

BOOTH TARKINGTON



THE LORENZO BUNCH

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Booth Tarkington
THE LORENZO BUNCH



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FIRST EDITION

To
HARRISON DANIELS
Young Classmate Old Friend

THE LORENZO BUNCH

AS THE earlier of the two afternoon programs at the Garfield Avenue Theater was completed and a sparse procession of patrons emerged to the sidewalk, an imported closed automobile stopped before the entrance and a colored chauffeur, neat in dark grey, opened the door of the rear compartment. Chauffeurs and such cars being by no means a matter of course before that theater, a few of the recent audience paused to stare mildly as a stoutish fair young man of what seemed to the observers an aristocratic appearance stepped forth from the interior of this costly machine, sauntered to the box-office in the lobby, bought a ticket and entered the theater.

Inside, the lights were still on for the interval; he paused for a moment at the outer end of an aisle, glanced over the scattered clumps of people still remaining in their seats, then determined where he would sit and passed down the aisle, removing his tan suede gloves as he went. Far forward, he paused again, glanced back idly over the audience, as if for no reason; then took an aisle seat in the third row from the front, and looked back again over his shoulder casually. After that, however, facing the vacant screen, he seemed to compose himself for the entertainment.

He had attracted the attention of two young matrons who sat at about the middle of the house. "Look, Arlene," one of them said to the other. "There's that fellow again."

"Which fellow you mean, hon?"

"You know. The one with the New York-looking hat and gloves and cane—only to-day he's got a blue suit on and the other times it was grey with a zippy blue handkerchief in the breast pocket. Don't you remember?"

"Yes," the other said absently. "You mean the blond that just sat down in the third row, don't you?"

"Yeppy. Who you s'pose he was looking round for, Arlene?"

"Search me, Mabel!"

The fashionable young man in the third row, turning slightly in his chair, once more gave the audience behind him a seemingly casual survey, this time a longer one. The face he thus reciprocally exhibited to them was of an evenly pale comeliness; though about the blue eyes were the somewhat puffy modelings often characteristic of plump fair young men for whom dissipation is the only escape from boredom. Upon his upper lip a mustache little more than a blond hint of manliness seemed to one of the two young matrons already discussing him a final exquisite proof of his modishness.

"I do love a man to look like that, Arlene," she said. "Cream de la cream all over, huh? I been trying I don't know how long to make Art sport a handkerchief in his chest pocket

and grow a mustache only as wide as his nose like that. Those little twin mustaches give 'em that Ritzy look, don't you say so, hon? Why'n't you make Roy grow one?"

"Roy?" Arlene laughed briefly at the suggestion that she could make her husband do anything fashionable—or perhaps at the suggestion that she could make him do anything at all. "Talk sense!"

"Look!" Mabel was suddenly excited. "He's looking straight at us! Look, he's keeping on looking at us, Arlene. Look, he looks like he thinks he knows us!" She giggled. "What's he think he's trying to do, pick us up?"

"Sh!" Arlene whispered, and looked indifferently away from the fashionable young man who continued to stare in their direction. "Better not talk so loud."

The lights went out, and a fragmentary affair called a "pre-view" began flatly to be visible upon the vivid screen; but Mabel couldn't immediately stop tingling over the young man whom they now saw as only the vaguest silhouette of shoulders and head. "He's stopped looking; but I bet he was, Arlene. I bet anything he was wondering if he couldn't make us."

"No, I don't think so."

Mabel persisted. "But look, listen here! This is the third time we've seen him here. He was here the day last week I wore my plaid skirt and Madam Thompson hat, and then he was here Friday aft and look, it's only Monday and here he is again! He rubbered around a good deal those other times, too, don't you remember? But this is the first time he's spotted us. Honest, I think that was kind of a funny look he gave us. It looked like the look you give somebody when you've been looking for 'em quite a while and just spotted 'em." She giggled again. "I bet my old Art'd be sore if he was here and saw it! Honest, hon, what I better do if he gets up and follows us when we go out? S'pose he does speak to me, what I better do?"

"He won't speak to you," Arlene said calmly. "Don't worry, Mabe."

Her tone was quietly that of a woman who knows what she's talking about; but Mabel was too pleased with the prospect of a slight adventure to be easily convinced. "He certainly was looking at *one* of us, Arlene." Then she felt it the part of friendship to be modest or at least fair-minded. "The reason I'm pretty sure it's me, it's because he couldn't see you as well, account of people between, as he could me. Gosh Pete, I bet Art'd be mad! Anything like the slightest liberty always gets Art sore." She giggled again; then presently her attention became concentrated upon the screen, drawn there by the pictured appearances of far remote persons to whom she was unknown but with whom she nevertheless enjoyed an unctuous kind of intimacy. "Claud Barnes and Myrta Beal! Say, hon, that's good camera-work, too, you know it? Myrta won't make any more pictures without Claud and's going to get her divorce this month and marry him. They been crazy about each other ever since they did 'Hearts of Fire' together. He used to be prackly cuckoo over Paula Oberlin."

"No," Arlene said. "It was Marie Loner; she took dope. Oh, look! Myrta's going to get her sport clothes torn in the bushes again, same as she did in 'Rough House', and he'll pin 'em together with thorns for her the way he did then; you watch. What'll you bet he doesn't?"

Mabel wisely declined to bet anything, and the two became absorbed in the story

revealed before them, in spite of the fact that the pattern of this revelation was familiar to them, and the fact also that they felt so personal an intimacy with the two principal actors that these lost all illusion of being other than Mr. Claud Barnes and Miss Myrta Beal. "Look," Mabel whispered. "Claud's going to get in trouble now; Myrta's husband's got a gun." Not pausing, she murmured eagerly of the clothes worn by Miss Beal. "Myrta never wears it cut lower'n about fourteen inches in the back. Her back's not so good; that's why she runs to these opera cloaks. Look, lined with white ermine every inch of it! What you bet it cost, hon?"

Mabel had almost forgotten the fashionable blond young man; but, when the disks of film had spun out sound and picture for something like an hour more, Arlene said, "Here's where we came in," the two rose for departure, and Mabel's previous excitement returned. There was the clatter of a walking-stick falling to the floor near the front of the house, and, as the pair of young matrons reached the aisle and turned toward the outer doors, Mabel clutched her friend's arm and whispered, "Wha'd I tell you? That fellow's following us out. Didn't I tell you!"

"Come on," Arlene said in a dry voice, and strode with some rapidity to the open lobby, where the smoked yellow twilight of the October day showed her to be a tall, rather thin young woman with a thin, handsome face. She had brown hair, not touched with bronze or any ruddiness; her grey eyes were cool and reticent. She looked knowing, experienced and what is called likeable.

Neither her black plain hat, rather large, nor her dark clothes were worn to compel the gaze of passers-by, though this couldn't well be said of the green beret, yellow coat and tan skirt of her blonde little friend, Mabel. Arlene had once told her husband, Roy Parker, in confidence, that Mabel looked like a plump little pink-and-white pig made pretty, a true enough caricature; though Arlene had modified it conscientiously by adding that Mabel was a lively little thing, awful dumb but nice to run around with.

Mabel just now, in the lobby of the Garfield Avenue Theater, was livelier than Arlene wished her to be. "Hay! Don't walk so fast, hon. I simply got to see if I'm not right." So swift was Arlene's long-legged stride that her loose coat breezed out behind her, and Mabel detained her only by grasping it. "Wait, Arlene! I bet you anything you like he's right behind us and——"

Her voice collapsed into a delighted gasp as the young man came quickly out into the lobby by way of the door that had just closed itself behind them. Arlene, moving toward the sidewalk, did not look round; though she was as well aware of him as was her excited companion. Mabel suffered a disappointment; the young man spoke, but not to her.

"Ah—Mrs. Parker," he said. "Ah—just a moment, please, Mrs. Parker." Arlene walked on a few steps as if she intended to make no response whatever. He spoke more urgently. "Just a moment, Arlene, please!" She frowned, showed annoyance plainly; but paused. He lifted his hat, glanced at Mabel and asked, "Will you give me just a moment, Mrs. Parker?"

It was clear that he meant a moment aside with him, out of Mabel's hearing. Arlene hesitated, then said, "Oh—well!" in the tone of one who finds it necessary to humor some importunate inferior and be done with it.

Mabel perceived that manners really compelled her to move on, as if indifferently, to a

little distance, out of earshot. Piqued for herself and aglow with an almost stinging curiosity, she did this, and, pretending to be interested in Garfield Avenue's passing traffic, watched Arlene and the fashionable young man as they stood together at one side of the lobby. Mabel's impression was that the young man, though he kept his face impassive, put forth some request, pressing it upon Arlene, and that Arlene, less genial than usual, refused to grant it. Obviously laconic with him, she was seen to shake her head several times as he talked; then she decisively turned away from him and moved to rejoin her friend upon the sidewalk.

He followed, as if to renew his urgings; but, nearing Mabel, shrugged his shoulders slightly and strolled obliquely upon his own way. His chauffeur, across the street, had seen him and brought the impressive car to the curb before the theater; the young man stepped within and swept nobly away.

Mabel, clutching her friend's arm as they began to walk toward home, gasped again. "Pete's sakes, look at that million-dollar car! Listen, but ain't you mysterious, Arlene! You knew him all the time! Who is he?"

Arlene, walking briskly, seemed to wish to regard the incident as closed. "Oh, just a fellow."

II

MABEL WATCHED the fine car as it turned westward at the next corner. “Look. Crossing over to Gillespie Boulevard. I bet he lives on Gillespie Boulevard—with that car!—or else out in Goldwood. Did you know that’s what they call Oldwood Park now? They call it ‘Goldwood’. Bet he lives in Goldwood and going to drive out Gillespie Boulevard. D’you know they say Goldwood is even on top of Gillespie Boulevard socially? Honest, hon, aren’t you going to come across? Where’d you ever know that bird?”

“When I was cashier at the Griswold,” Arlene said. “I knew about every fellow in town when I was at the Griswold; they’d all come in there.”

“Say, honest, what you want to keep on being so mysterious for? I and you’ve belonged to the bunch about three years now and I’ve heard you say you quit the Griswold five years before that. Isn’t that straight?”

“Yes,” Arlene said. “I stayed on at the Griswold five years after Roy and I were married, on account of the salary; but I quit when little Ola was four years old so’s to devote more time to the child. Ola’s going on thirteen now. I was only twenty when Roy and I were married, and he was just four months older’n I was. Roy’s almost thirty-four now; he’ll be thirty-four the seventeenth of——”

“Listen!” Mabel openly showed irritation. “I know how old you and Roy and Ola are, and how old you were when you were married and everything, don’t I? Haven’t you ever seen that bird since you were at the Griswold?”

“Hardly more’n to say hello to on the street.”

“Oh, all right!” Mabel said, and took pains to let both her annoyance and her skepticism be audible in her voice. “Have it your own way. Why, certainly!”

“What’s the matter? What you sore about, Mabe?”

“Oh, nothing! Have it your own way, Arlene.”

The two young women walked on for some distance without speaking, Mabel being silent because of petulance, Arlene because of a meditation that engaged her. Mabel’s pretty, pink, piggish face showed painted lips resentfully pouting and artificially sparse eyebrows thinly scowling; Arlene thought she’d better take these distortions as a warning. Charlie Rice and Ed Stem and other husbands in their group often said Mabe Finch might be dumb but anyhow was the best little pal in the bunch, and that was really because Mabel was such a cosy talker. Get her alone and she’d tell anything to anybody—confidentially!

“Don’t be sore,” Arlene said. “He’s just a fellow I used to know when I was at the Gris——”

“Yes, I already heard that! Say, honest, do you mean you aren’t going to tell me his name? I know I’ve seen that good-looking sporty face of his somewhere before, and it kind of seems to me it was in the Sunday Rotogravure Section; I bet it’ll be there again and his name with it, too!”

“His name?” Arlene said promptly, upon that. “Gillespie Ives.”

“Pete’s sakes!” Mabel cried, enraptured. “Gillespie Ives! You mean to say you’ve known the great Gillespie Ives all this time and never——”

“Great?” Arlene laughed. “Where’d you get that ‘great’ stuff? He don’t count with me, hon; not a nickel’s worth.”

“Oh, he don’t? Say, listen! Why’s Gillespie Ives been at the Garfield Avenue Theater three times looking for you and what was it all about in the lobby just now? *He* certainly showed interest, hon!”

“Not in me,” Arlene said impatiently; but comprehended that Mabel must be told something and hoped that a part of the truth would satisfy her. “Listen, I’ll tell you, Mabe. It’s a laugh on him all right. One afternoon a couple weeks ago I was downtown shopping with a good-looking married girl-friend of mine and——”

“Who was she?”

“Who?” Arlene hesitated. “Why, she was a cousin of mine by marriage from out o’ town. Well, he passed us on the sidewalk in front of Marcy and Burton’s, and I noticed he’d turned around and was following us. He hasn’t got anything to do with his time, that bird, and it looks like he’s getting to be more and more of a chaser. He——”

“Pete’s sakes!” Mabel interrupted. “With a wife like Mrs. Gillespie Ives—anyhow judging from her pictures in the papers! He ought to be ashamed! Why, with a wife like that, if he’s around chasing everybody he sees on the street, he must have one of those manias you read about!”

“No. Too much money, I guess, and nothing to do, and he always did get that way over a whole lot of good looks on a girl.”

“Well, go on, Arlene. What happened?”

“Nothing at all. I had our Chev parked right by where we were and I saw he was fixing to speak to us; so I just poked her in ahead of me and jumped in, myself, and slid on down the street.”

“Well, go ahead. What then?”

“Nothing at all,” Arlene said again, and laughed. “That’s the whole business. First time he came to the Garfield Avenue Theater, last week, of course I knew what he was there for as soon as he commenced looking around. He thought maybe she’d be with me again and so he——”

“You’re skipping, Arlene.” Mabel was suspicious. “How’d he come to look for you at the Garfield Avenue if it’s straight you’ve never more’n said hello to him once or twice since you worked at the Griswold all that time ago?”

“Looked me up in the ’phone-book.”

“You mean he called you up?”

“Called me up?” Arlene laughed. “Men like that don’t call apartments where they’re liable to get a husband on the ’phone. No, he must have figured the Garfield Avenue was

the nearest theater to where I lived; so he dropped in there, hoping she might be with me. I ducked out on him the first two times; but to-day he got me treed for a minute, and that's all there is to it, Mabe."

"All? Why, you haven't——"

"Nuts over pretty women," Arlene explained. "Tried to get me to tell him who she was and how to find her. I wouldn't. That's all the beans."

"All?" Mabel was but the more suspicious. "Funny I never heard you mention any out o' town cousin of yours by marriage before, Arlene."

"That so? Might be a good many things I've never mentioned, don't you expect so?"

"I certainly do!" Mabel said in bitter complaint. "I never knew anybody that kept more mysterious with their best friends. You never tell me anything. I bet you got a past that if poor Roy knew all about it the very hair on his head would——"

"That'll do, Mabel!" Arlene spoke sharply, and this reference to her husband overspread her face with quick color; but, instantly realizing that her now deeply offended companion must again be placated, she said in a troubled voice, "Excuse me, Mabel; I didn't mean it. You say I never tell you anything and maybe that's so—I guess it's kind of a habit." She hesitated; but saw that it was necessary to continue her explanation. "Roy never wanted me to go on working at the Griswold after we were married and I wouldn't of; but those days we just had to have the money. He hated my being there so much that afterwards—well, it's something we just never talk about. You understand, don't you? It's like people that have been through a sickness or something they want to forget and so never mention."

"You mean Roy can't stand talking about it?" Mabel asked hungrily. "You mean he still gets sore on account of the sporty fellows that came in there and you——"

"I mean we don't talk about it," Arlene said. "What I don't talk about with my husband I just as soon not talk about with anybody else, Mabel."

"Oh, certainly," Mabel returned, courteous in resentment. Then, pondering, she tried to think of something further with which to fret her tall companion. "Say listen, Arlene; s'pose this good-looking cousin of yours comes to find out some day Gillespie Ives was crazy over her and you choked him off, why, what about that? Aren't you even going to tell her?"

"No, I'm not."

"But listen here; he's Gillespie Ives, and she might think you hadn't done her much of a favor. I don't say I expect she'd flop right into a date with him or anything; but when a man like that gets that way, why, I bet she'd certainly at least want to know it. S'pose she finds out——"

"Well, let her!" Arlene looked bored. "I'm not going to tell her."

"But why not?"

"Gosh!" Arlene exclaimed. "She's got a nice husband, and I don't know her well enough to know what she'd do."

"You don't? I thought you said she's your cousin."

"By marriage," Arlene said promptly, and yawned. "Listen, let's quit talking about this, will you? There's really nothing to it."

“Okay.” Mabel’s assent was grudging; she felt that her curiosity had been treated as intrusive, something that happened too often when she was with Arlene. However, she postponed to a better occasion the reprisals natural under the circumstances, and the two friends walked on for almost a block, not talking.

They were nearing home; the yellow of the twilight was left only in the western sky, and the further distances of long, straight Garfield Avenue were obscured in gloom. A voluminous dirty smoke drooped down upon the street from the chimneys of smallish supposedly Spanish, Norman, Italian, Tudor, Georgian and Colonial houses and from the brick apartment buildings and from corner groceries, drug stores, delicatessen shops and shops that were semi-suburban branches of greater establishments downtown. Long ’buses and longer trolley-cars rolled by crowded with the thrifty who didn’t put themselves to the expense of “all day parking” downtown, and no doubt carrying also some too poor or too economical to support automobiles. But most of the evening home-coming folk who lived along these upper reaches of Garfield Avenue, three miles or more from the thriving city’s center, whizzed by in those ubiquitous vehicles, sedans.

The sedans strove with one another, stole marches on one another, quarreled, edged one another callously into peril, complained of one another and cursed one another. One, a complainer, having passed squawkily by Mrs. Finch and Mrs. Parker, was itself just afterward fiercely upbraided for halting unexpectedly at the curb before an apartment building; and, at the same moment, as if the outcries of the profane sedans heralded the brilliant spectacle, twin straight miles of street lights leaped instantaneously into white radiance.

“There’s Ed,” Mabel said, alluding to the owner of the abused sedan, as he crossed the sidewalk and entered the apartment house. “Of the whole bunch he’s the rottenest driver, easy! They think they got it all over the rest of us ever since they bought that new Pontie. I was going to ask him how Carrie’s cold is; but he’s gone in. I certainly hope she won’t come near me while she’s infectious. Listen, hon, when’s this new couple going to move in?”

Arlene had become absent-minded. “Who?”

“This couple that’s such friends of Roy’s—Foot, didn’t you say their name is? When they going to move in?”

“Oh, the Foots,” Arlene said. “Pretty soon, I guess. Roy’s only a friend of his; he’s never even seen her yet and I just barely know her, myself. He’s a real nice fellow, though, Ernest Foot.”

“Think they’ll do for the bunch, Arlene? Think we’ll want to take ’em in?”

“I don’t know,” Arlene said. “She’s awful good-looking. Look, there’s Ola.”

A thin, long-legged schoolgirl, roller-skating on the cement sidewalk, clattered toward the two young women. “He’s home,” the skater said to Arlene. “How about some eats?”

Mabel was glad this application didn’t concern her; she thought it nuisance enough to have to get supper for herself and Art. “Ain’t that a kid all over? Never stop making you do something for ’em from the day they’re born till they get married and give you the go-by for good. Not me!”

Ola, not removing her skates and preceding her mother and Mrs. Finch, clattered into the stone-faced entrance of the eight-storied brick apartment building. The vestibule,

paved with black and white tiles, ended in two open glass doors with a glass transom above them, and the transom bore in neat gilt lettering the building's title, "The Lorenzo". The owner's reticence in omitting to state what Lorenzo this namesake implied may have been either modest or uninformed, though certainly he wished to hint enticingly of magnificence. Nor was this wish of his ungratified by various tenants; young Mrs. Finch seldom entered the building without lifting a complacent glance to the name upon the transom.

