyance," said Trancher, as they trotted along the country road.

"I like to drive Flossy," she said, "but one can go so much faster and farther with a car that I am afraid I shall have to get one some day. However, we could not use a car on the road we will take today. It is just an old logging-road."

"I believe I might have made quite a good farmer," he said. "I learned a lot from Jake this morning. He taught me the difference between hard and soft wood and I helped him pile some of it in the woodshed. I never saw such a huge woodpile in my life. What do you do with it all?"

"We keep what we need for our own use and sell the rest for cordwood."

"Does the sale of the cordwood cover the cost of cutting?" he asked. He was

getting an insight into the practical side of this new business.

"Oh, yes, usually a bit better than that."

"Then you get all your fuel practically free. Think what I have to pay at home for coal and wood in the course of a year."

"I am going in for a bigger venture in lumbering than that. I will show you when we get there. I want to get it settled before I leave. Your idea of a wedding has rather upset my plans. I may have to leave you for a couple of weeks this winter and come back to finish up."

"I may have to come with you if I can get away from the office."

"I would love to have you see the woods in winter, Stephen," she said.

They turned into a less-frequented road, grass-grown and deep-rutted in places, with woods on either side. After a time they came in sight of a house.

"This is where Wes Rogers lives," she explained. "He is going to take charge of the new enterprise for me."

Wes Rogers was splitting wood in the yard and came forward to greet them. He was a stocky little man with a keen, pleasant face. Lydia introduced them and Trancher sat listening to a business discussion that at times he found difficult to follow.

They would have to open up the old camp, Wes said, it would be too far for the men to get home at night. Then there was talk of supplies, provender for the horses, food for the men. The services of a cook would have to be engaged and good river-drivers in the spring, a sealer and pulpwood peelers. Lydia seemed to know what it was all about. She was wonderful.

There would be three kinds of wood to be got from that wood lot, Wes thought. There'd be pulpwood and board-wood and a certain amount of cordwood could be hauled out in the spring. They estimated the approximate cost and the probable value of the cut and the best buyers.

"You better go over there and take a look at it yourself, Missy," Wes said. "I figure it won't take much to patch up the old camp; we won't need all the buildings and the walls are still good."

"Thank you, Wes," she said, taking up the reins and turning Flossy toward the road. "I'll see it and stop in on the way back."

"This business certainly fascinates me," Stephen said. "It is so different from anything I have ever encountered."

He questioned her keenly about some of the estimates with quick insight into the value of profit and loss, and asked for further information about the different kinds of wood and what were scalers and river-drivers.

She was pleased at his interest and laughed at his ignorance. "I used to think you knew everything," she said, as she explained the terms so familiar to her.

"Don't expect too much of me the first day," he pleaded. "I mean to be a great help to you some day when I have learned more about it. This seems like too big an undertaking for you to tackle."

"Really I am going in for it on a very small scale. Wes would like to put a much larger crew on the job, but I don't want to do more than I can finance. John thinks it best for me to feel my way at first. But, you see, I own all this woodland and I could not get much for stumpage."

"Might I humbly inquire what is stumpage?"

She laughed at him again. "It just means that I could let somebody cut the wood on my wood lot and charge them a certain rental per cord."

They had come to the old logging road and bumped along over stumps and stones until they came to an open clearing where there was a deserted lumber camp.

Lydia produced a hitching-rope from the back of the buggy and tied Flossy to a tree and they went to inspect the old log buildings.

"This is the cookhouse," she explained, "and this is the bunkhouse where the men sleep. They fill those bunks with spruce boughs and have quite a comfortable bed. Over there is a shelter for the horses."

She looked the whole place over carefully, making a few notes in a small book she carried.

"Now I understand," he said, "what your friend Roberts wrote of his *Solitary Woodsman*—

'*Green spruce branches for his head*
Here he makes his simple bed'.

Imagine having a business that poets can write about!"

Lydia gave him a happy smile, charmed at his understanding. "Come with me," she said, "there is a lovely spot I want to show you," and they walked together through the deep woods until they came to a little woodland stream that ran between groups of tall beech trees. Fallen leaves had made a rich brown carpet for their feet. High above them great branches met, forming a series of arches through which the sunlight came dimly. There was no sound but the gentle gurgling of the brown water as it rippled over the stones.

"This stream," she said, "is very useful. The men haul the logs on to it when it is frozen in the winter and when springs comes and the ice melts, the stream carries them out of the woods and down to the river. It saves a lot of hauling."

"It is wonderful how nature assists you people at every turn," Stephen said. "In my business, I get no assistance whatever from natural sources."

That, she told him, was one of the joys of farm life, but nature was sometimes capricious.

She turned to look at him. He had taken off his hat and she noted with joy that the youthful look had returned to his face. "I thought you would like this place," she said.

"It has all the hallowed solemnity of a great cathedral. I think I once dreamed about a place like this. It is awe-inspiring."

"Isn't it? I love the woods and I hoped so much that you would like them, too. Once I dreamed of walking through the woods with you."

He took her hand and they sat together on a fallen tree.

"Tell me, Lydia," he said, "there is something I have been puzzling over ever since last night. How did you know that that paper was in the back of the miniature frame?"