"The Lorenzo," she murmured now with pleasure. "I always like to have people notice me turning in here, don't you, hon? Art says it may be a little old-fashioned, but it's lots more dignified than those new ones up the Avenue. I expect even your Mr. Gillespie Ives'd think we're at least a little somebody if he saw we lived here." She lowered her voice to a suggestive, confidential tone. "You going to tell Roy about him, hon?"

"What!" Arlene was surprised and irritated. "I told you——"

"Oh, yes," Mabel said quickly. "I forgot. On account you don't like to talk about anything that dates back to your old days at the Griswold. I forgot."

They passed between the glass doors and ascended four stone steps to a corridor, where Ola, still wearing her skates though seriously practising some tap-dancing steps, was awaiting them. Mabel was effusive over the long-legged little girl's show of talent, and, for the time, made no more mention of Mr. Gillespie Ives. What she injuredly said to herself, however, was, "Thinks she put that over on me!"

III

OLA REMOVED her skates in the elevator, which was operated by a young mulatto woman whose expression, recognizably habitual, was that of a person cogitating upon something superior but remote. Alternating the languid conveyance of news and audible plyings of chewing-gum, she informed Mrs. Parker and Mrs. Finch that their husbands had lately arrived. "Just carried Mr. Ed Stem up, too," she added, during the ascent. "Ought to get a hair cut. Hasn't had one since that last boil."

"He say how Mrs. Stem's cold is?" Mabel asked. "She been out to-day, Emma?"

"Not as I've saw," Emma replied. "Heard her kachoo couple times when I been up to the eighth."

She opened the grilled iron door of the floor she'd just mentioned; the passengers stepped into the corridor, and Emma, chewing with more vigor, descended in brilliance from their sight. Mabel turned to the left, and, laughingly calling, "Olive oil, gals!" to Arlene and Ola, who had gone to the right, she walked thoughtfully to a varnished, brown door at the upper end of the corridor. Between the two upper panels of this door, which was mate to all the other doors in sight, there was a calling-card held by a thumb-tack and engraved "Mr. and Mrs. Arthur I. Finch", with "The Lorenzo" added near the left lower corner.

Mabel, being Mrs. Arthur I. Finch and at home, turned the octagonal brass knob of the door and entered a passage so slight in dimensions that five or six steps took her through its other doorway, where she was immediately in possession, so to speak, of almost the whole of her apartment. It was a room somewhat larger than the pinched hallway promised; the carpet was deep green, the ceiling was pale green, and the wallpaper, beginning as green at the white-painted baseboards, altered its tint talentedly at about the level of the eye and finished as increasingly radiant orange at the ceiling. White-painted double doors in one wall seemed to promise a spacious room beyond; but this was misleading, since a double bed now stood on its head, concealed behind these double doors. To the furniture, which was almost identical in all the apartments of the Lorenzo, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur I. Finch had added a few personal items of their own—a radio cabinet, a red-legged card-table with indigenous brass ash-trays, and two dangerous-looking one-legged "smokers'-stands", one beside each of the two "double-stuffed" easy-chairs. The Finches also owned, of course, an article not at present in view—a sedan—and upon the sedan they had to pay taxes.

Clinking sounds and the smell of boiling coffee came through the open door of the kitchenette. Mabel called in that direction, "You there, hon?" Not awaiting a response, she continued, "That's right; you just go ahead and set the nook table, Art. I'll be back in a

minute and do all the rest. Got something funny to tell you later if you're a good boy."

She returned to the corridor outside and began to walk toward its other end, passing varnished brown doors, carded like hers and all of them portals to ingeniously compacted dwelling-places inhabited, for the most part, by young or youngish couples not essentially differing from Mr. and Mrs. Arthur I. Finch. To Mrs. Finch's mind, however, three of these doors were incomparably more interesting than the others, since on the other side of these three dwelt members of "the Lorenzo bunch", that exclusive group centralized on this, the top floor of the Lorenzo.

The bunch preferred the top, feeling themselves there in more ways than one. They lived there, devoting their lives to the enjoyment and the intricate little inflictions of one another's society; and, of all the various clusters of human beings piled up in the Lorenzo—struggling up or sinking down in the world, and pleasantly unconcerned with the world's future or past, or with anything at a distance from themselves—the bunch lived in the most unrelaxed intimacy. They might indeed have been upon a little ship, passengers so deeply engaged with one another's smallest affairs as to be unaware of the vessel's destination.

Mrs. Finch pushed a pearly disk in a shallow socket beside a door that bore a card engraved "Mr. and Mrs. Charles C. Rice" and, of course, also "The Lorenzo". A man's voice called "Kmin"; she entered a hallway twin to her own and an apartment almost as close kin to hers. An addition to young Mr. and Mrs. Rice's furniture, however, instantly caught Mrs. Finch's eye.

"Well, if you aren't the nervy little copy-cats!" she cried. She first addressed the visible occupant of the apartment, a red-haired young man seemingly more interested in his evening newspaper than in her; then she called more loudly toward the open door of the kitchenette, "Say listen, Lide! Where'd you get the front to imitate I and Art and buy you these brass-and-mahogany smoking-stands?"

Mrs. Rice, black-haired, bright-eyed, button-nosed, slim and vivacious, showed herself briefly in the doorway. "Art and you took out a patent on 'em? Better tell Marcy and Burton they can't sell any more, huh? How about Art getting those crash pants last summer right the next day after Charlie got his? What's on your mind, sport? Come on in here; I'll let you open this can for me while you're spilling it."

Mabel went into the kitchenette, and red-haired young Mr. Rice at once paid no attention to his newspaper. The little more than whispered conversation in the kitchenette, reaching his ears as suppressed poignancies of sound merely, let him know there was news afoot more piquant than any he could find in the paper. Emphatic sibilances from Mabel and gloating exclamations from Lida reached him; and continued repetitions of the one word he could plainly distinguish—the pronoun "she"—were not needed to inform him that the two were busy over one of the other ladies of the Lorenzo bunch.

The confidential talk, somewhat hurried, ended with "All under your hat, hon!" spoken archly by Mabel, as she came forth. "You tuck it away, see?"

She was reassured from the kitchenette. "Got you sport! Nerts even to my red-head!"

Mr. Rice was again apparently engrossed in his paper; but Mabel knew better. She gave him a mocking glance, said, "Don't read too hard! Olive oil, Big Boy!" and departed, having produced within him just the disturbance—annoyance and curiosity mingled—

believed by most of the wives in the bunch to be any husband's proper condition.

"She's got a front!" he said, after obeying his wife's summons to the little table in the kitchenette nook. "You'd think Marcy and Burton'd haf to go out of business just so Mabe and Art'd own the only smokers'-stands in town. What was all that she was getting off her chest in here to you about this soup?"

"Soup?" his wife echoed. "What you mean, soup?"

"That's what she was talking about, wasn't it?" He tried to speak uninterestedly, but failed; and his facial expression, too, striving to be one of indifference, deceived nobody. "Thought I heard her talking about soup. Was she griping over our getting ours at Marcy and Burton's because she and Art get theirs there?"

"Soup? Go right on thinking it was all about soup," young Mrs. Rice said; then deliberately looked impenetrable.

He had to become franker in his questioning, to endure rebuffs and to be told several times that what he didn't know wouldn't hurt him. To appetize him the more for the revelation, Mrs. Rice withheld it until they were washing the dishes together; then she told him all that Mabel Finch had told her. Innocently, he avenged himself for what he had been put through.

"Who's this Mr. Gillespie Ives?" he asked.

Disgusted, Mrs. Rice attacked him. "Always showing you grew up in Hendersville! Once a rube always a rube, ain't it the truth? Listen, strawstack; Gillespie Boulevard's named for his family—but what's the use? You'd never know who's the goods in this town, not if you read the Sunday Society Section for a hunderd years!"

"Me? I wouldn't read it once for a hunderd dollars; those people gripe me. What I'd like to know, though, who's the girl Arlene says was such a looker this bird was after her? Who'd Arlene say she was, Lide?"

"Said some cousin of hers by marriage from out o' town. Likely! Mabe's dumb; but she didn't swallow that." Mrs. Rice rubbed dishes with a towel and chattered musingly. "Every time I been downtown with Arlene I'd notice if we met some real well-dressed fellow—sometimes maybe even with a white mustache—he'd tip his Fedora and kind of give her the funny eye as we passed him, and say listen, would she look conscious! Usually get out of even telling me his name; just say it was some fellow used to eat sometimes at the Griswold when she was cashier there. I guess Arlene was some sport around this town in those Griswold days. Some sport! Boy!"

"Think so, Lide?"

"Do I? Look at this afternoon. Boy! Roy may be quiet; but if I was her I wouldn't take many chances on what he'd *do*. I'd like to know what he'd think about it if somebody told him."

"I like Arlene," Charlie said. "I guess everybody does; yet at the same time she always does seem to be holding something out on you." He looked eager. "Arlene's a mighty good-looking woman. How much you believe it amounts to, Lide?"

At that, Mrs. Rice thought it high time to sit on him again. "You thinking of starting in to find out on your little own?" she asked, and, the dishes being finished, informed him that she was going up the hall to the Stems' apartment to see how Carrie's cold was.

Young Mrs. Rice had no respect either for germs or for the theory that they spread contagions. In the apartment of Mr. and Mrs. Edson Stem she sat on the sofa with her head so close to Mrs. Stem's stricken sinuses that caller and hostess were able to converse in whispers only. Poor Mr. Ed Stem, engaged with after-dinner solitaire, had to postpone knowing what it was all about until Lida Rice had replied to Charlie, over the telephone, that she was coming, they'd be in plenty of time for the second show at the Garfield Avenue and that he'd better sound more polite and keep his shirt on.

Meanwhile, separated from the home life of the Stems by a partition, Arlene Parker sat looking across the center table at her husband. Aided by a meditative cigar, he was studying some figures he'd been writing in a pocket note-book; and he remained unaware of his wife's thoughtful gaze. Like her, he was long and thin; but, unlike her, he wasn't handsome. He was dark, a little rugged and gaunt, with a lank, sallow jaw and shadowed friendly eyes; a quiet-seeming man with a look of being both reliable and self-reliant. Young Ola, disposed in acute angles upon the sofa with a technical work upon dancing from the city library, was long-legged and long-armed, like both her parents; but her expression was an exaggeration of her mother's—Ola appeared to be a very storehouse of severely guarded secrets.

Parker's figurings satisfied him. "They can swing it," he said, replacing the note-book in an upper pocket of his waistcoat. "With rents 'way down where they are, Ernie'll be all right. I took an option on one of those vacancies on the fourth floor for 'em, and tomorrow I'll tell Ernie he might as well sign the lease and move in. You'll kind of help his wife along to get started with the bunch, won't you?"

Arlene's response was not a direct one. "How'd you happen to take such a fancy to Ernie Foot, Roy?"

"What?" Her question surprised him. "I don't know." He appeared to consult his cigar. "Just liked him, I expect. Don't you?"

"Sure," she said. "I only wondered——"

He glanced across at her. "Maybe you don't like her."

"Couldn't tell much about her, that one afternoon," Arlene said. "She wanted to go shopping. We just rubbered around and priced things; she didn't have any money."

Parker seemed to have been enlightened by his cigar. "Tell you what I like about Ernie Foot. They put him next under me, the day he got his job, and I could see he was just a small-town boy new in the big burg; and of course that's what he was, too. He and his wife had just moved up here from Corinth City then, and Corinth City isn't over about seven or eight thousand population. I mean there was something about him suited me right from the start, and the longer I've known him the better I've liked him. It's not just his good looks nor his being a frank, open-hearted, likeable young fellow anxious to fill his job right and all that; it seems to me there's something about him that's above the average run of people we know. Finer, you might say."

"You mean finer than the bunch, Roy?"

"Well, yes. Yes, I do," he said. "I wouldn't say a word against the bunch. They're our best friends. I like 'em all right and I'm anxious for them to like him and his wife. There's something about Ernie Foot that's different, as the ads put it—above the average run. I'm glad they're going to quit their boarding-house and move to the Lorenzo where we'll see

more of 'em. You think the bunch'll like 'em, don't you, Arlene?"

"They will him."

Parker looked a little disturbed. "Not her? You can tell by the way he talks he's crazy about her, so I thought of course she must be——" He hesitated; then asked abruptly, "What's the matter with her?"

"Nothing at all."

"Why don't you like her, Arlene?"

"I expect I'll get to," Arlene said impassively. "Maybe you don't know it; but she's just about the best-looking woman in the wide world."

"So? The bunch would like that. Expect we might throw a little party for 'em some evening after they've moved in, Arlene?"

"Yes, if you want to. I expect we'll haf to. I kind of wonder——" She paused.

"What?" he asked, as she didn't go on. "What do you wonder?"

"Nothing."

"Yes, you do," he said with some urgency. "What's on your mind?"

"Nothing."

"Look here," he began; but was interrupted. Ola, behind them on the sofa, spoke without looking up from her book.

"Mom's holding out on you, Pop," she said in an absent-minded monotone, turning a leaf in the book. "She never tells you anything and you don't know anything about her. She means this woman's going to make trouble here if these Foots move in."

The child's father, turning, stared at her from under his dark brows; but Arlene told her unemotionally that it was bedtime.

"All right," Ola said; and, as willing to read her book in bed as elsewhere, went to the door of the tiny additional room included in the Parkers' apartment. "Don't say I didn't warn you!"

With this effect, she retired. Arlene laughed; but Parker looked up at her, and, seeing that his eyes were serious, she became serious, too. "What is it, Roy?"

"Well—I've been thinking. You and I are young yet; but it won't be so many years before we'll be getting middle-aged and—and maybe I'm foolish to think so, but lately it's seemed to me that we might be getting more out of life than we do. Seems like there ought to be something—something more. Foolish of me, you think?"

"No, Roy. Go on."

"Well, as I said, I like the bunch first rate; but—but you know how they are. Seems a good deal just always getting together and kind of gabble gabble, and going to movies and a lot of little excitements about each other's affairs and no interest much in anything else, to speak of. More just a kind of gossiping and sociability than—well, than real living and true friendship, you might say." He laughed apologetically. "Think so, too, maybe?"

"Yes, Roy. Go on."

"Well, since I got to knowing Ernie Foot it's seemed to me maybe you and I'd have more in our lives if we both of us had something like what you might call a—a true friendship for somebody like him and his wife. I—I mean——" He glanced up at her,

embarrassed and wistful; then laughed feebly in mitigation of his sentimentalism. "Likely I'm foolish——"

"No, you aren't," she said gently. "Go on."

"Well, I thought as fine a man as Ernie must certainly have a fine wife, too, and if you and I'd get to feeling about both of them the way I do about Ernie—well, there might be something more than we get from just being all the time with the bunch. I—I mean I've been sort of hoping so, Arlene."

She looked down at him as he timidly advanced his idea; and in her kind eyes was a troubled adoration. "I understand what you mean, Roy. You want me to be a true friend to his wife. I will—if she'll let me."

"Anybody'd let you," he said fondly; then was grave. "Ola picks up all kinds of things. There isn't anything in what she said, is there? You don't think Ernie Foot's wife's the kind to make trouble, do you?"

"No—I only thought——" She paused.

"Why don't you tell me, Arlene?"

Her honest gaze fell from his; then she looked up sadly and put a hand on his shoulder. "You wouldn't want me to, Roy. That afternoon I was shopping downtown with her something happened that made me wonder a little about her; that's all. It didn't amount to a great deal and I'd tell you all about it of course; but if I did it'd bring up some things you don't like to talk about."

"Would it?" His voice was suddenly husky. "Then don't tell me. No, don't tell me!" For a moment he looked haggard; then he made a manful effort, stood up, smiled waveringly upon her, patted her upon the shoulder and said briskly, "How about a game of cribbage, old lady?"

Arlene, hurrying to bring the cards and cribbage-board to the table, was so pleased that she blushed. "Don't you fear!" she said, as they sat down to the game. "I'll be her friend."

IV

THE FOOTS, Irene and Ernie, were the last arrivals at the evening party given by Arlene and Roy Parker in the hope that agreeable affiliations would be accomplished and the newcomers adopted into the Lorenzo bunch. Three varnished brown doors in a row stood brightly open to the corridor; the Stems and the Finches having cordially lent spaciousness to the evening. Guests might play cards in the Finches' apartment or dance in that of the Stems' to the Stems' big radio-phonograph; but these diversions were for later. The guests of honor were awaited in the Parkers' living-room, where two vases of chrysanthemums on a white-covered side table rose gayly above a gleaming symmetrical display of spoons, forks, knives, stacked plates and piled napkins. Expectant here were host and hostess and the Stems, the Finches and the Rices—octet nucleus of the Lorenzo bunch. In addition there were two other couples, non-resident members, so to speak, since they lived elsewhere than at the Lorenzo. There were also, from lower floors of the Lorenzo, two eager ladies widowed by divorce, a divorced young druggist and the exotic member, Mr. Ben Raphael, a bachelor.

Most of the ladies seemed to have based their hair and dress upon Hollywood's glisteners; the gentlemen were unanimously in black with short coats darkly framing their white shirtfronts. "See you had to get out the good old tuck for to-night, Ed," was Mr. Finch's greeting to Mr. Stem. "I wasn't going to; but Mabe said Carrie said you were. Lucky! I'd 'a' pulled a bad one on myself if I hadn't."

Charlie Rice joined them. "I like a tuck, myself," he said. "If I got to change my shirt anyway, I just as lief get into a tuck as not." He spoke further upon this theme, became the center of a male group, all in genially serious agreement with him. The ladies, collecting in another part of the room, likewise spoke of clothes. They praised one another's garments effusively, revealed prices amid marveling exclamations, insisted upon their envy of one another's hair, finger-nails, lip stains and artificial smells.

Everybody glanced sidelong repeatedly at the open door of the little hallway;—Roy Parker, nervous, heard the click of the elevator grille.

"Guess that's them," he said, and strode out into the corridor.

A moment later he was heard returning and talking cordially in the little hallway. "That's good; that's good! Lay your wrap on that table, Irene. Hardly needed it just coming up from the fourth floor, did you? Wore it just to prove you were coming to a party, I expect!" He laughed hospitably. "Thinking last night how nice you and Arlene having names so much alike—Irene and Arlene certainly ought to get along together, what? Step right on in, Ernie."

Polite but awkward, he urged this chosen friend of his through the door and into the

room before himself and Mrs. Foot. From both Roy and Arlene the expectant guests had already heard much in favor of the young man, and his appearance agreeably bore out the prophecies. Dark-haired, slender, amiable-looking, he came into the room smiling deferentially and instantly made the right impression upon the ladies, who all chattered but the more loudly, pretending not to be aware of him. Nevertheless, under this cover, there was approving comment upon him.

“Reminds me of Claud Barnes,” Mabel said hastily, out of the side of her mouth, to Mrs. Stem. “Awful aristocratic and the same soft look around the eyes Claud gets. Slim-waisted and wears his tuck buttoned, the way Claud did in his last picture. I bet that’s absolutely the right——”

She was silent abruptly. The general chatter died away, leaving upon the air only a few detached murmurs, breathed exclamations of wonder. For a moment the room was hushed in one of those dramatic pauses that sometimes take place even in the most polite assemblies upon the arrival of a surprising personage. The host came in with Irene Foot beside him, and she was so startling that no one could make the least pretense of not being aware of her.

Brunette and blue-eyed, she was one of those few fortunate women to whom short hair is fascinatingly becoming; she had the right head and the right, round neck for it—the thick dark curls, not touseled, were symmetrical upon this symmetrical head. Her nose was short but not stunted; the right mouth and the right chin went with it, and she had the smooth and even coloring that is often called an olive complexion, but isn’t. Twenty-six perhaps, at that age she had attained the full lustre of silken first youth; its glamor was like a glow from her, and the glance of her eye was ardent and adventurously inquiring.

Other women in the room were often thought pretty, and tall Arlene Parker was definitely a handsome creature; but everybody realized instantly that no competition could here be offered with this beauty, which was something of another and incomparably rarer class. Nevertheless, the Lorenzo ladies, after their first breathless moments of inward disturbance, were prepared to forgive her. Suave and exquisite modelings were easily divined beneath the close fabric of her silvery satin dress; she showed a silver high-arched foot, graceful arms, and hands that were pretty even though the delicate nails were as red as an Arab beggar’s toes; but neither the dress nor the slippers were new or of the year’s fashion, and, tending even more than this to mollify wifely apprehension, she wore an expression of gentle sweetness—a look of modesty that seemed to contradict the adventurous glancing of her brilliant eyes. For just the first half instant of her entering the room she seemed to sweep forward flashing, inquiring and bold; then the quick sweetness came over her, and her dark lashes lowered in an appealing deference. The whom room seemed brightened and enriched.

Honest Roy Parker had the needless embarrassment of a plain man who accompanies a conspicuous woman; he tried to appear easy. “Listen, folkses!” he said in a loud voice, addressing the company. “This is Ernie and Irene Foot that we’re throwing all this splurge for. Don’t stand off. They’re the best ever, so just treat ’em the way you——”

“No, no!” Arlene hurried forward, laughing. “Think you’re announcing a wrestling match? Listen, Roy; Ernie and Irene got to know people’s names, don’t they?”

Upon this, everybody laughed noisily; tension relaxed and voices resumed their function. Everywhere among the ladies there sounded an almost whistling hissing

betokening their warmed approval—"Sweet!" "So sweet!" "So sweet-looking!" and "Isn't she sweet?" The gentlemen fingered their neck gear; their eyes brightened and their expressions became fatuous yet furtive, as if some guilty secret had suddenly made them happier. Arlene began to present Irene to the other guests, pronouncing names distinctly, and Roy Parker, taking Ernest Foot by the arm, moved about the room introducing him, bragging of him warmly.

"Shake hands with Ernie Foot, Ed. Ben, I want you to meet Ernie Foot, my best friend. Started in under me at the Old Windsor Wholesale, and only last week they put him at the head of the Art Hardware Department. Shows brains can always do something, depression or no depression, what? These babies are Mr. Ed Stem and Mr. Ben Raphael, Ernie."

The host continued to circulate with his protégé, and a happy discovery was made—a fraternal bond already existed between the male guest of honor and Art Finch. "Gave each other the grip," Roy explained to all who would listen. "Ernie went a year to State College and Art was at Iola Tech a while. Art always wears his Chi Theta pin or whatever you call it, and Ernie saw it on him and right away before I introduced 'em they stuck out their hands and gave each other the grip! Wish I'd been a year to some college; it's a big advantage." He took his friend again by the arm. "Art, sorry I got to cut in on you and Ernie brothering each other: you'll get to talk to him some more later, Art. Right now he's got to meet these girls. Here, Lide, I want you to meet Ernie Foot; he's artistic, so they've made him our new head of the Art Hardware Department at the Old Windsor Wholesale. Her name's Mrs. Rice, Ernie, and that young fellow over there with the red head's her husband, so come on we'll go shake hands with him, too."

The party became informal. The phonograph presently sounded brassily from the Stems' apartment, where dancing began, and the red-legged card-table in the Finches' living-room acquired bridge players. Roy Parker's long figure went hovering from one room to another; he carried an open cigar box, proffering it hopefully everywhere—once absent-mindedly even to his wife, as she joined a group near the Stems' resounding radio-phonograph.

"Crazy!" She laughed at him benevolently. "Put it down and dance with me."

They danced, Roy conscientiously and the tall Arlene gracefully, observed from the doorway by Mrs. Finch and Mrs. Rice, who began talking to each other aside. "Can you beat it?" Lida Rice murmured. "Would you think there was such a person as Mr. Gillespie Ives in the world? You haf to hand it to her, how she puts it over. Poor good old Roy'd never dream she had a thought for any man in the world but him; she always acts like she just worships him. Why, if I had some big Goldwood baby come three times to the Garfield Avenue on account of me, I could no more go up to my Charlie afterwards the way Arlene just——"

"Me either!" Mabel said. "I'd pretty near be scared to look Art in the eye." Her glance went musingly from the Parkers to the only other couple dancing just then, Mrs. Foot and Mr. Rice. Mabel didn't need to explain that her topic had changed from Arlene to Irene as she murmured seriously, "Cute feet, too, hasn't she?"

"Cute all over," Lida Rice said in the tone women use when they feel they must face such facts. "That silver satin she's got on's anyhow a couple years old and those slippers been scuffed some, too; but Gosh! she should worry! With her shape and those eyes and that profile and hair I'd be willing to wear a few old doodads, myself!" She paused; then

added with detachment, philosophically, “Kind o’ makes you sick o’ husbands, don’t it?”

“How d’you mean, Lide?”

“All of ’em looking and behaving so gollblame silly just because some sweet-faced cutie’s got a silhouette like that! You wait till I get Charlie alone—if I don’t put him through a course of sprouts!” She laughed. “All of ’em trying to dance with her at once, and then those that get left standing around giving her the eye and posing, thinking she’s looking at ’em, when any fool knows a woman like that couldn’t think about anybody except herself to save her life; no matter *how* sweet she *acts*! Look at Ed Stem letting on to be terrible graceful and turning on that loud la-dee-da laugh of his, the way he does when he thinks somebody swell is listening to him. Him and Art pretending to be talking to each other but half the time looking sideways at her to see if she’s noticing. In a minute they’ll both try to grab her from Charlie again.”

“Sure!” Mabel said. “There they go.” To her pleasure, however, the two gentlemen were defeated. Dark Mr. Ben Raphael, more adroit than they, detached the beautiful Mrs. Foot from Charlie Rice’s lingering arm and suavely moved with her in fashionably voluptuous rhythms. Mabel tittered. “Look at Art and Ed! Like a couple o’ poodle pups that somebody’s grabbed away their bone!” Then she became serious. “Her husband’s pretty near as smooth a looker for a man as she is for a girl; s’pose I and you made ourselves as goofy over him as Art and Charlie are over her, would they ever stop rubbing it in?”

Young Mrs. Rice didn’t reply; for the moment she seemed lost in perplexing thought; then, as if she had solved a puzzle, she said triumphantly, “Yes, sir! I bet that’s it!”

“You bet what’s what, Lide?”

“Listen! Anybody when they get caught in a jam, they can’t think quick enough to make up a whole story to get themselves out of it; so about half what they say’ll be the truth. Arlene told you Mr. Gillespie Ives was following her and another woman downtown and she wanted to keep this other woman from noticing him, so she pushed her into the Chev and left him flat. Well, s’pose that part of her story happened to be true. S’pose there was another woman with her. Mrs. Ernest Foot!”

“What?” Mabel stared from Lida Rice to the dancing Irene and back again. “But it was *all* just a smoke-screen, so how——”

“No, sir!” Lida exclaimed. “There was that other woman. It works out just perfect. Arlene told you it was some cousin of hers because she knew you’d be getting acquainted with Mrs. Ernest Foot before long and she didn’t want you telling her Mr. Gillespie Ives is crazy enough about her to be hanging around the Garfield Avenue Theater looking for her and——”

Mrs. Finch’s mouth opened wide and then closed. “Lida Rice, you’re a wiz!”

“You bet!” Mrs. Rice agreed. “Yes, and you bet it was true Arlene hustled Irene away from Mr. Gillespie Ives and into the Chev! S’pose I or you had a rich friend on a string and was downtown walking with Mrs. Ernest Foot, and he came up, we’d get her out of the way as quick as we could, too, wouldn’t we? Yes, and *keep* her out of his way afterwards as long as we could, too! No wonder Arlene was shaking her head at him in the lobby of the Garfield Avenue when he was trying to get her to tell him where he could see Irene Foot again!”

“Pete’s sakes!” Mabel’s bosom was stirred by a profound enjoyment, one of those rich emotions known by ladies of the Lorenzo bunch, and like bunches, when one of their number is hiddenly perceived to be walking a secret and perilous path. Mrs. Finch and Mrs. Rice shared an almost breathless silence during which their brightened eyes apparently enlarged.

Their husbands, smiling falsely, approached them, Lida’s to dance with Mabel, and Mabel’s to dance with Lida; the two ladies had to separate. For the next few moments each loyally rallied the other’s husband, taxed him with posing at Mrs. Foot and waggishly put him in his place, the worm’s. Then the two busy heads joined again, in the doorway. Good old Roy Parker might be quiet but he wasn’t a man you better play tricks on, they agreed. Arlene was a woman you might think you knew her; but did you? Irene Foot might be in love with her attractive husband or she mightn’t; you couldn’t tell, but Beauties weren’t likely to be, no matter how sweet they *looked*. As for Mr. Gillespie Ives, so *that* was the way these Oldwood millionaires acted outside of the home, for heaven’s sake, was it?—and for crying out loud, what about *his* wife?

To the view of Mabel and Lida, six people, Arlene and Roy, and Irene and Ernie, and two remoter figures upon a high and gilded horizon, Mr. and Mrs. Gillespie Ives, were absorbingly involved.

Something must come of it. Lida and Mabel, like spectators delightedly stirred by the opening of a play, leaned forward, staring at Irene Foot.

BY MIDNIGHT the party for the Foots was at its height. Mr. Ben Raphael, in the Parkers' kitchenette, had brewed the goulash his talent for which had brought about his recent adoption into the Lorenzo bunch; plates were filled, and, besides the goulash, beer, stronger liquor, sandwiches, potato salad and coffee were abundant. Noisily jocose, sitting or standing at will, the company forsook dancing and cards and applied themselves to supper in the Parkers' apartment. Several husbands, reckless of what they were certain to hear at bedtime, made an impenetrable semi-circle of themselves close before the beautiful Mrs. Foot; but apparently she was accustomed to such formations. At least, when she was congratulated upon her success, a little later, she showed a lack of enthusiasm.

Young Ola had been sent to spend the night with a schoolmate, leaving her small room to be used as a repair shop for the ladies; and after the supper Arlene and Irene found themselves alone together there for a few moments. "No wonder you're making such a hit," Arlene said heartily. "You and Ernie are both going bigger with the bunch than I ever saw anybody yet, and it's easy to see why. You're so sweet to everybody, Irene, I guess the girls'll forgive you for being a beauty—though I don't know what they'll do to the boys when they get a chance at 'em!"

Irene, seated before Ola's little dressing-table, moved a stick of compressed scarlet grease attentively along her lips, making their lovely outline more conspicuous. "That so?" she said, casually preoccupied and not using any sweetness now. "I guess men'll make kind of a fuss over somebody new any time. I thought these big-town men of yours were going to be different from the fellows back home in lots o' ways; but I guess not—seem just about the same." Then she went on, seemingly in absent-minded and idle inquiry, "Say listen, Arlene, where's that fellow live that turned around on the sidewalk and you were sore with me for getting just the least bit sociable with him, that day we were shopping downtown? Where's he live?"

"Nowhere in this part o' town."

"No, I s'pose not." Irene looked into the mirror thoughtfully, touched her lips with color again; then said, with the appearance of being slightly more interested, "Who's that fellow that made the goulash, this Mr. Ben Raphael? Never takes his eyes off me. Gives me kind of a funny feeling. He got a wife around somewhere?"

Arlene laughed. "No; Ben's no marrier. He's a good fellow, though. Don't you like him?"

"How do I know?" Irene asked indifferently. She rose, glancing down at herself. "Out o' date," she said, referring to the silvery dress. "Best I got, though. I s'pose all these

women sized it up for year before last, didn't they?"

Arlene spoke rallying. "I expect you know well enough it don't matter what some people wear, Irene!"

"Don't it?" Irene said. Then, near the door, she made a face; symmetries of nose, lips and brow became contours of protest. "I guess it might to the people that got to wear it."

She opened the door, and the smiling Ben Raphael, not a foot away, carried her off gayly to the Stems' apartment for more dancing. Bridge, however, was not resumed, nor were fresh bottles lacking from the supper table. Glass-in-hand singing began; spirits became both more frolicsome and more sentimental; intimacies increased in warmth. Everybody called Mr. and Mrs. Foot Ernie and Irene, and Art Finch sang "I Wanna Go Some Place Else" with his arm about Ernie Foot's shoulders. Ernie Foot was discovered to possess a voice, himself, a light baritone, and was awarded the remarkable tribute of a general silence while he sang "Mandalay" with such effect that a little later he had to sing it again. His fraternity brother, Mr. Finch, made himself a master of ceremonies for this repetition.

"Hush up, everybody!" he shouted, waving his glass imperiously. "Listen, Ed, will you *kindly* shut up one minute? Ernie's going to sing Mandalay again. Charlie, will you close the old trap just once in your life while Ernie sings Mandalay? Listen, Mabe, will you can that yapping? Ernie's going to sing Mandalay. Mabe, if you won't can your yapping for decency's sake, will you do it for mine? I ask you! *Will* you kindly can it for *mine*?"

"If you'll kindly quit spilling gin all over me, I will," his wife said. "My! Wait till tomorrow and what you'll hear about the spectacle you been making of yourself all night seventeen different ways. Maybe eighteen!"

"Eighteen what? Whose spectacles?" he asked; but, before she replied, forgot her. "Si-lunche!" he shouted. "Si-lunche, everybody! Brother Ernie Foot's going to sing Mandalay again!"

Ernie sang Mandalay again. There were other songs; couples sang, dancing, and there was sporadic singing in all three apartments. Art Finch pounded Charlie Rice and Ed Stem upon their chests, declaring his Brother Ernie Foot to be the finest man he'd ever known; and both of them agreed with this, Charlie Rice passionately. So great was the enthusiasm for Ernie Foot, indeed, after his second singing of Mandalay, that this trio, Messrs. Stem, Finch and Rice, who had earlier spent hours in competition for the glances and dances of his wife, now ended by forgetting her very presence and leaving her almost entirely to the persistent Ben Raphael.

Charlie Rice finally admired the new friend so emotionally, in fact, that he couldn't speak of him without tears in the eyes and was therefore conducted down the corridor to his own apartment by his sharp little wife, Lida. His departure cost him nothing of value, however, as the other guests were dispersing, and Brother Finch was already locked up in his own kitchenette, singing "For he's a jolly good fellow!" over and over, while Mabel put their apartment to rights and let down the bed. A little later all three polished brown doors, the Parkers', the Stems' and the Finches', were closed for the night with only their proper tenants inside.

Roy Parker, glancing over the disordered room, was delighted. "Went off just right,"

he said. "They all had a good time and they certainly made a big fuss over Ernie. Seemed to me they liked her, too, didn't they? Might think she'd been spoiled—such a star for looks—but I didn't see a sign of it. Mighty nice sweet woman, don't you think so, Arlene?"

"Yes—I guess so. You sit down, Roy." She took from him a tray upon which he was placing dishes and bottles dangerously. "I'll straighten everything up and have it done before you finish that cigar."

"Guess you will," he said, obeying. "You can do more and better and quicker'n anybody I ever knew—with those long arms of yours, old lady." He became reflective. "Yes, sir, I guess it was a pretty good party. The bunch seemed to take to 'em right from the start, don't you think so, Arlene?"

"Yes, I do."

"Fine!" he said. "You understand of course the bunch are old friends of ours and I don't mean I'd ever want to shake 'em; of course not. Our having this new friendship that's maybe better wouldn't interfere with the old, and of course I want the old friends to like the new ones. They do like 'em, too; don't you think so, Arlene?"

"Yes, I expect so."

"Fine!" he said again, and chuckled. "I expect Ernie and Irene are talking it over in their own apartment right now, the same as we are. I expect they're both tickled to death over it, Ernie and Irene. Don't you expect so, Arlene?"

Arlene, busy and capable, moving rapidly about the room and into the kitchenette and back again, said yes, she expected so; but her tone was not assured. She wasn't convinced that Irene Foot's present condition was one of delight. Irene's parting words to host and hostess had been properly effusive; but Arlene had perceptions that roused doubt within her when her husband spoke of the probable happiness now pervading the Foots' apartment on the fourth floor.

The doubt was a shrewd one, moreover. Mr. and Mrs. Foot had descended to the fourth floor and had entered their new abode without the husband's perceiving that he was doing all the talking. He was enthusiastic, grateful to the Parkers, pleased with all his new friends and no doubt, too, with himself for being so obviously liked. He talked on gayly, unaware that his beautiful wife's silence was eloquent; until finally, as he was unfastening his collar before a mirror, he felt her lack of responsiveness. Innocently continuing to observe himself in the glass after he had detached the collar, and pardonably pleased with what he saw, he asked, with almost no misgiving, "Don't you think it was a pretty big evening for us, Irene?"

She hadn't begun to undress; she was sitting in one of the apartment's two upholstered armchairs, and her face wore no expression whatever. She spoke in a flat voice. "Oh, stop looking in that looking-glass! Don't you *ever* get tired?"

DISCONCERTED, he turned to her. "Can't I even take off my collar before a looking-glass?"

"It's been off quite some time, Ernie; but go ahead, though. Look some more. Don't let me deprive you of a pleasure that——"

"Listen," he said feebly. "Can't I even look at myself long enough to take off a collar without your——"

She interrupted him. "Honest, until we were married I never knew men were supposed to look in the glass a whole lot. I never saw poor Father do it, except when he was shaving. Do you keep forgetting how you look—betweentimes?"

"I do not!" he said, reddening. "Do you?"

She laughed. "Came right back at me with that one, didn't you?" He had already opened the camouflaging double doors, let down the bed and placed his coat upon it. She pointed to the coat. "Better hang up your swell new clothes in the closet, hadn't you? They might get mussed and lose you the reputation of being the dressiest little fellow this Lorenzo crowd ever met. 'The Lorenzo bunch' I hear they call themselves. It'd be a terrible thing if they'd see you in a mussed-up tuck some time, wouldn't it?"

He sat down and groaned. "I guess I'm in for it again!"

"Oh, no!" she said, and kept her voice to a tone of light bantering. "How could *you* be in for anything? Everybody's crazy about you; you're so well groomed! Of course, though, they don't happen to know that when your wife hasn't had a new dress for two years because you tell her you can't afford it, you take and buy yourself a new Tuxedo suit and——"

"A new one?" he said. "You talk as if I'd had an old one? I didn't have *any*, did I? How many times do I have to tell you it's important for both of us that I don't make the impression of being a country yap when I go out among business men in this city? In the city if a man goes out to an evening party——"

"Yes? How about your wife? It doesn't matter if she's in rags and can't even buy a new pair of slippers, just so you have a new tuck, yourself? What about that new sack suit, too? When I ask you for enough to get a facial and manicure, oh, no! we're right on the edge of bankruptcy!" Irene's voice became sharper. "You can go and buy yourself a tuck, though, and a new sack suit and——"

"I *had* to!" he interrupted plaintively. "I simply *had* to have that sack suit, Irene. You can't be head of a department in a big city business like the Old Windsor Wholesale without looking at least a little like the right thing. I have to meet all kinds of people,

important people and——”

“Do you? Important people like this bunch to-night, for instance?”

“Oh, dear!” he said. “What’s the matter with ’em? Here we’ve come to live among ’em—you said yourself you wanted to and were crazy to get out of the boarding-house—and right the first evening you begin to talk like this! They certainly did their best to give us a nice time, and here you’re already jumping on ’em! What’s wrong with ’em?”