It suddenly dawned on her that after all she had not yet made her confession about the broken crystal. It had been crowded out by more important happenings. She looked up far into the arching branches and then said quietly, "Now that you think you are in a cathedral, would you like to hear a confession?"

"It is an ideal place for it," he said.

"Well, I broke the crystal."

"You did?"

"Yes, though I did not mean to. I had seen you so often gazing at that crystal and thought you were looking into the future, until that night when you showed me the miniature and told me the story. Do you remember that evening?"

"Yes, I remember it well. We played Beethoven's minuet together and you put your hand on my arm."

"I only just——"

"You only just saved me from a complete mental collapse. Now tell me how you knew about the paper."

"I am leading up to that gently, for it was almost a tragedy. You left the miniature on the desk when you went out and I picked it up and started crystal-gazing myself. It was the dress that held my attention at first, there was something so familiar about it. Then I remembered the old dress put away in the attic at home."

"Then did you pry open the frame?"

"Oh, no, I would not have dared do that. The telephone rang and it dropped to the floor and the crystal broke."

"It is not broken now."

"Yes it is. I have the fragments still. I will show them to you. That is a new crystal I had put in before you came home the next day. I found the paper when I was putting the ivory back and read it. I recognized the name of my ancestor, Nathaniel Allen, and I knew his wife's name was Lydia but had forgotten her maiden name. When I came home I looked it up in the records and it was Trancher."

"Why did you never tell me?"

"I don't quite know. I just can't explain it, but I could not tell you—not then. I wanted to make sure first and then I thought I might tell you some day."

"Think of the years and the money I have spent trying to find some clue to the fate of Lydia Trancher and you knew it all the time!"

"Only part of the time. You should have broken the crystal yourself, instead of just gazing through it."

"It took you to do that, Lydia. You have always explained the mysteries and solved the difficulties for me. You see now why I cannot do without you."

"You got on without me all summer."

"I didn't get on. You don't know what I lived through last summer without you."

Lydia hesitated a few moments, then said, "Now I want to ask you something. Tell me, did you ever get the letter I wrote you after I came home?"

"Did I get it? It was what I lived on all summer."

"You never answered it."

"Yes, I did."

"I did not receive it and I hoped so much that you would write me. I looked for a letter every day for weeks, until finally I gave up hope."

"You never got it because it was never posted. I did not think you would care if I wrote or not."

"But why did you never post it?"

"I was afraid you would not understand what I had written." He hesitated and added slowly, "Don't ask me now, Lydia. Some day—after we are married, I will tell you." He put his arm about her and drew her to him and she did not question him further.

Stephen was silent for a while, then he said, "There is another thing that puzzles me, Lydia. Why, with your brains and a college education, you did not embark on some career that would have been reasonably profitable for you? Then you need not have come to New York all alone looking for work."

She laughed at him. "I have been asked that question before," she said. "City people are so funny, they never realize that a farm is a business as well as a home. I

had the farm in view for my career. You inherited your father's business, didn't you? Well, I inherited my grandfather's business."

"Then why did you go to college?"

"You *are* hopeless! I went to college because I wanted to have an education. Do you think that people who live in the country don't wish to be educated?"

"You should not rebuke me so severely, dear. Remember, I have only had the meagre advantages that a city has to offer."

She slipped her hand into his. "I just looked at it this way," she said. "Country life is beautiful, but it is a lonely life sometimes, and we are often thrown on our own resources. I wanted to learn all I could so that I would have some resources to fall back on. I have sometimes noticed that in the country small minds will grow smaller and great minds grow greater."

"I can understand that. You are always so convincing, Lydia."

She suddenly looked at her watch and jumped to her feet. "Come, Stephen, we must not be late for dinner." He rose reluctantly and they walked slowly back to the clearing and Flossy.

Jake was at the door when they got home, and as he took Flossy he informed them that a telegram had arrived for Mr. Trancher.

"That probably means trouble," said Stephen with a resigned sigh.

He picked up the telegram from the hall table, and Lydia, watching him, saw his expression change to one of dismay.

"This cancels our honeymoon, dear," he said.

"Oh, Stephen, what has happened?" she asked.

"Tony tells me that last Monday (the very night I left to come here) an old lady whose estate was entrusted to us died suddenly. She had considerable property and has left a very complicated will. She had no near relatives, but a number of remote cousins who have been hoping for her death for some time. They will probably dispute the will and Tony says the office is daily bombarded with clamouring heirs demanding my immediate presence and Wilcox is distracted. I should go back tomorrow."

"Could not the heirs be made to wait?"

"They could and it would be good for them but hard on Wilcox. That man knows more about the business than I do, but he can't take responsibility. He goes all to pieces."

"Then you will have to go alone and let me follow later."

"No, I won't do that, Lydia, not if I can get a special licence this afternoon and you are willing to forgo the honeymoon for the present. I will stay overnight at

Fredericton and you meet me there early the next morning. We can be married and take the first train we can get. We can catch an evening train from Boston to New York and get there Saturday morning. I will wire Tony and have him tell Maggie to open the house for us and have my things sent out from my room in the city. Tony can break the news to Wilcox and the rest of the staff, so they will have recovered from the first shock before I arrive."