“They’re ordinary.” Irene looked at him coldly. “They may be all right in their place; but they’re ordinary. I thought when we came to this town and commenced getting acquainted we’d meet people that’d be more the kind you read about than the crowd we went with in Corinth City. This ‘Lorenzo bunch’ is just exactly the same, except maybe the women are about ten per cent dressier and all the men got tucks instead of only half of ’em. I could eat Swiss cheese sandwiches and dance to scratched records back in Corinth City as well as I could here, thank you!”

“You never had any goulash there,” Ernie Foot said desperately. “You never——”

“No? That’s a nice thing for you to bring up. You never came near me all evening yourself—too busy making a big hit! Left me to dance about fifty times with that Ben Raphael that never once took his shiny eyes off me from the minute we got there. What do *you* care how much your wife dances with some dressed-up Turk?”

Aghast, he stared at her. “Why, every time I looked at you there were three or four fighting to dance with you—anyway up until after supper——”

She rose; looked down at him. “Oh, go sing Mandalay again!”

“What?”

“Go sing Mandalay some more! If you did it enough you might get tired of it.”

Stabbed, he seemed to sink into himself. “I’m sorry,” he said. “I didn’t know. I can remember when you said you liked to hear me sing it.” He laughed ruefully. “I *can* remember that far back, Irene.”

“Yes,” she said, went to the mirror and began to unfasten her dress. “I *did* kind of like it—the first three or four hundred times.”

“All right!” He rose, and addressing her reflected face, spoke haughtily. “You won’t have to stand it any more. I’ll never sing it again.”

“Never, Ernie?”

“I never will, so help me!”

“Honest?” She laughed softly, as if for the benefit of the lovely face in the mirror. “Sure you won’t right away up and learn ‘Old Man River’ to sing, instead?”

He made no response; seemed unable to command his voice so far. She began to hum an indistinguishable tune almost inaudibly, and, turning from the mirror, pulled the silvery dress off, over her head, hung the limp satin thing in a closet; then sat on the bed, with her back toward him, and went on with her undressing.

“Going to stand there all night?” she asked, after a time, not turning her head. “Too mad at me to even move?”

“I was just thinking,” he said unhappily. “I was wondering if you hated my singing because you thought it made them slow up making so much over you.”

“What!”

“Yes; it almost seems like it, Irene. It seems as if you hate me because you thought they got to paying more attention to me after that than they did to you. You’re wrong to hate me for it, because it just happens that way sometimes when the drinks get to going round—men sort of forget about the girls for a while and want to get together and sing or shoot craps or just babble. You oughtn’t to hate *me* for that.”

“What!” Irene cried again; and upon this, because in his simplicity he had indeed come near the truth, her voice was louder. “You have the front to stand there and tell me I was jealous of you—because you think you made a bigger hit than I did?” She laughed loudly through the folds of her nightdress as she pulled it down over her head; then, as the garment fell about her, she rose and looked at him with a glittering derision. “Honest, you oughtn’t to be so modest about yourself, Ernie Foot! You’d make a hit with a crowd like that every time. Maybe with the right people you wouldn’t; but you would with the Lorenzo bunch—*they’d* always fall for you!”

“Listen,” he said. “What do you mean the ‘right people’? I don’t say this crowd’s the top socially in this city—of course not—but why aren’t they just about as ‘right’ as anybody else?”

“What?” She uttered a whoop of laughter. “Well, for crying out loud!”

“Well, why aren’t they? You can call them ‘ordinary’ all you want to. That’s only calling names because you got mad over something or are sore about your dress or my singing or something—I don’t know what. I don’t think it’s very decent of you, myself.”

“Oh, you don’t?”

“No, I don’t! They’re nice, cordial, jolly people and all of ’em put themselves out to give us a good time—couldn’t have been more gracious. Roy Parker’s one of the straightest, kindest men I’ve ever met. He’s my best friend and his wife’s certainly as cordial and fine-looking and nice a woman as you ever——”

“Oh, she is? Is that so?” Irene laughed knowingly; he had seemed to be putting her in the wrong and she seized the opportunity to reverse their positions. “You know a lot about her, don’t you?”

“I know as much about her as you do.”

“You do? Then I s’pose you know she’s got a boy-friend.”

“What!”

“Oh, yes,” Irene said, smiling upon him frostily. “That day I went shopping with her—with thirty cents in my bag because that’s all we could afford!—I had a good look at him. Oh, yes; quite a fine-looking fellow, too, he is—quite a big sport, I’d say, from his looks and clothes.”

“Who is? You don’t know what you’re talking about!”

“Oh, yes. Mrs. Roy Parker’s sweetie,” Irene explained. “Not going to let anybody else cut in on her, either, Arlene isn’t. He came up to us on the sidewalk, and after he’d said something to her he said he’d like to meet me, and I didn’t think anything; I just laughed and shook hands with him, and he was going on to say some more and I was, too—just to be polite. She didn’t even introduce us; just said ‘Come on!’ to me and fairly pushed me into her car.”

“What? Why, there’s nothing to that.”

“No?” Irene asked mockingly. “Were you there to see the way she did it? Then afterwards, when I merely asked who he was, she said she hadn’t seen him for so long she’d forgotten his name. And he’d just been calling her Arlene!”

“Why, that’s nothing,” Ernie said. “Just exactly nothing!”

“Just exactly nothing?” She burlesqued his voice. “Any woman would know it was something, I can tell you! Yes, and she wasn’t taking any chances any woman would cut in on her. Wouldn’t tell me his name! S’pose she thought I wanted to call him up?” Irene laughed loudly.

This laughter of hers, too long, had in it a note of peculiar sharpness that brought a curious and bitter idea into the mind of her goaded husband. “Did you?” he said. “Did you want to call him up?”

She stared at him, reddened, caught her breath audibly, and cried, “That’s a dirty insult!”

“I know it!” he moaned, dropped in a chair and took his head in his hands. “I get provoked into saying these things. I never know what’s going to happen. You seem to hate me. I love you but——”

“Yes, you do!”

“I do!”

Her lower lip trembled. “Nice way you got of showing it.”

“How can I show it?” he asked. “You can’t show that to anybody that acts half the time as if she hates you, can you?”

“Hates you?” Irene said in a gentler tone. “I never hated anybody in my life, and I never insulted anybody, either—not the way you’ve just insulted me, Ernie.”

“You know I didn’t mean it. You know I’m sorry.”

“Honest, are you?”

“Yes, I am.”

She came near him, put her hand gently upon his head. “Well—all right. I don’t know how we get into these fights any more than you do, Ernie.”

“Don’t you?” He looked up pathetically, took her hand from his head and pulled her arm round his neck. Forgiving and ready to be fond, she sat on his knee, bent to him tenderly. “Irene,” he said, “let’s never have any more fights. Let’s just try to see the best in each other after this. I’ll try if you will.”

“I will. We’ll both try, Ernie, from now on.”

“Yes,” he said. “We’ll try to see the best in each other instead of the worst. I’ll try as hard as I can not to see the worst in you, Irene, if you’ll——”

“Say!” she interrupted. “Listen!” His honest effort to put things on a worthier foundation could have been more diplomatic, failed to complete the reconciliation. Irene detached herself from him, rose and looked at him suspiciously. “Oh, you’ll try? You’ll try your best not to see all the worst in me, will you? *What* worst, may I ask, please?”

“What?” Disturbed by a new ominousness in her tone, he got up from his chair to explain unfortunately, “Why, I just mean your temper, Irene—just your temper and picking on me for nothing and getting jealous if people like me and——”

“Me!” She shouted the pronoun at him. “Me! Jealous of you if people——Listen! Going to spend the rest of the *night* insulting me? Gosh, if you don’t burn me up! First you accuse me of wanting to make a date with another girl’s boy-friend, and then you hand me all this! One insult after the other to your wife, and what for? Just because you’re all ballooned from playing the hero of the evening for the Lorenzo bunch and I make the mere remark they don’t appeal to me as the best on earth! So for that I get one insult after the other. Gosh, if you aren’t a honey of a man to live with, though!”

“Oh, my, my, my!” Once more deflated, he collapsed into his chair, took his head in his hands and groaned. “Here we are again! I don’t know how it happens; but it always does happen! Things seem to go all right for a while and then something gets you upset—I never know what or when it’s going to—and then you get mad and talk as if you hate me and pretty soon we’re fighting like cats and dogs, and I’m always sure to fly off the handle and say something that puts me in the wrong, and we’re both sore and it takes us I don’t know how long to get over it! Here I thought we were having a happy evening with these new friends of ours and starting this new life among ’em so brightly, and everybody liking each other and everything looking fine for us, on account of my being put at the head of the Art Hardware Department, and maybe you and I’d never have another of these quarrels and—oh, my goodness, what’s the use?”

It would have been difficult to answer him; Irene made no effort to do so. Indeed, before his despondent question was asked, she had turned out the light and got into bed.

The room was not entirely dark, however, and he would be able to see well enough when he roused himself to complete his undressing. Daylight was already filtering through the drawn shades at the windows; the Lorenzo bunch were asleep now, and soon so was Irene, with her face beautiful upon the pillow—all slumbered except that most popular and newest member, her husband. Before he, too, slept, a Sunday morning newsboy on the pavement below howled and howled in cadences that came into fourth-floor windows not as “Sunday Morning Despatch News” but as “Somebody wants to scratch you! Scratch you, scratch you, scratch you——”

VII

THIS NEWSBOY, in business on Sundays only, was again under the Lorenzo's windows destroying early Sabbath peace a week later; and, returning like some spiteful mechanism on the following Sunday, gained a new patron. That morning Roy Parker and Art Finch and Ernest Foot were up betimes for a threesome on the city's golf course. Roy and Art were waiting in Parker's car when Ernie came out to the pavement; but he begged their indulgence for a moment, bought a paper from the screeching boy and returned with it to Irene, who was still in bed.

"Here it is," he said. "I've left the current on, so the coffee'll be hot when you get up. Anything else you want?"

She took the paper languidly. "Wait till I get awake enough to think whether there is or not."

"All right. The boys are waiting down below—but all right." As he spoke, he helped to prop her head and shoulders with pillows; and neither in his expression nor in hers were there visible traces of their quarrel of a fortnight earlier, the end of the Parkers' party.

To the mind of Ernest Foot the recurrence of such quarrels had grown to seem an adjunct to the institution of marriage. All married couples had these miserable hours, he supposed; outbreaks not calculable beforehand by husbands but necessary to the strange natures of women. During the actual moments of conflict he suffered, raged, sometimes even wept, and the next day would be wounded and despondent; yet betweentimes, like a dentist's patient going about his business between sessions in the chair, he almost forgot past agonies and the fact that others were in store for him. Betweentimes, indeed, he almost forgot that the intervals of peace between him and his wife were growing briefer.

Now, as he gave her the newspaper and made pillows a supporting background for her loveliness, he was able to look upon affairs between them as almost wearing an aspect of brightness; Irene had seemed to be changing her mind about the Lorenzo bunch.

The first excited gallantries of Ed Stem and Art Finch and Charlie Rice hadn't been renewed. Good husbands all, they saw they'd better realize that gallantry can go only so far without disproportionate inconvenience; but Irene didn't seem to mind this sobering down of Charlie and Art and Ed. To her husband's pleasure she had daily become more friendly with Mrs. Finch, Mrs. Rice and Mrs. Stem and especially with Arlene Parker. This seemed to Ernest Foot as near a retraction as wives ever permit themselves to make; and in particular it seemed to retract the hasty slander uttered against Arlene. Irene apparently had completely forgotten everything she'd said of her.

"Well?" he ventured a little urgently, as she yawned and passed stained pretty fingers over her dark curls. "The boys are waiting and if you can't think of anything more you

_____”

She pointed to the telephonic instrument, a “French” one upon an “end table” beside the blue sofa, just where this instrument’s counterpart was in every other apartment of the Lorenzo. “Call up Arlene for me and tell her maybe I’ll give her a look-in after I’ve had breakfast. Ask her if she wants to go downtown with me to Shipo’s for a facial and— No, it’s Sunday. Wouldn’t be open. Just tell her maybe I’ll be up there after a while.”

He did as she asked, heard Arlene’s pleasant deep voice responding in assent, and was released to his friends and the game. As he closed the door behind him, Irene sat up straighter, drew the Rotogravure Section from the voluminous folded paper, and, frowning, began to look over the pictures.

One of them, occupying the quarter of a page, caught her attention and held it. A slim young woman was seen standing before a blank wall and apparently about to paint upon it, since she wore a long blouse and held brushes and a pallet. She looked not at the wall, however, but over her shoulder at the photographer, and consequently now from the paper at Irene Foot, who was inspired in return with resentment.

“Oh, yes, of course; it’s you again!” she murmured half aloud. “How many times a week do you get photographed? Nobody can keep *you* out of their house, can they?—not if they live in this burg!”

She read the lines of print beneath the picture. “The new studio at Foxglen Farms with the chatelaine at work. The artistic addition to the Manor nearing completion, Mrs. Gillespie Ives sets about painting the murals herself.”

“Go on, set about it, then, why don’t you?” Irene asked. “All dressed up for it, aren’t you? Even left off your pearl necklace; but what you care?—the papers already proved you got one! I sh’d think you’d get a doctor to do something about that nose, though; and Gosh! look at your hair!”

The pictured hair, in fact, was a touseled dark mop, a little eccentric; but to the nose Irene was unfair. It was a thin nose, aquiline and rather long, yet helped to gain for the round face something of distinction. The eyes were small, and, if the photography had not erred, they were brightly eager, in agreement with the impulsive hair; nevertheless, this was not an ugly woman. Moreover, she seemed to be commandingly self-assertive, without fear of the photographer or the consequent spectators, or, apparently, of anything in the world.

“Oh, yes; you got your nerve!” Irene said to her. “Putting it all over us, aren’t you? Give me half your chance and wouldn’t I, though!”

She discarded the Rotogravures; took up a “section” labeled “Society, The Clubs, Fashions and Art News”, and was presently irked again. Here, too, was printed photography, and, in the midst of a group of pictured young ladies, the distinguished long nose and the round face were again to be seen, though a tilted hat hid a little of the mop of hair. “Junior Committee for the Service Club Bazaar,” Irene read; and added, whispering, “Chairman, of course. Gosh Pete, yes; catch you being anything else! Which is it you got on to-day—the mink or the sable? *Always* rubbing it in on us, aren’t you?”

Brooding, she got out of bed, breakfasted moodily in her nightdress at the nook table in the kitchenette; then, postponing doing anything about the bed or the breakfast dishes until later, she rubbed her face with an unguent, patted it with scented alcohol, wiped it

dry, washed her hands, dressed and ascended to the eighth floor.

In the elevator the expression of the mulatto girl at the lever was worshipful. "Oh me!" Emma said. "They all got to give way when Miz Foot come' stepping along. Up and down Garfield Avenue they all know who's the flower of the Lorenzo now! That blue street suit you're wearing maybe wouldn't look as cute on me as it does on you, Miz Foot; but it's not so fresh—looks close on time for you to give it away. You know who's waiting for it!"

"You might wait too long," Irene said, not smiling. "You'd have to wait till I get another."

Emma opened the grilled door of the eighth floor. "Then your husband don't treat you right. If he's going to stay husband of the flower of the Lorenzo, you tell him he better dig down. You tell him, Miz Foot. You say, 'Dig down, man, dig down!'"

"Guess you're right!" Irene called back, as the elevator sank from sight.

She found Arlene alone, knitting a sweater for young Ola who'd gone unwillingly to Sunday School. "Said she didn't want to go because she knows too much," Arlene explained. "Wasn't joking, either. She's a funny girl, Ola. She often makes me feel like I'm not her mother but more she's my aunt or something."

Irene wasn't interested in Ola. "How about this afternoon and maybe you and me dropping down to this Garfield Avenue Theater, just below here, to see what they got?"

"All right, except listen, Irene, Roy's got the Chev; but we could hop into a 'bus and go on downtown to the Plaza Theater and see a lots better show."

"Okay." Irene glanced at the sofa where disordered sheets of newspaper indicated that Arlene had engaged in reading before taking up her knitting. "Looks to me like that's a jay paper for as big a town as this. Don't you think so?"

"I don't know. Why?"

"Who wants to look at a baby photograph prize contest? Takes one whole page of it, and the rest just airplanes and people with dead fish and this long-nosed, fuzzy-haired Ives woman all over the place."

"Who?" Arlene glanced sidelong from her knitting. "Who'd you say?"

"This Mrs. Gillespie Ives," Irene said. "I sh'd think the people of this town'd be sick of that face of hers; I sh'd think she'd even begin to feel a little that way about it, herself. She's been more in the papers than Mussalino ever since Ernie and I moved up here from Corinth City. You ever seen her?"

"No—except in the papers. There are some others, though, you see about as often."

"Yes," Irene admitted. "They all like to rub it in, I guess."

"Rub it in?"

"On the rest of us," Irene explained. "Rubbing their money in on us—their sable coats and their minks, their silver foxes and their real pearl necklaces and——"

"You can't tell," Arlene suggested. "Maybe they're real and maybe they're not."

"Oh, they're real all right!" Irene cried, and her lovely face was bleak. "I wonder what it'd feel like to have a husband that'd come home some night and hang a real pearl necklace around your neck. I'd like to *try* it once for a while, just to see! Look at their faces—yes, and their shapes, too—you wonder how any of 'em ever got hold of a man

like that, a man that'd say, 'Here, hon!' and give you a town car and a private chauffeur, so you'd go riding by and let 'em rubber at you, and have *your* picture in the paper a few times, maybe, and let a few of 'em get sick over that! Honest, these newspapers make me tired."

"Then what do you look at 'em for, Irene?"

"What for? That's just where the papers are smart; they know if they print these pictures the rest of us can't help wanting to see 'em. Yes, and that's what these women in the photographs know, too. They know it shows they're prominent and makes the rest of us sore."

Arlene laughed dryly. "I expect they don't mean any harm; but likely that's what a good deal of this being prominent is, maybe; making the rest of us sore because we're not and think we ought to be."

"*Ought* to be?" Irene repeated challengingly, and she was so moved that her voice even shook a little. Color glowed in her cheek and her eyes flashed with a bitter light—an old, old gleam from eyes that beheld the world as caprice, a gaming-board at which the one most deserving player of all sits cheated, bankrupt and obscure. "Just look at 'em," she said. "How many of 'em don't look as if their husbands mustn't be cuckoo to throw away such clothes and jewelry on them—yes, and even build these swell houses for 'em? Why, they——"

She was interrupted. The doorbell merely clicked, so briefly was the disk pressed, and Mabel Finch came in, pink, blonde and plump, having passed through the corridor informally, since her visible attire consisted of a brightly mottled kimono and a pair of crocheted blue slippers. "Bum joor, sports!" she said jocosely. "How about us three golf widows strolling down to the Garfield Avenue all by our lonesomes this aft? Art said they were going to eat a hot dog lunch and try to play around again after that if they could squeeze in; so how about us for the Garfield Avenue?"

"Arlene thought we'd get a better show at the Plaza downtown," Irene said.

"At the Plaza?" Mabel looked at Arlene, smiled hiddenly. "Been to the Garfield Avenue a couple times this week, Arlene; didn't see anybody in particular—nobody to bother about." She made her tone as significant as possible. "A certain party—you know, the one that was crazy about your married cousin, Arlene—it looks like he's quit going there."

Arlene gave Mabel a cool glance. "Safe as a church, aren't you, girlie? When anybody tells you anything it's buried."

"Gosh, I forgot!" Mabel exclaimed, as if contrite. "Okay, Arlene; I get you." She was disappointed. Irene, paying no attention to what was said, had seated herself on the sofa, had picked up the Rotogravure Section she had examined in bed and was looking at it again. Mabel sat down beside her and winked a pink eyelid at Arlene, as though they were partners in a roguish secret. "How do you like our city's big-bug pictures, Irene? There's one of the biggest right under your eyes—the fascinating Mrs. Gillespie Ives."

"Fascinating?" Irene put the paper down, pushed it from her. "With that nose and hair and——"

"She's got a wonderful figure, though," Mabel said. "Everybody says her——"

"Figure!" Irene uttered a sound of mirth such as might imaginably come from the

Syracusan Venus were the form of some human hag praised in her presence. “Figure! Call that a figure? She’s got just one thing to be thankful for; that she’s young. I bet her husband’s one of these rich old boobs that married a young wife and got twisted around their little finger just on that one account.”

Mabel’s pretty, piggish face showed excitement. “Didn’t you ever see Mr. Gillespie Ives?”

“Her husband?” Irene asked. “They don’t print *his* picture—not that I’ve seen. Guess she doesn’t leave room for him.”

“Yes, they do; his picture gets in sometimes,” Mabel said, speaking hurriedly and as if just rattling on without a thought. “I didn’t mean his picture, though; I thought maybe you’d seen him, himself, some time somewheres. You *might* have seen him, Irene, on the street or somewheres, not knowing it was him. I mean maybe not catching his name or something. He isn’t old; he’s awful dressy and he’s a blond and got a little blond mus _____”

“Yes,” Arlene said sharply. “He’s one of Mabel’s most intimate friends, you see. Where’d you meet him, Mabel?”

Thus openly challenged, Mabel lost courage. Bored with Sunday, she’d hoped to stir up something and even perhaps to make a discovery and confirm a theory; but Arlene’s straight gaze at her intimidated her. “Oh, I might have seen him somewheres. A cat’s got a right to look at a king, like the old saying goes; you needn’t get so jittery.” She thought it best to change the subject, at least for the time being. “Well, if we go down to the Plaza, what you going to wear, Arlene?”

Arlene laughed; a slight tension seemed relaxed. “Same old thing. What you expect?”

“What you, Irene?” Mabel asked.

“This!” Irene laughed, too; but not good-naturedly. “Who you think I am? One of these long-nosed, mop-haired clothes-props?” She jumped up and went to the door. “I’m going out for a walk; meet you downstairs at two o’clock.”

When she was gone, Mabel Finch also moved in departure. “Honest, Arlene, I forgot,” she said. “I wouldn’t give it away; I just had a slip of the tongue. Listen here, though—on the level, just between us neighbors—aren’t you ever going to tell her?”

“Tell her what?”

“Oh, come off! Listen, I just *know* it was her and not any old cousin-by-marriage of yours, Arlene. Listen, she’d have the time of her life if she knew who’s crazy about her. Honest, aren’t you ever going to give the poor girl the chance to know she could have a little fun if she wanted to? Not that she *would*, of course; but just to know it. Honest, aren’t you going to?”

“You put such an idea in her head and I’ll wring your neck, Mabel Finch!”

“What?”

“I won’t have it,” Arlene said. “Ernie Foot’s my husband’s best friend. Don’t you try to get her stirred up. I won’t have it!”

“Gosh!” Mabel cried. “You must think she’d fall for it!” Then, scurrying out hastily, she called giggling, “Don’t get sore; I’m not doing anything. Meet you downstairs two o’clock.”

VIII

“PRACKLY SAME as a confession!” was Lida Rice’s gratified comment that evening when Mabel, seizing the first opportunity, told her all about it. The two were in the Finches’ kitchenette preparing an after-theater supper, cheese, beer and a salad of canned pineapple, while their husbands waited in the living-room. “That’s the way *I* look at it, Mabe, prackly a confession.”

“Yeppy,” Mabel said. “That’s right, Lide. What Arlene let *on* to be saying was, ‘Mabe Finch, don’t you lead my husband’s friend’s wife into mischief’; but what was underneath it, why, she was really the same as saying to me, ‘Listen, Mabe, don’t interfere between me and my boy-friend by telling the prettiest woman in town he’s breaking his neck to find out where she lives.’ Gosh, the front she puts up!”

“Don’t she, though?” Lida cried. “Carrie Stem said only yesterday she hates Arlene’s lack of frankness with her best friends as much as I and you do. But that’s not the worst. Arlene’ll turn right around and tell you where to head in any time!”

“Yes, look at the way she talked to me this morning, bawling me out—prackly threatening me!”

“That’s right, Mabe.”

“Yes, she did!” Viewing the scene between herself and Arlene in this light, Mabel heated its rankling within her, as her expression showed. “Gosh, I’d like to see her face some day if he’d ever happen to find out where Irene lives!”

“So’d I! Wouldn’t that be a scream?”

“The best ever!” Mabel said. “Somebody ought to wise him up. All we’d have to do, we’d just call him up on the ’phone and say, ‘Say, listen, blondie; her name’s Mrs. Ernest Foot and she lives at the Lorenzo, Garfield Avenue and Thirty-fifth. Give her a ring, ‘bo!’ ”

Delighted with this burlesque, the two friends burst into laughter; upon which their husbands came from the room beyond, complaining of a delayed supper and seeking the cause of the laughter. Their wives set the food before them but thought best to keep to themselves the fanciful idea that had incited their mirth. The husbands remained uninformed; but the fanciful idea, though at first conceived as mere jocular vapping, lingered in the mind of one of the two wives. Lida Rice forgot it; but Mrs. Finch thought of it again.

She thought of it, in fact, again and again. At the same time, her own interpretation that Arlene Parker had scolded her and threatened her became the more galling. Mabel inevitably began to be possessed by the feeling that somebody really ought to let Mr.

Gillespie Ives know how to find Irene Foot. This feeling, moreover, being both an inward itch and the reproachful sense of a duty postponed, was sharpened by a coincidence that seemed to show destiny itself taking a hand in the matter.

Her husband, devoted to Brother Foot, had asked Ernie and Irene to dine in the Finches' apartment one evening the next week. In the kitchenette nook, the party of four had eaten a steak and a vegetable hash of the host's, overwhelmingly garlic; then, after ice cream from the drug store, they were joined by the Parkers in the living-room for coffee. Art Finch, modest, apologized to Irene and Ernie for his concoction.

"I didn't get enough garlic in it," he said. "No, you're mighty polite and nice to try and make me feel better about it; but I know I didn't. When I get it just exactly right, why, it's all right; but I know myself I kind of slipped up on it to-night. I can tell when it's right. I can always tell."

Ernest Foot tried again to comfort him. "It was fine, Brother Finch, fine. Irene and I aren't very hearty eaters; but we liked it, didn't we, Irene?"

"Yes, indeed." Irene wore her air of sweetness that had charmed everybody at the time of her Lorenzo debut. She always wore it at the beginning of parties, even small ones. "I ate almost every bite of mine," she said. "I hardly left any."

"No, I know when I fall down." The troubled cook shook his head ruefully and appealed to Mr. and Mrs. Parker. "Look, Roy; look, Arlene. You've eaten it when it was right and you've tried to when it wasn't. You know I do get it right sometimes, don't you?"

"Splendid!" Roy Parker said, and Arlene echoed him. "Splendid!"

"I got it wrong to-night," Mr. Finch insisted. "Sometimes I get it right and sometimes I get it wrong. I know when it's right. It'd 'a' been right to-night with just a touch more garlic. It wasn't right." He spoke mournfully to Irene. "I guess you wouldn't ever think it'd be in the class with that goulash Ben Raphael cooked the night of the big party."

"Ben Raphael?" Ernest Foot took up the name, seizing upon it as a means to divert his host's mind from remorse and also no doubt to add a new theme to the conversation, which seemed in danger of becoming almost monotonous. "Ben Raphael? He's a funny sort of a fellow; I don't make him out—though of course I don't know him and I've only run into him two or three times. By the way, what's he do?"

"Ben Raphael? Sell you anything," Roy Parker informed him. "Sell you a stone fence or a spiral staircase or a window-shade. Sold the copper statue of Justice from the old Courthouse to some kind of museum when they tore it down last year; he had the job. Sort of a super junk dealer. Got a wrecking business."

"House and home both," the sprightly Mabel added; and, lest her joke be missed, laughed and explained it. "House wrecker and home wrecker, see? Ben Raphael's a home wrecker whenever he gets the chance, I bet; huh, Arlene?"

"He's a right good fellow, Ben," Arlene said, undisturbed. "He's deep, too; he's read a lot of books, reads everything. He can tell you something about any subject on earth if you can get him serious and not kidding about how lonely he is because you're married and all that patter. How do you mean you think he's funny, Ernie?"

"I didn't mean funny, exactly," Ernie explained. "I meant kind of queer; but I guess I only thought so because I happened to run into him to-day in the last place on earth I'd

have expected to find him. I mean running across him *there* seemed queer.”

“Running across him where?” Mabel asked.

Ernie looked amused. “Why, the office sent me out a couple of times to an addition some millionaires are building to their house out in that park residence section they call Oldwood. Of course the Old Windsor doesn’t deal retail; but I guess the office is glad to do these people a special favor, so nothing’s too good for ’em. Building an artist’s studio and wanted to get special hinges and door latches and so on. Chromium. Everything’s got to be the modernest modern and just so. I had to go out one morning last week and leave a lot of samples to be looked over; then again on Monday, and they telephoned down this afternoon and asked me to bring back some of the hinges I took away the second time when she said they wouldn’t do.”

“Who?” Irene asked abruptly alert, her social sweetness gone. “Who said they wouldn’t do?”

“The lady that’s having this studio built,” Ernie said. “She’s painting the walls herself. Stuck *me*! She wanted to know what I thought of her pictures, and they looked just wild to me—couldn’t even tell what they were meant for—so she started right in to tell me all about art. Said she’d send me some books; but I expect they’re going to be pretty tough reading.” He laughed comfortably and remembered what he’d intended to say. “Oh, yes, the funny thing about it was that this afternoon when I got there she was drinking coffee in this studio of hers with Ben Raphael. She didn’t have coffee cups or demitasses; she poured the coffee into drinking-glasses that had filigree silver holders, and I hardly knew how to handle the one she gave me; but that way of drinking coffee didn’t faze Ben Raphael a little bit. No, sir, he was just as much at home there as he is here in the Lorenzo. I mean it surprised me, sort of.”

Arlene Parker laughed. “Wouldn’t surprised me. Ben knows just about everybody. He _____”

Irene interrupted her. “What woman are you talking about—that’s sent for you three times and you drink all this silver filigree coffee with? What’s her name?”

“Ives,” Ernie said; and, occupied with the lighting of a cigarette, was not aware of the tensivity with which his wife and his hostess and Arlene Parker all three suddenly stared at his handsome head. The name “Ives” startled another of his listeners, too; though no one saw Roy Parker’s wincing side glance at Arlene or the involuntary slight shiver of his shoulders. Art Finch alone remained as casual as Ernie.

“Ives, Brother Foot?” he asked. “You mean the Mrs. Ives that’s so much in the papers?”

“Yes,” Ernie said. “Seems to me I’ve seen her picture in the papers once or twice. Name’s Mrs. Gillespie Ives.”

Mabel Finch looked from him to Arlene and then at the lovely figure of Irene stiffening to a sharply upright rigidity upon the sofa. “Well, ain’t this the small world, though!” Mabel cried.

IX

NOBODY INQUIRED what Mabel meant or paid any attention to her. Irene Foot asked a question in a tone that would have disquieted any company hopeful of a genial evening.

“When’s your next date with her, Ernie?”

“Date?” He looked at her with a surprise that was but momentary, so quickly did dismay succeed it. “Why, good heavens! that was purely business!” He tried to laugh; but the effort wasn’t useful to him as a palliative of his wife’s fixed and wide-eyed stare at him. “Why, this Mrs. Gillespie Ives only——”

“Only sent for you three times!” Irene said. “That’s all. Only’s had you out there three times so far, drinking out of silver filigree with her and going to make you a present of a whole lot of books! She must be a honey, that woman!”

“Why, she’s all right,” Ernie protested unfortunately. “I thought of course she’d be highbrow and high hat; but she was just as cordial as Arlene here or any other nice pleasant woman would be. Just because she wanted to look at some hinges, I don’t see why you——”

“No?” his wife asked. “When’s she going to get you trotting out there to bring her some more hinges? To-morrow?”

“Oh, see here!” Like many another astonished, defensive husband before him, Ernie Foot floundered, tried to laugh, coughed and looked helpless. “Why, you don’t know her, Irene. I don’t see where you get such an idea of her. She’s——”

“You needn’t tell me what she is! If there’s one woman in the world I never wanted to hear of or see the picture of again, it’s that one!” Irene spread out her arms in a gesture of appeal to the others, and laughed painfully. “And here she’s got my own *husband* dancing to her beck and call and trying to talk highbrow with her like some trained chimpanzee. Then having the gall to sit there and tell me what a peach she is!”

“Irene! I only said——”

Irene’s tone became one of dangerously fragile mockery. “Why, Mr. Ernest Foot, you’re right in society, aren’t you! Right in the Oldwood bunch, aren’t you! You and the Gillespie Iveses! Your *wife* has to sit around the flat, looking at the wallpaper all day; but *that* doesn’t matter. Gosh, if you aren’t the cute little honey of a husband, though!”

Arlene Parker intervened; it was high time for somebody to try to make Irene appear to have been joking. “Yes, we’ll all have to watch Ernie from now on,” Arlene said, stressing an effect of archness. “He’s getting on too fast in this town. We’ll all have to sit on him, now and then—just to keep fascinating swell ladies from doing that!”

“Yes, sir!” Roy said, manfully seconding his wife’s effort and chuckling as genuinely

as he could. “Ernie’s setting a pretty hot pace in this town, for just a boy from the country! Says it with chromium-washed hinges instead of flowers. You better sober down, Ernie, or I’ll tell your wife a few things *I* know about you!”

“So’ll I, Brother Foot,” Art Finch said, tactfully joining the pacific party. “You be careful or I’ll tell about that waitress at the hot dog stand that wanted to know if she hadn’t seen you on the screen. You be careful!”

Irene sat silent, and, though there was a burning in her cheeks, the evening was saved—made to appear, on the surface at least, as if its peace had not really been broken. Conversation was renewed, did not revert to Mrs. Gillespie Ives, and presently Irene was able to take part in it herself without displaying relics of agitation. Mabel Finch, however, remained emotional; that is, she was in a state of inward thrill. To her mind the coincidence just revealed seemed a very pattern of Fate itself—a pattern demanding for its exciting completeness but a single stroke, that Ernest Foot’s wife’s address be made known to Mrs. Gillespie Ives’s husband.

Mabel’s high spirits helped the dinner-party to recover its poise, and, at a little after ten, when the guests departed, Mr. and Mrs. Foot seemed upon amiable terms with each other. So, indeed, Ernest Foot himself believed. Again he descended to the fourth floor, talking cheerfully and not aware that he was the only speaker—and again, after he and his wife had entered their own apartment, he discovered his mistake.

This time, however, he had no more than closed the door when she confronted him.

“Think you got out of it, don’t you?”

“Oh, Lord!” he groaned, after one searching glance at her. “I thought you were all right again. Out of what?”

“Out of answering my question.”

“What question, Irene?”

“When’s your next date with her?”

“I haven’t got any. She isn’t the kind of woman that makes dates and I don’t either,” he said angrily. “Talk about ‘ordinary’! I don’t see that anything’s much more ordinary than talking about ‘dates’—yes, and charging your husband with making ’em.”

“So! That’s what running after the great Mrs. Gillespie Ives does to you, is it? Makes you call your wife ‘ordinary’! I’d like to know how anything could be more ordinary than a woman that gets a married man chasing out to her house every day. Oh, yes, strictly business, lolling around with her, drinking silver filigree coffee a couple hours and——”

“I haven’t been out there two hours altogether! The first time wasn’t over fifteen minutes and——”

“I see,” Irene said. “Fifteen minutes the first time; half an hour the second; an hour and a quarter the next, and——”

“You’re crazy!” Incensed, he fell back upon this mere yelp; for in spite of himself he recognized that his angry wife’s diagnosis of time came near the truth, and, for reasons unknown to him, this made him feel guilty. It seemed unreasonable that he should feel guilty for performing a business duty. He’d found Mrs. Ives surprisingly approachable; had felt an attraction, also some curiosity, and meant to try to read the books she was going to send him. That was all—except that there might be some further insignificant

business relations: the matter of the hinges was settled, but the latches were still in doubt. Probably he'd be called to Oldwood again about the latches and he'd also have to write a note of thanks for the books, but what of that? Nevertheless, Irene had made him feel guilty, and the very groundlessness of this sensation increased his anger.

"You're crazy!" he said, and then, as she laughed goadingly, his brow became stern, or at least strove to become so. "Irene, you have no business to speak like that of a lady you never even——"

"Lady!" Irene uttered a hoot; then was coldly satiric. "Oh, she's a lady, is she? Never catch *her* falling down on the rules of etiquette and good society. No, no; *she'd* never make any breaks—too much of a lady for that!"

"How? How's she fallen down on any 'rules of good society'?"

"What! You claim she hasn't?" Irene's tone became that of a chiding school-mistress. "I sh'd think even you would know any lady if she'd made some married man's acquaintance would at least have manners enough to make his wife's before she went on with it any farther. If she'd called on me in the proper way, as any real lady would, and I'd returned the call, and she wanted to invite us out there together for this afternoon coffee, why, she could expect not to be criticized. That's what a lady'd do if she expected people to think she's a decent woman and not chasing after other women's husbands."

"Irene! Mrs. Gillespie Ives isn't chasing any——"

Irene cut him off fiercely. "Then why'n't she show some decent manners? If she wanted you out there why'n't she ask your wife with you—unless she wanted to get you there alone!"

"Alone? Why, I told you Ben Raphael was sitting there all the——"

"Oh, yes, Ben Raphael; he'd make a lot o' difference! Maybe she didn't know, though—maybe you didn't let her know you're married. Maybe you——"

"I did," he said doggedly. "I did the second time I was out there. She said the color of silver was her favorite color, and I said my wife liked silver, too. I almost dragged it in. I ____"

"Dragged it in?" Irene cried. "So you thought you *had* to, did you? The second time you were out there, was it? Why'd you go out there a third time, then, unless she asked your wife with you?"

"Oh, glory!" he groaned. His athletic shoulders drooped and he sagged down into a chair, as he always did at one time or another during these battles. "I tell you it was business!" Despairing, he groaned again. "On my soul, I don't believe you're jealous of me, myself, Irene. The way it looks, it looks as if you're jealous just because you weren't invited out there. Honestly, it looks as if you were sore, not because she was just kind of cordial to me but on account of *your* not being asked to——"

Irene, stung unbearably by this haphazard but terrible accuracy of his, shouted out a sour laughter. "Me? I wouldn't wipe my shoes on her! If she tried to call on me now I'd tell her to go kiss a goat! Yes, and I can tell you something, too, Ernest Foot!" Furious, she came and stood over him, shaking a red-nailed forefinger at him. "You want to pen me up here in this cheap old flat-building while you go showing off your Claud Barnes waist in your new sack suit where they got the lights and the music! You can't work it; I don't intend to spend my life in any hen-coop, and you better look out, my smart boy!"

Another thing, when's she going to send you all these highbrow books you're so excited about? When'd she say she'd send 'em?"

"I don't know! What's that got to do with anything?"

"Oh, nothing!" All at once Irene was cool again, turned away from him and spoke quietly, with a satirical sweetness. "Nothing at all, except when they come I'm going to burn 'em."

Already beginning to undress, she glanced over her shoulder at him to see how he took this; but, occupied with misery, he seemed not to have heard her.

Neither said anything more that night. They endured the dismal process of living in their one room, kitchenette, hallway and bathroom for the better part of a week before they spoke to each other again.

BETWEEN THE Foots all disputes remained forever unsettled. Their flares of war were succeeded by the silences not of peace but of brooding; then, with embarrassment on his part and moodiness on hers, the two resumed vocal relations again, beginning with strictly utilitarian brevities.