"I am afraid it will be a terrible shock to them all."

"They will be delighted, I am sure, dear. You won the hearts of the Wilcox family at the Christmas party. Mrs. Wilcox told me herself that she knew you were a born lady."

"When did she say that?"

"One night last summer when I was at their house. I must tell you about that some time. As to Tony, he informed me that you were too fine for the job when I told him I was coming to get you."

"I don't see how you can possible explain anything in a telegram."

"I have sent so many telegrams that I am an expert. The fewer words the better. How would this do?" He wrote on the back of the envelope and handed the message to Lydia to read. "The housekeeper secured through marriage. Arriving with Mrs. Trancher Saturday morning."

"I would like to see Tony's expression when he reads that," said Lydia.

"I think I had rather see Wilcox's," Trancher smiled gleefully, then, looking more seriously at her, he said, "You will come with me, Lydia?"

"I don't see how in the world I can manage at such short notice, but I'll try."

They had dinner and when John arrived promptly at two o'clock Lydia met him at the door. She took him to the drawing-room and, while he sat beside her on the sofa, she told him the whole story. It was a great relief to talk to John, who was always sympathetic and understanding.

"It is all so unexpected," she said, apologetically. "I don't think I should rush into it like this, but I don't feel I can do anything else under the circumstances."

"Of course not," he agreed. "Elsie and I will see you through the ceremony. That is always a bit trying, though the women never seem to mind it so much. I will keep an eye to the farm while you are gone."

"I will have to come back for a couple of weeks before the winter sets in," she said. "I can't possibly leave like this unless I do."

"That will be fine," John said.

Stephen came downstairs carrying his coat and suitcase, ready to start.

Lydia introduced the two men. They were in marked contrast to each other, but

she felt that they would be friends. John would be understanding. He always was. Good old John!

After she and Stephen had said their farewells, they went out together to the car where John was waiting. "If you have time after you have finished your business, John," she said, "please show Stephen as much of Fredericton as you have time for. He will be interested to see the college and the cathedral and the Parliament Buildings. And don't forget the Reynolds portraits of George III and Queen Charlotte in their robes of state. They are hanging in the Assembly Room, you remember."

"Leave it to me," John said, and they drove off.

Lydia watched them for a few moments, realizing that she would not see her future husband again until they were made man and wife. The thought frightened her, but the die was cast and she must go on with it now. Perhaps she would wake and find it all a dream, though that thought was even more frightening. No, she wanted to go with him. He needed her and he meant more to her than her home or the farm or anything else in the world. It was an unusual case, but why should she worry? It was alarming and had come to her like a whirlwind, sweeping her up and carrying her before it, but nevertheless it was wonderful.

In a kind of ecstasy she went about the work of packing and putting things away and giving last orders to Jake and Janet in preparation for leaving, early the next morning, the home she loved so well, to begin her new life as the wife of a man whom she had known only during the time she had played a part in the drama that she thought had closed for ever.

CHAPTER XXVI

The day after the wedding Lydia arrived at the Staten Island house, alone. Stephen and she had breakfasted together at the station after the long, tedious train journey. Stephen telephoned the office, and at the urgent request of Wilcox had decided to go directly there if she did not mind going home without him. Lydia not only did not mind, but was relieved, feeling it would be easier to get everything settled before he came home. They took a taxi and he parted from her at the office door.

"I hate to have you go off alone like this," he said, but she assured him cheerfully that this arrangement was best and she would be ready and waiting for him when he arrived in the evening.

She found Maggie at the house with a smiling welcome for her. She had been afraid of Maggie's attitude toward her new status and was relieved at her pleased acceptance of it. Maggie said that Tony had telephoned when they got the telegram. The news was not such a surprise to her, she said, for she had suspected all along how things were going to work out, only it came a little more suddenly than she had expected.

Lydia was completely dazed by this revelation. What had they ever done to arouse Maggie's suspicions? She was afraid to inquire.

"Oh, Maggie," she said, "I hope I was wise to do it, but how could I refuse him when he had come so far to get me and would not leave unless I came back to him?"

It was a relief to her to find a confidante who knew all the intricacies of the situation.

"And what would you be wanting to refuse him for?" Maggie asked indignantly. "And him the best man the Lord ever made."

"I know he is, Maggie, but can I ever make good?"

"Don't you worry about that. You are the only one I ever saw that could."

"Oh, Maggie! I never thought you would approve."

"And why not? I have been hoping it would come to this for some time back."

"You have?"

"Yes, I've been watching the two of you and I knew you were the one woman that was suited to cope with the master and them queer ways he's got sometimes."

"What made you think that, Maggie?"

"Oh, I knew who you were."

"How did you know?"

"I used to live on that old river myself, you know."

They had gone into the familiar kitchen and Maggie was making a cup of tea.

"Of course," she continued, "I haven't been back for thirty years, but I remember passing by the old Allen place many a time when I was a girl. Even then, it was considered one of the old landmarks. I lived down Jemseg way and when you told me your name was Allen, I thought of the old place right away, though I did not think you'd likely belong to them people. They used to hold their heads pretty high in old times. The very first day you came here, I knew you were a bit above your job. I was afraid maybe I might have trouble with you, but you stuck to your guns and handled the situation like a thoroughbred."