The silence after this present quarrel lasted longer than had any before it; not until the beginning of the fifth day was it broken. Then Ernie, having breakfasted alone in the kitchenette, as usual either in war or peace, paused at the door before he left for business. "That coffee-pot leaks," he said expressionlessly. "I set it in the sink. You better get up pretty soon if you want any."

"I will if I want any," she returned, not glancing toward him and with equal expressionlessness.

He departed without either of them having said anything more, though both realized that when he returned that evening they would be on terms to talk fragmentarily and within another day or two would be as usual. Irene, not pleased with this prospect, or indeed with anything in her present way of living, got out of bed sluggishly, breakfasted, and then, leaving the dishes and the bed as they were, tried on a new dress.

This was neither silvery nor of satin like its predecessor; but, thin velvet, had the color of midnight blue and was sparkingly ornamented with rhinestone clips. "My wife's favorite color is silver, too!" she said, burlesquing a mincing tender voice; then, disgustedly, "Where you get that stuff?"

Before her mirror she smoothed the dress down, urging its fabric more closely and moldingly upon her. Turning this way and that, she studied the glass and did more than study it; she looked at it with rapture and cold rage commingled, an emotion not new within her. Venus short-haired and short-nosed and twentieth century was there superb in the glass; but Irene was like Venuses other than the marble of Syracuse. Were painters' masterpieces given human hearts what Irene felt might have smoldered in the breast of a Venus by Giorgione forgotten in some ignorant dealer's lumber-room when she should have been in the Louvre, glowing upon all the world.

Leaving the mirror, Irene added to the velvet dress a black silk evening cape trimmed with white fur, and her action in doing this was elaborate. First, she made a negligent motion with her left hand, a gesture for the benefit of somebody invisible—an imaginary reverent man-servant in waiting to place the fur-trimmed cape upon her. Then, from the touseled bed where it lay, she took up the cape and wrapped it about her. Her eyelashes haughtily drooped a little, and, with her lovely head held high, she spoke aloud.

"You're discharged!" she said.

Thus her dramatic sketch ended with the dismissal of the imagined other actor in it, who, after respectfully placing the cape upon her shoulders, was arbitrarily thrown out upon a hard world—not for any fault of his but entirely for her pleasure. She would have defined him as a butler, creating him as a composite of butlers seen upon the screen; but in herself she saw no figure in Hollywood, no Beauty celebrated from there.

Irene never had a desire to be a professional actress; she thought of actresses as women who worked hard pretending to be other than themselves. What she wanted was recognition of herself, not of any work she might do. She wanted luxuries, not work, and above all the luxury of having other women look up hopelessly to see her where she belonged, overhead.

That position, overhead, wasn't to be found in the Lorenzo. The bunch had settled down to the Foots, and, like previous harebrains in Corinth City, showed a disposition to make Ernie Foot their central figure and favorite—not that Irene cared what the Lorenzo bunch liked or didn't like! They were only obscurities who pored over the Rotogravure Section on Sunday, getting filtered glimpses there of the unattainable overhead—long-nosed Mrs. Gillespie Ives and her kind, who had precisely what Irene wanted.

. . . That omnipresent figure was once more thrust upon Irene later this same day. Awaiting her turn in Shipo's beautifying shop downtown, she passed the time in reading what parts of an afternoon newspaper interested her. "Mrs. Gillespie Ives has completed her murals at Foxglen Farms," she read. "Mr. Walter F. Mazzich, assistant director of the Fleming School of Art, will give a talk on the murals in Mrs. Ives' new studio on Thursday afternoon at four, after which Tea will be served. Interest in the murals has been widespread and the invitation list is said to be a large one."

"*Fuh!*" Irene blew an audible breath of distaste at the item; but, a moment later as her eye passed down the column, she found something that slightly amused her. "Gillespie Ives and Captain George V. Robbie, U.S.N., retired, will return to-morrow from the Lake Nugatee Club where they have been for the past three weeks shooting."

Irene laughed to herself, disdainfully. "So you do get in sometimes, do you?" she thought. "You do get a mention once or twice in a blue moon, do you, you poor old dub?" Then she remembered, though vaguely, that Mabel Finch had said Gillespie Ives was young, or at least not the elderly dotard Irene had imagined. "Just a plain dub," she said to herself, pushing the paper aside impatiently. "One of these rich outdoor boys that don't care what, just so they get to catch a catfish and shoot a couple of ducks. Nothing but a lottery ticket with the right number on it!" She sighed an old long sigh of hers. "Some women draw 'em!"

On her way home in the Garfield Avenue 'bus she thought of Gillespie Ives again, imagining him seated with a gun across his knees, in a boat upon some distant water—a misty figure with no face and not caring how often that long-nosed woman sent down to the Old Windsor for hinges or how many highbrow books she gave a handsome salesman.

Irene was curious about those books, though not in regard to their contents. No books had arrived at the Lorenzo for Mr. Ernest Foot. They might have been sent to him at the Old Windsor Wholesale; but it seemed more likely that they hadn't and that Mrs. Gillespie Ives was one of those scatter-minded women who say they're going to send you something and then forget all about it—even if they maybe have a crush on you! Irene got out of the 'bus wondering unamiably about the books, and twenty hurrying steps through

the coal-smoked early twilight in the beginnings of a drizzle brought her almost into collision with Mr. Ben Raphael in the Lorenzo vestibule.

His delight was spontaneous. He flourished off his black-banded grey hat, bowed a curly black head, beamed upon her from shining, large black eyes and took her ecstatically by the arm. "My lucky day! I haven't seen you so long I wondered if I only dreamed you live here. What a treat!"

"Is it?" Irene let him keep his hand upon her arm until they had passed the glass doors and were in the corridor; then she moved a little aside from him but continued to walk along with him toward the elevator. "Listen!" she said, delaying. "I got something I want to ask you."

"Splendid!" His enthusiasm was immediate. "I hope you'll take a long time to ask it. I have an idea. Come to my apartment and I'll give you a glass of a nice white wine while you put your question."

She hesitated. "Your apartment?"

"Terrible!" Laughing, he took her arm again. "Don't we both belong to the great Lorenzo bunch? All the bunch live in each other's apartments and they certainly all come to mine whenever they feel like it. Terrible!"

"Okay," she said, and in the elevator an evidence of their comradeship met with the approval of the operator.

"This here's nice, Miz Foot." Emma glanced benevolently at Mrs. Foot's left arm where it was still enfolded by the right hand of Mr. Raphael. "You with a good man now, Miz Foot."

"She means Christmas is coming," the good man explained, as he and Irene stepped out at the fifth floor and crossed the corridor. "To be good and go to heaven it's necessary to make Emma the right present." He unlocked his shiny brown door; they went in and he lighted the lamp on the center table. From his kitchenette he brought a slender tall bottle and two glasses, filled the glasses, gave Irene one of them and a cigarette and a light. Then host and guest sat in the two upholstered chairs that were like the other pairs of upholstered chairs in all the other apartments of the Lorenzo.

Something that wasn't like anything else in the Lorenzo, however, caught Irene's attention. Against the wall before her was a book-case and above hung an inexplicable painting. From it there seemed to come glowings of strange colors out of a tangled darkness; blurred figures, raggedly shaped, appeared to be merging themselves into a dim unnatural foliage that surrounded them. Irene drank half the wine in her glass, found it pleasant, pointed at the picture and laughed.

"What on earth you got there?"

Ben Raphael smiled with a caressive indulgence. "It's a painting by a poor fellow named Adolphe Monticelli who died a long while ago. You don't like it?"

"Like it?" Irene finished her wine, felt comfortable and laughed again at the picture. "My, but it's punk!"

"Yes," he said, and refilled both glasses. "So it is, compared to the picture sitting before it. What does anyone want with paintings or sculptures when such a marvelous thing is in the room!"

“Who you calling a ‘thing’? Me?”

“I’ll call you whatever you’ll let me. I mean what’s any work of art beside such a marvel of life, such a living sculpture and color as you are!” Still smiling, he was nevertheless genuinely ardent as he leaned toward her from his chair, speaking eagerly. “I never saw anything like you! Irene, when I think what I will be feeling in a few minutes when you’ll be getting up from that chair and going out of this room, leaving me lonely in it—so lonely in this lonely bachelor life I lead and——”

“Oh, yes, I know all about that,” Irene interrupted with a languid sprightliness. His remarks about her were to her taste; but she didn’t care to listen to him about himself; nor was she interested in having Ben Raphael make love to her. “Oh, yes, Arlene says the next thing you always do, you say you’re lonely because the girl you’re talking to’s married. That comes next, doesn’t it?”

“Yes; but what a difference! This time it’s true.”

“Sure! Only it isn’t going to come next this afternoon. Looks like you’ve forgot I said I was going to ask you a question.”

“Ask it. Ask me anything in this world! Ask me——”

“Don’t be scared; this won’t hurt you,” Irene said. “How’d you ever come to get so thick with this what’s-her-name woman, Mrs. Gillespie Ives?”

“Me? That’s simple,” he answered gayly. “She’s a person like me. She doesn’t care who she knows.” Then he sighed. “I wish I could believe that was the question you had in mind—one about me.”

“Well, it really was. I just wondered. Ernie said he saw you out there and I just wondered.”

At this mention of her husband Ben Raphael’s brilliant eyes, fixed upon her devotedly, became merely scrutinizing for a moment; then, smiling again, he said, “Mrs. Ives is so important she does anything that comes into her head to amuse herself, though she doesn’t think it’s to amuse herself; she thinks she’s very intense. She doesn’t care what anybody thinks of her and she doesn’t need to. She only thinks of what she wants to do. It’s true she likes to have people talking about her, one way or the other—she’d die without that.”

“‘Talking about her’?” Irene exclaimed. “Looking at her! I sh’d think she’d get sick and tired of seeing that face in the papers!”

“No,” he said, amused and pleased by this outburst. “You see, it’s *her* face. I wish,” he added wistfully, “I wish it were yours. I’d cut them all out and have a Golden Book made and——”

“Listen,” Irene said. “How much you been out there lately?”

“Me? She seems to think my opinion of the murals she’s been painting useful to her—oh, several times.” He looked into his wine glass gloomily. “I wish I could think why you take all this interest so suddenly in me. It makes me happy, I am flattered; but what do you care how often I go to see Mrs. Ives? I wonder——” Then apparently he had a revelation. “Oh, I see!” he said, and shook his head, reproving her. “No, no! You want to find out from me how often she has your attractive husband out there. Gentlemen don’t tell these things on each other. I understand now. You want to find out if he’s been there to-day because he got in trouble with you for being there yesterday.”

“Yesterday?” Irene cried. “*Yesterday!*”

“**A**H, BUT you shan’t find out from me if he was there to-day,” Raphael said archly. “For one reason because I haven’t seen her myself to-day.” Then he spoke solicitously. “Don’t worry about that attractive husband of yours; you needn’t. She takes whims—this year it’s a studio; next it may be a laboratory. She loves to have new people about her—somebody different. She takes quick fancies to——”

“Oh, she does, does she! Right off the bat, huh?”

“Ernie’s a dear fellow,” Ben Raphael said. “So honest, so good-looking, so simple; he’d hardly realize such a thing when it happens to him. Think of the armor he wears—the armor of being the luckiest fellow in the whole world, your husband! What do you care how many foolish books on art she explains to him?” Raphael laughed. “I hope you haven’t bothered that lovely head trying to read them, too?”

Irene put her glass on the table and sat rigid. “I haven’t seen any.”

He seemed to be shocked, playfully. “Oh, oh! Then she must send them to him at the Old Windsor Wholesale and he keeps them there—studying them while he works. Bad! Bad! I am surprised!” He changed his tone. “But of course you don’t take it seriously.”

“Don’t I?” she said, rising. “Never you mind how I take it.”

“You’re going?” He rose, too, and uttered expressions of dolor. “Ah, she’s going! What a loneliness!” Then, as if brightened by a sudden idea, he said “Wait”, went to a closet, opened a rosewood box on a shelf, took from it a small packet and brought it to her. “You’ll accept this as a souvenir of some happy moments you’ve given the poor lonely bachelor?”

“What is it?”

“Nothing. Just a hope that you won’t let this be the last time—that you’ll come again.”

She opened the packet and found a cigarette-case of tortoise shell rimmed with gold and further ornamented by initials made of tiny diamonds. These initials, an I. and an F., surprised her. “Why, what in the world——”

“You see it was waiting for you,” he explained. “You’ll keep it?”

“Well, I——” She hesitated, looking down at the pretty cigarette-case in her pretty hand; she was pleased with it, desired it. “I don’t see how I could——”

“You don’t need to tell,” he said genially. “It’s nothing. You can say you got it at the Five-and-Ten and everybody’d think so. They don’t know the difference. It’s just our little secret.”

“Well, it’s awful pretty. I guess so.” She gave him a smile that enraptured him. “All right. Thanks.”

“Bravo! Just let me be your private Santa Claus sometimes, and look in on me again like this when you can spare a half hour. I’m always here at this time.” She went toward the door, and, following, he protested sadly. “You can’t stay ten minutes more?”

“I better be going.” She paused. “That how you got in with your wonderful Mrs. Gillespie Ives—handing out presents?”

“No. Mrs. Ives already has everything.” He put his hand upon Irene’s arm and chided her indulgently. “Mrs. Ives seems to haunt you; but you’re wrong. You see you have a proof that even if she *has* taken a little fancy to your attractive husband it isn’t a serious one. Certainly not yet.”

“What proof are you talking about?”

“The surest one,” he laughed. “A lady with a serious fancy for a married man always wants to look at his wife. If Mrs. Ives ever shows she wants to look at you, *then* you must beware!”

“I would,” Irene said shortly. “I’d beware all right!” She opened the door. “G’by.”

“Let me come with you as far as the elevator—ah, just that little distance.” Then, with his hand still upon her arm, he seemed to find it necessary to guide her carefully and affectionately across the corridor.

Irene said casually, “I see her husband’s been away but coming home to-morrow. Kind of a softie, isn’t he?”

“Gillie Ives?” Ben Raphael laughed. “The stupidest man on earth!”

“I bet!” she said, as she stepped into the elevator. “His wife proves that!”

. . . In her own apartment Irene set the cigarette-case conspicuously upon the center table, and when Ernie came in, half an hour later, he saw it immediately. He went to it, picked it up inquiringly, though without looking at Irene. She smiled faintly and said, “A dollar eighty-five at Marcy and Burton’s. Sixty-five cents extra for the rhinestone initials—two dollars and a half altogether. Spending too much?”

“No, it’s very pretty and I’m glad you got it.”

“Thanks. Your conscience must be troubling you.” She put the cigarette-case into a drawer; then asked, as if absent-mindedly, “How is the hinge and latch business getting on out at Oldwood to-day?”

“I don’t know.”

“Too bad,” Irene said. “Now we’re speaking again, I just thought I’d ask you. Don’t get excited; I don’t care what you do.”

“I don’t think you do,” he said. “I’ve often thought you don’t care what I do, Irene.”

“So?” She looked at him coolly, turned away, began to hum a tune, and, with that, the brief truce of speech between them seemed to be over. Both were silent again, except for a necessary word or two as together they prepared their evening meal in the kitchenette. After that they said nothing more to each other until the next day, and then when they spoke it was briefly and of inconsequent matters.

All this was different from their former habit of somehow patching up their quarrels without settling them; for now there was no kind of patching at all. The patchless condition still prevailed on the third afternoon after Irene’s visit to Ben Raphael’s apartment, and she didn’t care how long it lasted. “Think I get any pleasure out of talking

to *him*?” she inquired of a sympathizer within herself, as she stood at a window and looked down on the thin mid-afternoon traffic of Garfield Avenue.

That was a dull sight, and for something to do—anything—she decided to walk to the drug store in the next block and buy a new lipstick. Half way upon this errand, sauntering along the sidewalk to consume as much time as possible, she became aware of an automobile that moved slowly beside the curb and seemed to be keeping pace with her. She turned her head to look at it, saw that it was a handsome machine for two occupants only and contained but one, a blond stoutish young man whose fashionable appearance was somewhat familiar to her. Immediately when she glanced his way he stopped the car, jumped out and came toward her, lifting his hat. Then she recognized him.

“Oh, Mrs. Foot,” he said, and extended his hand. “May I—ah, just a moment—if you’re not in a hurry——”

She shook hands with him warmly. “How’d you know my name? I certainly don’t know yours; but I guess we can say we’ve met all right, though Arlene Parker took mighty good care not to introduce us to each other that day downtown when you came up to us! Anyhow we’ve shaken hands before.”

“But you do know my name!” he exclaimed, surprised. “I can’t tell you how delighted I was to find you’ve been interested enough to inquire.”

Irene smiled brightly upon him. “No, I did inquire; but Arlene said she hadn’t seen you in so long she’d forgotten it. I don’t know it yet.”

He took from his coat’s inner pocket an envelope, opened it, brought forth a folded sheet of paper. “Then it wasn’t you who sent me this?”

He gave her the paper and she read, typewritten, “Mrs. Ernest Foot, Lorenzo Apartments, Cor. Garfield Avenue and Thirty-fifth Street. Mrs. Roy Parker don’t care about going with Mrs. Foot to the Garfield Avenue Theater but anyhow Irene Foot lives at the Lorenzo.”

“You mean you didn’t send it?” he said. “That would be disappointing.”

“Well, of all!” Irene cried, tore up the paper and sprinkled the bits on the pavement. “Somebody’s certainly taking liberties! Some of those women; but I guess I’d never find out.” She laughed excitedly. “Guess they wanted to put something over on your friend Arlene. She is an old friend of yours, isn’t she? A pretty good one, too, I guess!”

“I hope so, though as she told you I haven’t seen anything of her for years. That was quite true.”

“Honest? Is that straight?”

“Why, of course. By the way, I *did* haunt the Garfield Avenue Theater—looking for you—just as I spent most of yesterday afternoon and half of this driving up and down in front of the Lorenzo. You see what an impression you made on me?”

Irene continued to smile upon him. “Why didn’t you come in and call or give me a ring? Afraid it wouldn’t do?”

“Well, a little,” he admitted. “I thought just possibly I could get a glimpse of you on the street, and now you see I *am* getting one! I hope you’ll let it last as long as you possibly can. I even hope something more than that. There’s a lovely little tea house a few miles out on the Midland Road, altogether respectable.” He glanced toward the handsome

car. "I thought perhaps you'd be willing——"

"Listen!" Irene cried gayly. "You're pretty quick, aren't you? I don't pretend I'm not glad to see you again, though if you want to know the truth I'd just about forgotten you."

"And for weeks and weeks I've thought about *you* every few minutes, Mrs. Foot! That's true, don't laugh! I've just got home; I've been away for a month shooting, and I give you my word I thought about you most of the time."

"Yes, you did!"

"On my word," he insisted earnestly. "You hit me pretty hard, Mrs. Foot—yes, at first sight. You must have seen that for yourself. I never saw anybody like you before. I——"

"Where were you shooting?" Irene asked curiously, upon a random thought. "Where were you?"

"Lake Nugatee," he said. "All the time I was there I kept thinking about——"

"Listen!" she exclaimed. "I don't go riding with people I don't know the names of." She saw that he still held carelessly in hand the envelope that had contained the anonymous information, and, laughing, she snatched it from him, read the name and address upon it.

Her laughter ceased as she read. Then she stared at him and there came upon her the solemnity of one who feels that life is doing something intricately wonderful.

"Don't say you aren't coming with me," he begged. "After all this thinking of you and the waiting and hoping I've done, *please* don't tell me you won't——"

"No, I'll come." She was suddenly as radiant as she had been grave. "You're sure you want me to, Mr. Ives?"