"I was sometimes afraid you would ask me questions about home when you told me you came from Jemseg, Maggie."

"I kind of suspicioned that, so I never said a word to bother you. I remember you told me you needed money and that you'd never worked out before. But you never hinted you'd seen better days nor nothin' and I noticed you never put on airs, but you always knew how things ought to be done a sight better than I did. The way you put through that Christmas party was the smartest thing I ever saw."

"You did just as much for that party as I did, Maggie."

"No, I never could have got the master worked up to it the way you did. I just said to Jenkins when it was over, 'She is the one that should be sitting at the head of his table'."

"What did Jenkins say to that?"

"Oh, Jenkins knows better than to disagree with me. But I never told him who you really was, though I knew it by that time, for once you asked me to post a letter that was addressed to Elmwood, and I knew that was what they called the old Allen place."

"Maggie! you would make a good detective."

"Then, a while ago, after you left, I met some old friends at my sister's (she's younger than me and has kept up with the people back home). Well, they were visiting on the river last summer and I asked them, just casual-like, if the old Allen place was still standing, and they said yes but the old gentleman had died and left the place to his granddaughter and she had come home and was managing the farm herself. I remembered you had mentioned that your grandfather was dead and you lived on a farm. So I questioned them a bit more and found out the girl's name was Lydia. So I knew for sure then that it was you. I did think of telling the master some day when I got round to it, but I never thought he'd nose it out for himself."

Then Lydia told her of the family connection with the Lydia Trancher of the

miniature and how she had broken the crystal.

"Well, I never!" Maggie exclaimed. "That's as good as a mystery story. All it lacks is a murder. If Jenkins saw anything like that in the movies he'd say it never could happen, but I can see how it very well could."

Maggie rose to go, saying that Jenkins would be getting fidgety if his dinner was late.

"Have you ordered anything for our dinner?" Lydia asked.

"Yes, I got some steak and vegetables and a lot more stuff that you'll be needing, and I'm coming over to cook the dinner for you."

"Oh, Maggie, you need not bother to do that. I can manage. I have not forgotten how to cook a dinner, you know."

"I know that, but I'm not going to let you do it. Don't you start in just being the cook when you should be gracing the head of the table like his mother did. You let him forget about that cooking business."

"Perhaps you are right, Maggie, but can you spare the time? What will Jenkins do?"

"He'll be all right. I have cold meat for his supper and Ella gets home early. I got her trained so she's some good now."

"You are awfully good to me, Maggie," Lydia said as they parted. "You have helped me so much."

Maggie gave a characteristic snort and replied that she was only thankful to know the house had a mistress in it again.

Left alone in the house, Lydia wandered from one familiar room to another, feeling slightly dazed and confused. There was much that needed to be done, but she found it difficult to concentrate on the work. She was suffering a reaction from the events of the past few days, as though she had been pulled up by the roots in a tornado.

Her life in this house must now be readjusted, as Maggie had tried to point out to her, yet she felt a tendency to slip back into the old ways.

A feeling of apprehension, almost amounting to depression, stole over her. She should not have taken this step without giving herself more time to consider what she was doing. It was all too sudden. The realization came as a shock to her now that she was alone and had leisure to think. She was married to a man she did not know, carried away by him in a blissful hour of revelation. She had been on her own ground then, but now, in his house, would she fit into the picture? "Grace his table", as Maggie had said, and meet his friends? Would they be willing to accept her? What would Mrs. Marsden think about her?

She touched the small gold band on her finger, binding her to Stephen Trancher until the hour of her death. With something in the nature of a shock she realized that they had been alone together only on that one evening by the fireside when he had asked her to marry him and the next morning when they had taken the sheep to pasture and visited the wood lot. On both occasions they had been under a spell, a strange enchantment aroused first by the discovery of their kinship, and the haunting presence of that other Lydia Trancher. And again by the deep solitude of the ancient woods.

Then Stephen had driven off with John and she had not seen him again until the early morning in the parish church when they were together exchanging those eternal vows, beautiful, wonderful, yet terrible and awe-inspiring. Then there had been the long train journey. They had not talked much at first, but after a time Stephen had told her about the evening he had spent with the Wilcox family; also about Mrs. Farquhar's second marriage and Cohen's visit to the office. After that they had both felt weary and spoke little, feeling that a lifetime lay ahead of them in which to talk.

Now he was at the office. He would come home as usual—the master—that evening and find her there, not his maid but his wife.

She had lived in his house for more than a year, and yet she did not know him. Hers was a marriage without a courtship. Did he really love her or had his better judgment been overruled by his need of her help, his dread of returning to the house without her? In other words, did he think of her only as the combination of family portrait and housekeeper? She hated herself for harbouring such a thought and tried to think of the wistful grey eyes that had looked so intently into hers. This man with the youthful face and the silver hair, tall, slender, distinguished, usually so reserved—this man was now her husband and she hardly knew him. Yet, in some ways—little, unimportant ways—she knew him very well. She could anticipate his wishes, minister to his needs. That was all very well and she wanted to do that, but did he love her? Had he ever actually told her in so many words that he loved her? She could not remember that he had. All that had passed between them seemed now like a dream. She was definitely afraid.

She knew that she loved him devotedly, desperately; she would gladly make any sacrifice for him if only that same love could be returned in kind.

Lydia's methodical mind had always been averse to quick decisions. She felt now that she had too suddenly made the most momentous decision of her life, swept into it by the force of her own great love, without taking time to consider and analyze the feelings of the man she had married. Would he ever really love her in the way that she loved him? Would there always be that slight diffidence between them, widening

with the years, until he found in his own marriage an estrangement that he had always believed was the final result in any marriage? What would their life be then, here in this house?

She liked people, liked to entertain. Her grandfather had always kept open house. Even in her school days, she had acted as his hostess when friends drove down from Fredericton to visit them. The memory of those days struck her with a pang of homesickness. This, and the tension of her overtaxed nerves brought her to the verge of panic.

She jumped up resolutely from the kitchen rocker, determined to shake off her depression by going to work. There was much to be done before Stephen came home. Her courage rarely deserted her and whatever happened she would do her best.

The things Tony had sent out from the city lodging-house had been left under the stairway. Maggie had returned the desk and chair to their accustomed place in the library, but the small trunk and two large suitcases were still to be unpacked and put away and Lydia tackled them first. If she unpacked the trunk downstairs it would be easy, when empty, to carry it to the store-room.

She gathered Stephen's belongings in her arms and took them to his room and arranged them neatly, his collars in one drawer, his shirts in another, and laid aside a suit to be sent to the cleaners. These little intimate duties, which most young brides are at first so unfamiliar with, were to her a simple part of the daily routine. She was merely doing what Maggie had instructed her to do two years before.

Yes, it was just two years since the autumn day when she had first entered that house. How little had she thought then . . . ! But she had better not dwell on that, thinking only upset her; better to just go on and get the work done quickly.

She picked up the grey business suit she had thrown over a chair. It was shockingly soiled. He did need looking after, she thought more tenderly. She emptied the pockets as she always had done before sending a suit to the cleaners, finding the usual collection of handkerchiefs, papers, matches, and loose coins, which she deposited in a large ash tray on the table; all but the handkerchiefs, which went into the laundry bag.

Among the odd papers was a sealed envelope. Stephen must have forgotten to mail it. Lydia turned it over in her hand, staring blankly at the address—the letter was addressed to Mrs. Stephen Trancher.

The first apprehensive thought that flashed through her mind was that perhaps he had been married before! Was there some sinister woman in his past from whom he had been divorced and who had caused his lack of faith in the happiness of

marriage? Had he written to tell her of his approaching marriage? No! she dismissed the thought as quickly as it had come. This suit had been left in the city and he had probably not thought of their marriage when he had last worn it. It was horribly unfair to suspect him of having dark secrets in his past. His keen sense of truth and honour could always be relied on, as she knew, and she felt ashamed for having doubted him even for a moment.

Well, she was Mrs. Stephen Trancher now and there could be no law against her opening a letter addressed to herself.

Touching the wedding ring on her finger in order to gain confidence and justification for the daring act, she impulsively broke the red wax seal and tore the letter from the envelope. The heading gave the address of his room in the city and the date was last June. The letter began, "My dear Lydia", so it must have been meant for her, after all. She read on for a few lines, then it flashed across her mind that this was the answer to her letter that had never been posted because there were "things in it that she would not understand".

She sat down and with tense excitement read the long letter through to the end. When she had finished reading it, with trembling lips she kissed his name.

Now she knew he loved her for herself alone, and had loved her all the time, before he knew anything about her, before the secret of the broken crystal had been revealed, he had loved her like that! The joy of this knowledge overwhelmed her. It was like coming out of darkness into glorious sunshine. She glanced through the letter again. The inspired words flowed on with a rhythmic cadence, not flowery nor sentimental but with language that expressed the heights and depths of a great, abiding love. Words deftly chosen to bring out thoughts far removed from any sordid misuse of love. It showed the deep culture of the man who was now her husband, Lydia thought. Words were culled like flowers from the abundance of his well-stored mind to tell the story of his love for her, tinged with exquisite tenderness and sometimes a haunting pathos.

She had no further doubts or fears now and she sat there in his room, drowned in an ecstasy of delirious joy.

After a time she folded the letter and tucked it in the front of her dress. How changed everything seemed—the gloom had lifted and there was joy in her heart.

She ran gaily downstairs and prepared luncheon for herself, tidied the kitchen, and went out to the garden in search of flowers for the table. All she could find were some scarlet barberries, which she arranged in a copper bowl. She wanted to set the table herself, before Maggie arrived.

She dusted and put away books in the library and got out some of the ornaments

which had been stored when the house had been prepared for tenants. Among other things, she replaced the framed photograph of Stephen's mother. She looked at the wistful face of this sweet and gentle lady, whose presence in the house she had felt so all-pervading when she first came there, and wondered what she would think if she knew. Looking intently at the picture, she seemed to see a smile in the expression of the eyes that she did not remember there before. She took it as a smile of welcome. This mother would have understood the great love she had for her son.