XII

IN HIGH quarters, the middle and the low the same agitations prevail within most of the ladies of a group when the trouble one of their number has with her husband becomes noticeable. Mabel Finch hadn't allowed Carrie Stem and Lida Rice to go uninformed upon Irene's outbreak of feeling at the Finches' small dinner-party. Mabel had told both of them about it that same night, in fact, before she slept. Thereupon the trouble between Mr. and Mrs. Foot had become the Lorenzo's chief private topic, and, fed by subsequent evidence of more such trouble, this popular subject grew every day more exciting, every day less private.

At all times Mabel Finch was Irene's eager defender. "I won't stand for anybody's blaming Irene!" she said staunchly in the Stems' living-room to Lida and Carrie. "That night when they had dinner with us and Ernie told about Mrs. Gillespie Ives first sending for him, why, right away it showed a weakness in his character to me. I thought from the start he had a weak face and I said so the first time I ever——"

"No, you didn't," Carrie Stem interrupted. "You said he looked like Claud Barnes. I don't think Ernie Foot's weak at all. I always say if a man can't find anything he expects in his own home he has a right to go where he likes. Emma told me herself they're just as good as separated right now."

"Did she?" both Mrs. Finch and Mrs. Rice asked. "What'd she say?"

"Said they came in from eating at Schwartz's last night and he was wet through because he wouldn't even walk under her umbrella. Says they haven't spoken to each other for weeks and——"

"Everybody knows that," Mrs. Rice interposed. "Say listen. Charlie's got a friend in Corinth City who told him the Foots were considered the handsomest couple ever lived there, and of course even here in the big burg anybody that saw either of 'em would sit up and take notice; but that's no excuse—not for her, anyway. Mabe, was Art absolutely sure?"

"Absolutely. It just made Art sick on account of he's a fraternity brother of Ernie's. Art knows Gillespie Ives by sight, and you don't s'pose anybody could be mistaken about Irene Foot, do you? Art just happened to be collecting rents in that part o' town and——"

"Sh!" Mrs. Stem said. The doorbell was heard; Arlene Parker came in and gave them an estimating glance.

"Well, girls?" she said. "At it again to-day?"

The three, naturally piqued by this greeting, felt that they had a little triumph in store for themselves as well as some additional excitement; they would see how Arlene "took"

some news they hadn't found opportunity to test her with until now. "Maybe you wouldn't be so high hat, Arlene," Lida said, "if you knew a few things we know."

"Wouldn't I? What 'few things'?"

"Merely this," Mabel informed her, keeping bright eyes upon her. "Don't think I blame Irene Foot for it—not for a minute, the way her husband's behaving! You can say all you want for him, that he's just a small-town fellow that's got his head turned first by his boss taking such a fancy to him and promoting him, and then turned a lot worse by a big society woman making a toy of him; but if I had a husband acted that way I'd——"

"That all?" Arlene said. "I thought you said you knew something that I don't."

"I guess we do! Art just happened to be collecting rents down on the South Side yesterday, and he saw Gillespie Ives sitting in a convertible and wondered what he was doing down in that part o' town. Then Art went into a house to make some people pay up, and when he came out he saw Irene Foot get out of a 'bus at the corner and walk along quick till she came to the convertible. Then she jumped in and they drove off like a streak!"

"What!"

"Oh, yes! What you got to say about it, Arlene?"

Arlene was startled. She looked at her three friends, beheld six eager eyes fixed upon her hopefully and gave herself at least the pleasure of disappointing them. She laughed cheerfully. "Probably Art's near-sighted. Probably just somebody that looked like Irene." She turned quickly back to the door. "G'by. I just came in to see if Carrie wanted to go somewhere with me; but I see she's busy—no place important. G'by."

She left them staring at the vacant doorway, strode immediately to the elevator, descended to the fourth floor, rang the bell of the Foots' apartment, went in and found Irene not quite dressed. "You going out, Irene?"

"Pretty soon. What's the matter? Gosh, you look serious, Arlene!"

"I am. I've got to talk to you."

"Oh, you do?" Serious, too, Irene pulled a new green cloth skirt over her head, fastened it round the waist of her ivory-colored silk blouse, sat down before her mirror, and, gilded in the afternoon sunshine that sprayed upon her through the adjacent window, began to adjust a black hat upon her head. "What's up?"

"How'd you meet Gillespie Ives?"

"Who? Mr. Ives?" Irene with great coolness satisfied herself that the hat's effect was excellent, turned in her chair and looked inscrutably at the caller. "You couldn't possibly mean you object to his knowing other girls beside you, could you?"

Arlene winced visibly; her eyes closed for a moment while she recovered herself. Then she said quietly, "I knew I took a chance your thinking that—because I tried to keep him from meeting you downtown that day and got out of telling you his name. I'll tell you now why I did it. I did it because Roy Parker is a friend of your husband's and because I saw you're really a small-town girl and don't know much, and because——"

"Oh, I am, am I? Just a simple country girl, huh?"

"Don't get mad, Irene."

"Mad? I'm laughing! Go on, Arlene. Because what else? What was your other reason

for trying to keep Mr. Ives from getting acquainted with me when he wanted to?"

"It was because he's no good."

"Oh, isn't he? You know him so well, yourself?"

"I did once," Arlene said. "I used to know him and some others like him. If you want to know the truth—I guess I better tell you whether you want to know it or not—I had a pretty gay time around this town, up to when I got to knowing Roy."

"Oh, you stopped then?"

"Yes, I did," Arlene said in a low voice, a little tremulously. "Roy Parker's a square fellow and I was square with him. He knew all about it; but he thought enough of me to ask me to marry him anyway, and from the day I said I would I've never done anything that ought to worry him. The trouble was, I had to keep on being cashier at the Griswold Restaurant—Roy and I couldn't get along without the money—and it nearly killed him. My being there kept him remembering things he wanted to put out of his mind, and he knew the sporty crowd I'd gone with still hung around there. It used to make him sick—I mean sick—and after we could afford it and I quit, he said, 'Don't ever tell me anything that brings it up. I can stand it if you never say anything about it; but if you ever do, I can't!' Do you understand what I'm trying to tell you, Irene?"

"I don't know. What's it got to do with anything?"

Arlene sat down; looked at Irene gently and with a sad meekness. "I'll try to show you. That crowd around the Griswold, I had a good deal of trouble trying to make them understand I wasn't being the crazy in-for-anything, up-to-anything kind of girl I'd used to be outside of business hours. There's always lots of girls like that around any big town—girls with jobs that like to have their fun, too—and I guess they always have the same trouble with the old crowd if they quit and get married. Even yet sometimes when I run across one of those sports, I haf to tell him I don't go on parties—I try to do it just kidding, if I can. Some of 'em are right nice fellows and I was good friends with 'em once." Arlene faltered, found difficulty in continuing, but persisted. "I expect—I—well, when it happens I run across any of 'em like that, I don't speak about it to Roy."

"No, I bet not!"

"I would," Arlene said gently, "except I know he doesn't want me to. I expect—I guess I'm what the moving pictures used to call 'a woman with a past'. Maybe I——" She faltered again; then laughed apologetically. "It might help me to advise you now, Irene—if you'd let me; but being 'a woman with a past' is always kind of hard on the husband."

"Yes, I sh'd think likely!"

Arlene remained meek, continued her tone of apology. "It's funny, Irene; but it's always seemed to me I owed Roy a good deal—had a terrible lot to make up to him for. So when he took this great fancy to Ernie Foot and asked me to look after Ernie Foot's wife a little, I thought I'd do just anything—anything on earth—to do what Roy asked me. I—I expect I'm what they call kind of a fanatic about doing anything he asks me, no matter what. He doesn't often ask. Now it's as if maybe being some use to you would be making up a little of what I owe my husband. That's why I'm bargaining in like this."

"So?" the cool Irene said. "You mean you're trying to make up something you owe your husband by telling me that Mr. Ives is no good?"

"He isn't!" Arlene said urgently. "He knows how to make love to a good-looking

woman; but he doesn't care for anybody or anything except himself, and he never will. You're a good deal younger than I am—six or seven years, I expect—and you think a man like that's good-looking and got lots of style and money and's 'way up in the world—I tell you it *scared* me that day when I saw he'd got his eye on you! I knew he'd keep after you, once he'd seen you—you're just about the prettiest woman he or anybody else ever saw and—well, I knew right away, Irene, you weren't getting on any too well with your husband. I could tell.”

“Smart girl!” Irene said. “Any more to say about Mr. Ives?”

“Yes. He hunted me up to ask about you, and I hoped maybe I'd thrown him off the track by telling him you were from out o' town. He didn't believe me, and he hasn't got anything else to do with his time, so I might have known he'd manage it finally.”

Now anything but displeased, Irene laughed. “Oh, you think he *has* managed it finally, do you?”

“Yes; I know he has.”

Irene's look of inscrutability returned. “No, you don't. Who's been talking about——”

“The whole bunch, Irene; they're pretty busy over it. Art Finch saw you get out of a 'bus down on the South Side somewhere and get into a car. Gillespie Ives was there waiting for you in and——”

“What!” Irene jumped up, furious. “What do I care what this ordinary bunch of gabblers saw or what dirt they spill about or what they think? They mean a lot in *my* life! Tell 'em to go to the devil!”

“No; don't say that.” Arlene rose, too, extending her hand in a placative gesture. “They're just like anybody else. There'd be the same kind of talk in any crowd where they'd found out——”

“Talk? Let 'em talk till they bust! Think I'm going to spend the rest of my life in the Lorenzo with this bunch of cheap imitations? For all I care what they say, I'd keep a date with Gillespie Ives right at the front door—yes, and before long that's exactly what I *will* do, too! I'll——”

“No, no!” Arlene cried out, though she instantly lowered her voice. “I'm not talking about them, Irene. I just meant to show you the danger you're——”

“Danger? Where do you get that stuff?”

“Danger you'll lose a good husband,” Arlene said sturdily. “You've got one and you'd better keep him.”

Irene came closer to her. “Good, is he? Listen, teacher! We were over six months in this burg before he bought me one single thing. He bought himself a new sack suit and a new tuck suit and dress shoes and silk socks and fancy shirts and he let me come to your party in that old silver satin that ought to been thrown down the incinerator! I wouldn't have a decent thing right now if I hadn't fought him for it. I——”

“I know. I know. But you always look lovely and some husbands don't realize how much a woman——”

“Try living with one like that yourself!” Irene said fiercely. “Next thing you'll be telling me everybody likes him. Sure they do—everybody but me! Look at him, trotting out to that woman's house all dressed up in a new necktie! Oh, yes, a silver-colored silk

one—that's her favorite color—and I found it in his drawer and spilled a little ink on it, just by accident. Lucky, because the next time he was going to wear it, that let me out of speaking to him one more week. Tell some of your sweet Lorenzo bunch to slip it to *him* Art Finch saw me keeping a date! Not speaking, how's he even going to ask me about it? If that bird tries to start anything with me I've got a few questions myself I could ask!"

"Irene! Irene!"

"So you're all on his side, are you?" Irene said. "You'll find the laugh's on you for that before long, I bet! He thinks he's right in society; he won't have any use for you and your Roy and the bunch much longer, you'll see! How'd you like to have a husband running all around Goldwood with some long-nosed queen and thinking you weren't good enough for anything except to sit in the flat listening to the steam radiator? Ben Raphael told me yesterday she'd had Ernie out with her looking at pictures in some highbrow friend of her's home."

"Ben ought to know better'n to tell you that, Irene. I guess he does, too; but that doesn't matter. What scares me is your not seeing it makes the danger more for you, because if a woman like that's showing interest in Ernie and what he gets at home is just being liable to hear gossip and scandal about his wife——"

"Scandal?" Irene cried. "Warning me, are you? How about the party better look out on that score being just exactly Mr. Ernest Foot, the new Goldwood pet! Go and warn *him* if you want to, because he might need it. I don't."

"You do!"

"Think so?" Irene looked at her agitated visitor pityingly. "Just the simple country girl, huh? Can't handle herself at all, doesn't know how to say no, just lets the big city wolves eat her right up, poor simple thing!" She laughed satirically, a long laugh; for, before it ended, she'd gone to a closet, taken out of it a new tweed coat and put it on. "Little Red Riding-hood don't know how to take care of herself at all—oh, no, she don't!"

"No! All the more you don't because you think you do."

"So?" Triumphant and mocking, Irene went to the dressing-table, sat again, opened a drawer and took from it a small box covered with white velvet. From this she drew forth a platinum clip wrought in a design of foliage and set with tiny diamonds and emeralds. Deliberately she fastened the clip into her blouse at the throat. "Like it?" she asked. "Marcy and Burton's, marked down to three sixty-five."

Arlene disregarded this pleasantry. "See here! If you've let him give you——"

"Oh, no." Irene rose, smiling. "I just wanted to see if you'd think so. No *little* presents from him, thank you! Not *yet*, hon! That's from another friend of mine, a little fellow that gets kick enough out of thinking I like 'em." From the drawer Irene took white gloves and a black leather gold-mounted purse, closed the drawer. "Well—if you've finished your call, it's about time I was on my way."

"Irene, don't——"

"Don't read me any more out of your don't book." Irene spoke good-naturedly. "You're a good fellow, Arlene. You did a big thing telling me all that, more than most women'd do for anybody. I like you. I been thinking you were just being dog in the manger; but I had you wrong, didn't I?"

"Yes—you did."

“Sorry. Shake, will you?” The two stood looking at each other close by the door—the tall Arlene drooping sorrowfully; but Irene superb, self-confident and beautiful indeed in this new kindness of hers. Arlene took the extended pretty hand pleadingly.

“Irene! Irene! I knew you could be sweet if you wanted to—let’s straighten things out; let’s——”

“You bet—my own way!” Irene laughed, opened the door and gave her friend a pat on the back as they passed out to the corridor together. “Don’t you worry! Little Red Riding-hood knows just prezackly what she’s doing, hon.” She ran toward the elevator shaft, but called back over her shoulder. “Got to hop; here’s Emma coming down. We’re pals from now on, though, aren’t we? G’by!”

XIII

YOUNG OLA objected warmly after dinner to the suggestion that she retire to her own room. "It's too small in there to practise these new steps I got," she said. "I don't ask for the radio; I can dance without it, and you and Pops talking don't interfere with me at all while I'm practising, Mom."

"No, Ola. Your father only has a few minutes because he has to go downtown again this evening and I don't get a chance to——"

"Why?" Ola asked, merely as a postponement. "Why'n't you stick around more, Pops? You might miss something. Where is it you go all these evenings?"

"I guess you'll be disappointed, Ola," Parker said quizzically. "I'm not a secret gangster going to the hang-out. I'm just getting up the year's records down at the Knights' Hall because I have to go to Toledo and read it at the national officers' meeting there next week. Better run along, like your mother tells you."

Ola tried another plea. "It's unjust. If I go in there and you talk low, I can't hear a thing you say. It's unjust because you think I'm only a child; but I'd like to know what there is I don't know and oughtn't to be talked about in front of me! What you s'pose I don't hear at the Garfield Avenue? They call it a neighborhood family theater; but *oh*, my! You can hear things there you wouldn't even find in the 'Lives of the Dancers' I been reading these last couple weeks—and is that a book? Boy! Listen, Mom, it isn't going to hurt you any if I practise my steps in here while you and Pops are talking."

"No. There's something I want to speak to your father about in private."

"Well, isn't that just exactly why I want to hear it?" Ola asked plaintively. "I bet it's about the trouble these Foots are having."

Arlene took Ola by the shoulder. "Go in there, Ola."

"Gosh!" Ola said; but obeyed, and, when her door had closed, her father, disturbed, looked inquiringly at Arlene.

Parker wasn't aware of the Lorenzo's recent agitations. During the last fortnight his duties as an earnest officer in a benevolent order had occupied all of his spare time and had taken him downtown in the evenings and kept him there until late.

"What's the child mean?" he asked. "What trouble? That night the Finches had 'em to dinner I noticed Irene took Ernie up pretty sharply about—about——" Parker hesitated. "Well, about some lady's having him sent out to see her at Oldwood. I didn't think much of it, though. Do you think maybe Irene picks on him quite a little?"

"It don't look as if they're getting along any too well," his wife said. "Do you notice anything different in Ernie these days?"

“Different? Haven’t seen him out of business any lately, or anybody else, on account of all this work on the Knights’ books for the Toledo meeting. I’ve been working on ’em a good deal lunch hours, too; and besides I’m not over in Ernie’s department very often.”

“You haven’t noticed any difference at all in him, then?”

“Don’t know as I have.” Parker seemed to search his memory. “Well—the other day something kind of puzzled me for a minute.”

“What was it?”

“I might be wrong,” Parker said. “I thought there was a little change, sort of, in the way he was talking—as if he was trying to be elegant or something. Sort of blurred over his R’s and didn’t sound just natural. One thing—I said something, I’ve forgotten what, and he answered in a way that sounded just the least bit airy, you might call it. He said, ‘Not at all, my dear Parker.’ You know—not just saying ‘All right, Roy’ or ‘Okay, Roy’, the way he used to. I don’t mean he was high-hatting me; nothing like that. Just sounded a little bit dressy—the way he’s been getting about his clothes. Well—I just wondered a little.”

“Wondered what, Roy?”

“Oh, practically nothing. What I mean, Ernie’s such a *hit* everywhere—just so natural-born magnetic and attractive—and down at the Old Windsor Wholesale the Head Pushers took such a liking to him right from the start, and he’s got on so fast and all—well, he’s pretty young yet, Ernie, not in his thirties, and it’d be the wonder of the world if he didn’t get spoiled a *little*—maybe even just the least bit swell-headed and kind of condescending.”

“Roy, are you still just as fond of him as you were?”

Parker laughed. “Men don’t talk about being ‘fond’ of each other, Arlene. Ernie’s the best friend I’ve got, and that’s something that wouldn’t change just because he got a little touch of high. Truth is, I think more of him than I do of anybody else except you and Ola. If they’re having trouble, I bet it isn’t *his* fault.”

“Roy, who knows what goes on between any husband and wife when they’re alone? Who knows just how they are with each other? Ernie might have been a little bit selfish sometimes with Irene.”

“More likely she with him, Arlene. How’s he——”

“Well, about clothes, for instance. She’s got some new things now—but he got his first, you see. Maybe he might have thought more about how much she wanted ’em and less about putting up a good front in the city. I like her better than I thought maybe I was going to, Roy. Of course I was always going to be her friend anyhow—after what you said—but I do like her. She can be right sweet if you kind of get *to* her a little.” Arlene spoke timidly. “I don’t suppose you could kind of hint to Ernie to be——”

“Lord, no!” Parker said. “Men can’t do anything like that, Arlene.” He put his hand on her shoulder. “I got to go, old lady. I can’t do anything about this—a man just can’t. *You* can, though. You’re a mighty smart big-hearted girl, and I don’t believe there’s anything you couldn’t fix up all right. I’d hate to see Ernie and his wife have any real trouble, and I don’t believe they will if you’ll lend a hand.”

Grateful color mounted in Arlene’s cheeks, as it always did when he praised her and looked at her affectionately with kind eyes that admired her and believed in her. “I’ll do

all a human being can," she told him, and her moved low voice was that of one devotedly making a promise.

At that, pulling on his overcoat, he laughed, said he hoped the Foots' troubles were less serious than she looked, kissed her, gave her a pat on the shoulder and departed. Arlene remained near the doorway, thinking indecisively; then abruptly she went to the telephone, called Ben Raphael in his apartment, asked if he was alone and told him she'd be down immediately to see him.

Young Ola came in from her room. "Where you going, Mom?"

"Never mind. I'll be back in a few minutes."