After Lydia had unpacked her own things, she took stock of her simple wardrobe. What should she wear to "grace the head of his table"? In this matter, she felt Maggie must be reckoned with. She decided on the dress that she had worn at the college dance. At that time it was the first good dress she had bought for some years, so she had felt justified in being a little extravagant, and the rich, ruby-coloured taffeta, with its long, full, frilly skirt was still lovely. A jacket transformed the evening dress into a simple dinner gown. It had been much admired, and people had told her she looked well in it.

CHAPTER XXVII

In the late afternoon, after finishing all the work that was necessary, Lydia rested for a time, but found she was too excited to sleep. Finally she got up, turned on the lights, bathed and spent much time in dressing. She viewed the results with some satisfaction and then, still sitting before her dressing-table, she clasped about her throat an antique necklace of garnets set in gold filigree work that had belonged to her grandmother. It went well with her dress.

When she went downstairs, Maggie was already in the kitchen.

"Will I do for the head of the table, Maggie?" she asked, whirling around gaily to show off the frilly taffeta.

"Elegant!" Maggie exclaimed, approvingly. "You look splendid. Now, don't stay here in the kitchen or you'll get spots on your handsome dress. I'll see to the dinner, so you go sit in the library, restful-like, just as if nothing had happened. The master will be home pretty soon now."

Lydia obediently did as she was told. She lighted the fire and then tried to read the paper, but the headlines meant nothing to her, for all she could think of was the letter lying warm against her heart. She would not speak of it until later in the evening, after Maggie had gone and she and Stephen were all alone in the house.

After an endless time, she heard his step on the veranda and the fumbling of his latchkey in the door. The old, familiar sounds that had always proclaimed his coming brought back a shadow of the past. She longed to run to the door to meet him, but instead she stood in the middle of the library floor, petrified with joy, or fear, she did not know which. All she could do was to stand there, listening for other familiar sounds. The front door opened and she heard him take off his coat and hang it in the hall closet. She waited for him to go upstairs to change to his smoking-jacket, but instead of that he came with hurrying steps to the library door and crossed the threshold to greet her with extended hands. "How lovely you look, my little bride!" he exclaimed, placing both hands on her shoulders and looking earnestly into her face. He stooped and kissed her very reverently, as though she were something sacred. He had always kissed her like that. After a time, he held her at arm's length to admire her, saying, "That is a beautiful dress you have on. I never realized you were so tall, Lydia. I always think of you as a little thing."

"That is because you are so very tall yourself; perhaps the long dress makes me look taller than I am." She looked up in his face and said, "Did you have a busy day? I thought you would never come home."

"Did you, dear?" he said, giving her a quiet, happy smile. "Yes, I had a very busy

day, but an interesting one. I want to tell you about it. All day long I have been thinking that I was coming home to you; it seemed too good to be true."

He noticed that the Morris chair was again in its place by the fire and sank down in it gratefully. "This is wonderful," he said, and held out his hand to her. She took it and stood beside him for a moment, feeling more relaxed now, for he seemed so happy and contented.

"Maggie is here," she told him. "She insisted on coming over and cooking dinner for us. She said I must dress up and wait for you in state."

"Quite right, too. That is as it should be. How is she taking it?" he asked, somewhat anxiously.

"Like a lamb."

"I am glad of that. I was beginning to be a little afraid about Maggie."

"You need not be. Maggie is a rare person."

"I'm going out to speak to her," he said, rising. Lydia thought it best to let him go alone.

As he entered the kitchen, Maggie stopped stirring the gravy and took his outstretched hand in both of hers.

"Well, Maggie," he said, "what do you think of it?"

"I think it is about the most sensible thing you ever did."

"I am sure of that, but I feared the news might come as something of a shock to you."

"Oh, go 'way with you," she replied, complacently, "I've been more or less expecting it. You see, I knew who she was all the time." Maggie assumed an air of vast superiority.

"You did?" he exclaimed in amazement. "However did you know?"

"I was born and brought up on the River Saint John, and that's how I knew."

"Were you, now? That is the most mysterious river I ever encountered. It is quite uncanny."

"Well," retorted Maggie, still with a superior tone of voice, "I've been keeping my eyes open for some time and I wondered how long it was going to take you to see that girl wasn't the kind that ordinarily goes out doing housework. A boy that has been brought up like you were should have known that much."

He loved it when Maggie referred to him as a boy.

"Oh, Maggie, I did know it, only I could not just understand. You mustn't expect too much of me, for I wasn't brought up on the River Saint John, you know."

"Well, it has all turned out for the best, anyway, and the dinner is all cooked. Now, you go and bring in your wife and I will bring in the dinner."

"Bless you, Maggie," he said, "you always did stand by me, even if you were a tyrant sometimes." In the exuberance of his own happiness, Stephen Trancher kissed the kind, comely face of his faithful old servant, to her great joy and astonishment.

"Bless his dear heart," she mumbled to herself, as she dished up the dinner.

Stephen returned to Lydia in the library. "This dinner," he said, "is going to be quite an occasion. I should have on my dress-suit. Will you wait till I change?"

"No," she said. "I love you best in the velvet smoking-jacket, so go and put that on."

He was very happy seated at the prettily arranged table, looking proudly at the lady in the ruby-coloured taffeta who sat opposite, realizing that she was his wife.

Maggie waited on them with considerable ceremony, and he waited until she had left them alone, to say, "Now, I want to tell you something I have been thinking of all day, or, at least, in the odd moments when I was not interviewing clamorous heirs of that wretched estate. Wilcox had told them he thought I would not be back until Monday, so that eased some of them off a little, but there was plenty of work to be gone over. However, I had time to look up some things for myself. The market now is better than it has been for years and some stocks I thought worthless have come to life again and are paying dividends. It is most heartening to feel I can now make plans."

"And what are you planning now?"

"That will depend largely on you," he said. "Tell me, Lydia, you would rather live in your own house than live here, would you not?"

The question was abrupt and so unexpected that she hesitated to give a direct answer. "Why do you ask that, Stephen?" she said, looking at him questioningly.

"Because I have a guilty feeling about taking you away from your old home. You are so much a part of that beautiful place, you belong there and it needs you. You made a great sacrifice for me when you left it. I feel that more and more whenever I think about it. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes," she said, "but you would not want to live there, would you?"

"Yes, I think I would. It is the most enchanting place I have ever seen. But the trouble is, I don't want to live off my wife's broad acres. I knew it was selfish of me to take you away, but I thought at the time I could not support a wife unless I came back and kept on with my work at the office. Now, I begin to see a way out, as you would say."

"I think we could find a way out," she said slowly, "if you are really willing to give up the office."

"I am more than willing to do that," he said. "It has never been work that I liked.

I can do it and I understand it because I was brought up to it, but nothing would give me more satisfaction than to close the door on that office and know I should never see it again. The only reason I have stuck to it is that it has been my only means of livelihood."

"Are you sure you would not regret it, as time went on?" she asked, looking intently at him across the table. "You have been tired and overworked lately and that may be the reason for your feeling the way you do now." She was afraid of his making this sacrifice for her sake.

"No, that is not the reason at all, for when I am in robust health I often think how much happier I should be had I been able to choose some other line of work."

"Yes," she said, "I think I understand, only I want to be sure you are not giving it up just for me."

"Don't worry," he said. "To begin with I have not given it up yet, I just want to consider that might happen if I did. I had a long talk with your friend John as we drove to Fredericton. I liked him, Lydia. He is the kind of man who inspires one with confidence."

"You can always rely on John, for he never fails you. I have a lot of faith in his judgment. What were you talking about?"

"Most of the time about you. He thinks you are carrying more responsibility than any woman should. Then, he also thinks that if you insist on running that farm on the scale you have planned you should be on the spot all the time. He thinks you are a wonder and have good, practical ideas and know what you are doing, but he is worried for fear you will break under the load. He got me considerably worried, too."

"Men never think women can do things," she said, rather scornfully.

"He did not say you could not do things. Do you want me to tell you what he said?"

"Yes. I am prepared for anything."

"Well, quite unexpectedly, after he had been silent for a while, he turned to me and said, 'Why don't you stay here and help Lydia?' I told him I knew absolutely nothing about farming and I would be a broken reed when it came to helping you. But he said that what you needed was someone with good business experience to look into the markets and keep strict accounts of profit and loss and overhead expenses, and all that. He thinks that with my business experience I could easily pick up the necessary knowledge of farm management. He says you have a huge property there, with good farm land and a fortune in the timber lands alone, but it needs to be properly organized, just like any other business concern, and on sound

business principles. He says that is where most farmers fall down, including himself. He has visions of having the whole community organized by one good man, and suggested that I might take it on, in time."

"Oh, Stephen, would you like that?" she asked, her eyes brightening.

"I think it would be tremendously interesting, and I am just conceited enough to think I could learn to do it."

"It would be a great relief to me not to have to bother with the accounts."

"You really think I could help?"

"I am sure you could."

"Then I want to ask a few questions. Tell me, how much income would we need to be on the safe side, supposing the crops all failed and the farm showed a deficit? Would two thousand dollars a year tide us over?"

"Oh, yes; less than that if we were careful. You see, we can practically live off the place, even if crops did fail, and they never all fail the same year; not if we manage properly."

"I feel sure that I could arrange enough safe investments to bring in two thousand a year, and maybe more. I could sell this house and most of the furniture for a good price. Then, there is a young man named Bob Lindsay, who is very anxious to buy out the business. I was talking to him on the telephone this afternoon. He is coming to see me on Monday to talk things over; that is, if you approve. If he takes on Wilcox and Tony, they can help him out at first, and I believe he would make more of a success of it than I ever did."

She looked at him across the barberries with eyes that seemed to kindle with a new joy. She realized now that he was in earnest. "Would you truly be willing to give up everything here and come home to live, then?" she asked.

"I would be more than willing, if I thought there was useful work for me to do there. Of course, we will have to go into it all very thoroughly before we come to a definite decision. I want to ask a lot more questions, but I had to tell you what has been working at the back of my mind. I won't undertake it unless I am sure of giving you a decent living if I fail."

"You won't fail and the farm has always provided a decent living for us, and anything extra that we have would be just velvet."

They rose from the table. Lydia put her arm through his and they went into the library together.

"Stephen," she whispered (she still found it difficult to say "Stephen"), "the more I think of it, the more wonderful it seems."

"I am quite enchanted by the prospect myself," he told her. "In fact, I have been

living in a wonder world ever since the day I went through the 'vale of tears' in the little white steamboat."

Maggie brought them coffee and Stephen lit his pipe. Lydia found a footstool and sat beside him before the fire. For a time they spoke little, thinking out plans that they communicated at intervals to each other.

Lydia said, "I don't suppose you would feel any more lonely at Elmwood than you have been here, just sitting reading by the fire."

And he said, "I would never feel lonely anywhere if I had you with me."

Then she said, "I am wondering what would happen if we were invited to a dance in Fredericton. Would you decline to go, or submit to letting me drag you there as a martyr?"

He stroked her hair, winding the dark tendrils around his fingers. "You sadly misjudge me," he said, and the twisted smile flickered over his face. "I used to like dancing once. It was one of the few social performances that I did like. I have not danced for years, but I think it would be heavenly to dance with you."

"Splendid," she said. "We will go to the next Parliamentary Ball."

"That sounds very grand."

"So it is. They make it quite a ceremonious affair. The Governor is present in full regalia, scarlet and gold braid, and with his aide-de-camp in attendance."

"I certainly never have gone to a dance like that! It reminds me of something in little Mary's fairy book."

Lydia thought happily that it would be wonderful to go to the Parliamentary Ball with a tall, distinguished-looking husband. How proud she would be of him!

They sat in silence after that, each immersed in dreams of the future.

Then Stephen said, "Do you know, dear, what I would like to do some time—perhaps next summer? I would like to ask all the Wilcox family to visit us."

She said, "Wouldn't that be fun?—and it would do them all a lot of good. Would you really enjoy having them?"

"It is your house, you know."

"It is our house now."

"Is it?"

"Of course it is."

"Mrs. Wilcox told me she has always wanted to have her children see a real farm."

"Then we must have them."

They lapsed again into a perfect and understanding silence. All the time Lydia was thinking of the letter he had written her and, though she wanted to talk with him

about it, she was waiting until Maggie had left. She expected her to come in to get the coffee cups and to say good night. After a time she herself carried the cups to the kitchen and found that Maggie had already gone.

When she returned to the library, she went to him and sat on the broad arm of the Morris chair, and as he put his arm about her she said, "Stephen, my husband, tell me this. Do you really care for me as you said in that letter?"

"What letter, Lydia?"

"The one that never was posted."

He looked at her with some alarm. "Where did you find that?" he asked.

"In your coat pocket."

A whimsical smile came over his serious face as he remembered that she was now his wife. "That is just what I have always heard about married life. You search my pockets and read my letters—the very first day, too!"

"But this letter was addressed to me."

"It was?" He looked puzzled.

"Yes, the address on the envelope was 'Mrs. Stephen Trancher'. Is not that my name now?"

"Why, so it is!"

"Didn't you know that?"

"Of course I knew it, but I had not thought about it before."

"Well, I sent the coat to the cleaners this morning and I thought it best not to leave the letter in the pocket."

"You did not read it, did you?" he inquired anxiously, trying to remember what he had written on that feverish night.

"I would never have known that you loved me if I had not read it."

"Oh, Lydia! You know I love you! Would I have married you if I had not loved you?"

"I thought you loved me in a way, but I was afraid it was the kind of love you might have for a family portrait that would keep house for you. I did not think you loved me as I love you."

He drew her closer to him, looking reproachfully into her eyes. "How could you ever think that, when I love you so dearly?"

"You never told me so."

"Didn't I? I thought you knew it without being told. Somethings seem too deep for the spoken word. When I wrote that letter I found myself saying things I felt I had no right to say, but I could not seem to help it, I wanted you so much. As I went on, I knew I could never send you a letter like that, so I just kept writing on and on,

telling you everything, even though I thought you would never see it. I did not dare send it to you. I felt that no man should write like that to a woman unless he was married to her. So I addressed the envelope to my wife, though I did not have a wife at the time."

"And I nearly broke my heart waiting for that letter, and when it did not come all I could do was to fight the memory of you."

"I'm sorry! I never thought you would care like that. I have always been afraid of you, Lydia."

"Nonsense!" she laughed at him.

"Somehow you always contrived to keep me in my place. You used to flit away and disappear when I wanted so much to have you stay and talk to me. I could write things like I did in the letter, but I have been afraid to say them. And so you thought I did not love you!"

"This morning, here in the empty house," she said, "I did think so—until I found that letter! Then, when I had read it, I was deliriously happy, for I knew then you loved me as I loved you."

"Come here to me," he said. "I can show you!" He gathered her into his arms, slender and lovely in a cloud of rustling taffeta. She was his to have and to hold forever.

He kissed her again and again, not as a benediction this time, but as when some icebound torrent, long imprisoned in the cold grasp of winter, breaks forth with wild joy at the warm breath of spring.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *Broken Barrier* by Grace Helen Mowat]