"Listen," Ola said, and her customary expression of containing enigmas was strongly emphasized. "If Pops comes back for his umbrella or for some important papers he pretends he's forgotten, I'll tell him you've gone to the delicatessen for bread to make toast for breakfast because there isn't any, and I'll sneak in the kitchenette and throw that loaf out the window before he looks to see; but you better go buy another and have it with you when you come back, so you could show it to him and prove you——"

"What on earth are you talking about, Ola?"

"You always speak louder at the telephone," Ola explained. "If you go to Ben Raphael's apartment all alone at night when there's nobody else there—I heard you ask him that—and then if Pops comes back——"

"Ola!" Relaxed, Arlene laughed and kissed her. "Think he or anybody else minds Ben Raphael? You've got to quit going to the talkies so much and reading 'Lives of the Dancers'. I'm not a dancer or——"

"Yes, you are, Mom. You're a wannaful dancer; I've seen you. If you'd begun at my age and given your very life to it——"

"Yes? Where'd *you* have been?" Arlene cried gayly, kissed her again and went forth laughing. Nevertheless, by the time she'd reached Ben Raphael's apartment her face was so grave that he showed a smiling alarm.

"You look as if you'd come to tell me the police are after me," he said.

"They ought to be," she told him. "What's your idea stirring up Irene Foot—telling her about another woman's taking Ernie around looking at pictures and everything? You're supposed to be a harmless little fellow, aren't you—everybody's friend and all that? What you up to?"

Upon this, he was as grave as she. "Yes, I'm not behaving well, Arlene. Sit down and I'll tell you. I've got myself bewitched. I'm glad to talk to you. I was going to call you up."

"What about?"

"About what you're here to talk about—Irene Foot, of course. I came to this country when I was thirteen years of age and all I brought with me was twenty-eight dollars and a love of art. It's old-fashioned now to say the love of art is the love of beauty; but that's still the state of things in me. I don't care two cents worth what Irene's soul is made of, if anybody possesses such a thing. All on earth I care about is that she will get old very, very slowly and not change in any modeling or color of hers before I begin to have trouble with my eyes. Yes; I've never had such feelings before and they make me behave badly; but

you're wrong if you think I made her jealous of her husband the way people are jealous when they're in love. She isn't jealous of him that way; but she's so jealous of him in another way that lately she's begun to dislike him personally."

"What did you go and make that worse for, then, Ben Raphael?"

"I don't excuse myself," he said. "But she'd have got that way, anyhow; I only helped her on a little faster."

"Yes, you did." Arlene looked at him angrily. "Pushed her right over to another man; I suppose you know that."

"Gillie Ives? Oh, yes; I don't take that seriously. She isn't in love with her husband; she isn't in love with Gillie Ives, and she won't be. She'll never be in love with anybody—it's too much to be expected of her. You've been talking to her this evening, have you?"

"No," Arlene said. "This afternoon. You know what she as good as told me? Not more or less than that she hopes to get him wild enough to leave his wife and marry her, instead. If his wife is taking Irene's husband away from Irene, why, Irene pays her back in the same coin—just like that! To top off, that's to leave Irene rich with the rich husband, in the other woman's place—and the other woman poor and Ernie poor, on each other's hands! That's the A B C of what's in Irene's mind, Ben Raphael, and who's responsible for it if you aren't?"

"No," he protested. "No, no, no! I think that's in her mind; but I didn't put it there. Do you think I want Irene to become Mrs. Gillespie Ives? Do you think——"

Arlene interrupted him impatiently. "I don't care what you want Irene to be. I want her to keep her husband. How much of a fool do you think that woman's making of Ernie?"

"A fool?" Raphael looked dubious. "I wouldn't say that, exactly. It's all on a very high plane. This young fellow—handsome, almost poetic-looking, yet manly—he's sent out there to show her some hinges. He's very attractive, very modest, yet laughing and frank. The lady shows him some pictures she's making; it's easy to become interested in such a young man, so honest, so receptive and appreciative. What a pleasure to educate him a little—even to dazzle him a little, too—and even to show one's friends this fine young man attached and dazzled! I don't think you'd call Ernie Foot a fool, though, if you saw him there; he's very quiet, very dignified—you'd only see how much he looks up to her. More like the kind, almost loving teacher and the best pupil—maybe you'd say not only the best but the best-looking! Not a fool, though; she wouldn't be interested in one. She's anything but that herself, you see, Arlene."

"I don't care what she is," Arlene said sharply. "She ought to let him alone!"

Ben Raphael shook his head. "No, she's quite interested, maybe you'd even say excited. So much so that I might have some news for you very soon. News that would take you out there to see for yourself, Arlene."

"Out where? Me? What are you——"

"Yes; I'm not joking. Suppose you're invited for tea among the murals at Mrs. Gillespie Ives's new studio at Foxglen Farms in Oldwood, Arlene; do you think you could live up to that?"

"How'd you get this way?" she asked. "Talk plain!"

"Mrs. Ives invites anybody that comes into her head. Look at me," he said cheerfully.

"She keeps her own Oldwood circle separate, of course—yet she even asked me to dinner with some of them once. You could see they looked upon me as a child of the slums, but felt she had a right to be eccentric in having me there if she wanted to. Well, it just happens now she's curious to see what Mr. Ernest Foot's wife looks like."

"Oh, she is, is she?"

"She's been asking me a little about Irene lately," he said. "She puts on an air of carelessness, of course. Wanted to know if Mrs. Foot was 'anywhere near equal to her husband intellectually'. I just told her Irene was unusually pretty; so she asked me if I thought Mrs. Foot would be interested in seeing the murals. I said I was sure of it. She didn't want to make a point of asking Mrs. Foot alone to look at them, so she said perhaps Mr. and Mrs. Foot had friends who'd like to visit the studio, too."

"So?" Arlene blew out an audible breath of hostile, brief laughter. "Wants to see Ernie's wife and the kind of people he lives among too, does she? *Going* it over him, isn't she! She expect to invite the Lorenzo bunch out there?"

"No, no—though I'd like to see it!" He laughed. "Just a specimen or two will explain the type to her, you see. She asked me who were Mr. and Mrs. Foot's most intimate friends and I mentioned you and Roy; so I think maybe you and your husband'll have an invitation before long."

Arlene, troubled, shook her head. "We wouldn't go."

"No," Raphael said. "I can't imagine Roy's going; but you would, I hope. Irene Foot in the house of Mrs. Gillespie Ives would need some support. You'd go, wouldn't you?"

"No." Arlene changed the subject decisively. "What *are* you up to?"

"Again that question!" Raphael smiled, but made despairing gestures in which there appeared to be some sincerity. "Everlastingly that question! How do I know, Arlene?"

"Look here!" Arlene rose and confronted him sternly. "Things are bad enough between Irene and her husband without anybody's helping it on. If Irene goes out to that woman's house something'll happen!"

"Will it?" he asked eagerly. "What?"

"I don't know; but those two couldn't meet without something's happening. You know that as well as I do, and yet here you are fixing it up, helping to have it happen. What for? Why didn't you try to stop it?"

"Me? Stop Mrs. Gillespie Ives from asking Irene out there once she'd decided she wants to know what Mrs. Ernest Foot looks like? You don't know the lady! There's only one thing I *can* do about it."

"Only one?" Arlene said contemptuously. "What's that?"

"To beg you to be there with your friend. She'd need you, and you're the only friend she's got except me."

"Except you!" Arlene laughed out the two words harshly, seeming to throw them in his amiably persuasive face. Then, in three long-legged strides she reached the door, where she added a farewell of sardonic meaning. "Except you! Good *night!*"

TO THE CLEAR mind of Arlene Parker it was but too evident that she was Irene's only friend on earth, and that when one is any human creature's only friend great staunchness in friendship is needed. Irene's voice had been sweet when she'd called back over her shoulder, in the corridor, "We're pals from now on, though, aren't we?" More, just before that, when she'd all at once changed, and, no longer frigid and hostile, had put out a hand and made a friendly moment, she had a great effect. Arlene was touched, disproportionately touched. The rejoicing in heaven over one repentant sinner may be disproportionate; but it is natural, and it was in the nature of Arlene Parker never to forget an appeal that touched her.

Irene, too, remembered that moment of friendly emotion; its warmth remained within her, and thenceforth, without more words, she counted upon this friend. When the two next saw each other, some days later, her manner recognized the change that had taken place between them. Outspoken even startlingly, she revealed herself for the first time; and to Arlene it was as if some shrouded stranger, after traveling sulkily beside her for days, had suddenly thrown off a muffling veil to show all trustfully a frank and mischievous face. Irene might have been an excited high-school belle engaged in an adventure, gayly imparting narrative bits of it to a schoolmate and not doubting this confidante's sympathetic admiration.

Thus, in this reversion, was known once more the self-centered but laughing and friendly Corinth City beauty Ernie Foot had courted. Here was the lively girl of whom he'd seen less and less as she began to disappear beneath the surface of the moody wife. Here, indeed, was the girl of whom he'd seen so nearly nothing since she became one of the Lorenzo wives that by now he must almost have forgotten what she was like and how to be in love with her.

She was in high spirits, rushed in upon Arlene at noon and hurried her off to eat dangerously in the "luncheonette" alcove of the drug store in the next block.

There in partial seclusion Irene chattered confidentially about everything, sniffed a big clump of violets she wore—an offering from Ben Raphael—and laughed immoderately as she talked of him and his gifts to her. Her beautiful eyes were even more brilliant with mischief, however, when she spoke of her husband. "You wouldn't believe the nerve of that bird, Arlene!"

"Yes, I would. I'd believe anything about Ben Raphael because——"

"No, no! I mean my own precious Ernie. What you think he had the gall to try and put over on me last night? I don't know how many days we haven't said more'n just, 'You better open that can' or 'Your socks aren't in my drawer, so shut it'; but last night he came

in with his face all dressed up in the expression of a boy scout. Just rich! I wish you'd been there, Arlene!"

"You mean you had a talk?"

"I mean I had a listen!" Irene cried. "He had the talk. Regular little Christian lecture. We ought to face life together, make the best of it together; ought to reason things out together, be utterly frank with each other and learn to understand each other." Irene uttered a mirthful hoot. "Never struck him he might be a little bit late!"

"No, that needn't be," Arlene urged. "It oughtn't ever——"

"Wait! That's not all of it, hon. He said he wanted to be frank with me; that he'd wanted to be for a long time but we'd been on such terms he couldn't break the ice and speak. He had nothing to be ashamed of but rather something to be proud of—something his wife ought to be glad of because it opened up higher opportunities for both of us to lead a finer and fuller kind of life. He'd wished all the time I'd allowed him to tell me how often he was seeing Mrs. G. I. because there was nothing I'd really mind if I only understood, and now he felt he'd truly won her friendship and he wanted me to meet her, too, and do the same. Honest, hon, can you beat that?"

"But he was trying to be straight with you, don't you see?" Arlene said. "He wanted _____"

"Wait! *Here's* a laugh! He went on how when I met her I'd feel just the way *he* did about her, and together we'd up and get to going with a finer kind of people. The Lorenzo bunch were all right in their way, and Roy and you in particular he would always remember kindly; but, after all, when something better was calling to us we mustn't miss these higher opportunities. Gosh, he had us moved right out into millionaire's row in Goldwood! The laugh is that when we first moved up to the Lorenzo *I* wasn't too strong for the bunch, or you and Roy either, Arlene, myself, and *he* sat up pretty near all night crying about it. Isn't that a laugh?"

Arlene didn't laugh. "He spoke as if he expected you were going to meet her?"

"Yes; and again this morning before he went downtown. I didn't say anything at all last night; I just let him talk. I thought about what Ben Raphael'd said to me—how if she ever got anxious to see what I *look* like I'd better look out. Guess I can attend to that! This morning before he went downtown Ernie did a little more Sunday Schooling—I mean he spoke like that, sort of teacherish and superior and yet terribly conscientious and kind, the old softhead! I just said, 'All right, Ernie, if she wants to meet me tell her to go right ahead; I'll meet!'"

"I wouldn't, Irene."

"I would!" Irene said merrily. "She wants to know what I look like and that's just what I'll be pleased to show her! Maybe I could show her something else, too. It might do her a little good to find out how it feels to have a husband running up with his tongue hanging out every time some other woman says, 'Hyuh, Fido!'" Irene lowered her voice to an unctuous whisper, so profoundly did she seem to marvel over the miracle she discovered herself to be. "Honest, Arlene; I've got him eating out of my hand—all just by not even letting him hold it! I wouldn't 'a' dreamed I could ever got a big society fellow like that simply cuckoo that easy! Why, they're just like anybody else, aren't they?"

"Yes—just men."

Irene was merry again. “‘Darling!’ he’ll say in the convertible. ‘Darling, I’m dying for you!’ So then I laugh and tell him I don’t see any strong signs of it, and he’ll say what can he do to prove it, so then I tell him wait, maybe there’ll be a way some day, and then I commence talking about how pretty the sky is and won’t talk about anything else and he gets almost cuckoo. Honest, he’d bark and jump over a stick if I snapped my fingers and told him to!”

She was radiant; color glowed on her cheeks like roses on ivory, and her eyes had the shining blue of a happy child’s. Indeed, she might have been a child chattering of triumphant innocent mischief, Arlene thought, and sat wondering if there were essentially much difference between Irene and any lively beautiful schoolgirl delighting in the thought of vengefully switching boy-sweethearts with some rival schoolgirl and getting the best of the exchange.

Arlene asked of herself, “Then are we always really just children with only our bodies grown up?” She saw one difference, however—that children can sometimes be controlled—and with Irene she wasted no more breath upon either persuasion or remonstrance. Like the wise woman who said of men, “We can’t stop them from doing what they oughtn’t to, we can only take care of them when it makes them sick,” Arlene saw that she could only wait until Irene was sick.

Irene, in brilliant health, showed little prospect of ever needing any nursing. When they left the “luncheonette” she stopped at the corner for a ’bus. “No, not keeping a date,” she explained. “This is the stage where the scarcer the dates the more they’re ready to bark and jump over sticks. G’by!” And she called back from the door of the ’bus, “Bet I know by to-night what comes next! I’ll put you wise, hon.”

She did more than keep this promise. That evening Arlene was alone, as Parker had left on the day before for the meeting of the Knights’ officials in Toledo, and Ola was at a dancing class. Irene spoke over the telephone. “You and Roy there, hon? No, I forgot—he’s out of town, you told me—but I mean is any of the bunch there? If not, why, Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Foot’d like to call on you.”

“No, nobody’s here,” Arlene said. “Did you say Ernie’s coming, too?”

“Yes.” Irene’s voice was gay. “Oh, yes! Didn’t you understand me? Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Foot would like to present their compliments to Mrs. Parker and come up and give you a big time for a few minutes, hon!”

THE INSTRUMENT at Arlene's ear clicked a giggle at the other end into sudden silence; but when Irene and Ernie arrived, some moments later, Irene seemed to have brought the rest of the giggle with her. That is, she came in tittering, kissed Arlene, whispered, "*Get him; he's a scream!*" and sat down, breathing loudly in laughter. Her husband, on the contrary, was more than serious; his handsome face expressed an anxious gravity.

"I'm sorry Roy's out of town, Arlene," he said. "He came over to my department yesterday to tell me good-by but didn't mention when he'd be back. I don't suppose there's any chance of his getting home by to-morrow?"

"Yes, he'll be back to-morrow evening at six forty-five, in time for dinner, Ernie."

"Six forty-five? I'm afraid that'll be too late."

"Too late for what?"

"I'd better explain," Ernie said. "I have an invitation for you and Roy, Arlene. I——" He hesitated, glanced at his wife whose all too brilliantly smiling face plainly perturbed him. "I—ah—it just happens, Arlene, that lately I've made a number of new friends in town here—ah—lovely people, very lovely people——"

"Very lovely people," Irene said with apparent amiability. "That's the new way he talks now, Arlene. Notice any change in him?"

Ernie sighed patiently. "I think, myself, there's a change in me," he admitted, and turned to Arlene plaintively. "I hope it isn't one for the worse. Irene hasn't been in sympathy with that feeling in me; but I hope that after to-morrow—that after to-morrow maybe she'll understand me better and maybe begin to see for herself how——"

"Get ahead," Irene interrupted. "Tell her about to-morrow."

"I'm trying to. Arlene, perhaps you remember my mentioning one evening that—that in a purely business way I'd met a Mrs. Ives who——"

"Yes," Irene said. "*She* remembers that, Ernie."

Ernie's color heightened. "I—it just happened that I was of some slight service to Mrs. Ives in helping her to select some hardware for her studio and that she's the kind of woman who's very appreciative of—of anything one does——"

"One," Irene said, apparently musing. "Anything one does. Some slight slervice—I mean service. Anything one does."

Outwardly he ignored the interruption. "You see, Arlene, Mrs. Ives has been very, very kind and—and I—and it happens that I've had the privilege of seeing something of her and later of meeting some of her friends. She's been very kind indeed, and naturally she's the sort that would want to take the same interest in my wife that she does in me."

“Yes,” Irene said. “Naturally she’s that sort. Naturally she is.”

“Please, Irene.” Ernie gave her a pathetic look of protest. “I mean Mrs. Ives is the kind of a woman that you can’t appreciate until you know her, Arlene. All this being so much in the papers that seems to have prejudiced Irene, why, Mrs. Ives is so prominent she can’t avoid it, and it gives a wrong idea of her. She——”

Irene interrupted him. “Isn’t that terrible, Arlene? Think how she must suffer, always struggling to avoid it and not being able to! Tough, I call it. Suffers ’most all the time, does she, Ernie?”

Upon this, as goaded as he was intended to be, Ernie spoke impulsively; he turned angrily upon his mocking wife. “How do you know what she suffers? How do you know what a woman suffers—with a husband like hers——”

“What?” Irene’s smile was instantly gone; she looked all blank inquiry. “Has she got a husband? I never heard.”

“No, probably you wouldn’t,” the young man retorted hotly. “Not in the Lorenzo!” Then he turned apologetically to Arlene. “I beg your pardon; I don’t mean that, Arlene—it’s just that Irene always knows how to get my goat, and when I think of as high a type of woman as Mrs. Ives having had to live for years with a man like her husband——”

“Having had to just for the money, you mean?” Irene inquired. “It seems to upset you to think of her living with anybody, doesn’t it? You been seeing much of him, Ernie?”

“I have not!” he said indignantly. “I have not and I don’t wish to.”

“No, of course not, Ernie. In the first place, he’d be an interference, and in the second place why should you, since what you say shows she must been telling you all about him and done some awful noble suffering at you all the time she was telling you! Or does she just give you hints sometimes and let you guess how much she has to bear from him?”

“Irene!” he cried, stung to the quick. “This is simply insufferable!”

“Must be,” she said, beaming upon him. “That’s *exactly* what little Johnnie Briggs said back in Corinth City when his mother said how bow-legged his girl was—and she certainly *was*! Didn’t I tell you we were going to come up here and give you a big time, Arlene?”

Ernie, who had not sat down, began to pace the floor as a measure toward regaining a slipped self-control. “She can *always* get my goat,” he groaned. “Always, always!” He turned to Arlene. “I’m sorry to let you in for this. She said we must come up and tell you—she seemed friendly and I thought she’d keep on being that way—at least before you!”

Irene showed a brief, humorous compassion for him. “Why’n’t you just simply go ahead and tell Arlene what we came for, Ernie?”

“I was trying to; but you insisted on insulting——”

“Yes,” she said. “You were trying to, Ernie; but you switched off onto how noble your new girl-friend is, and how she squawks over her husband and having her picture all the time in the papers. Don’t switch off so much to tell about *her*, Ernie. Just sit down quietly and try to be natural and tell Arlene about the invitation.”

He stopped walking, sat down, passed a blue handkerchief across his forehead, breathed heavily and achieved some composure. “Mrs. Ives told me, Arlene, she’d be glad if I’d bring my wife, and any friends I might care to, out to see a new studio she’s built.

She's very hospitable and said she hoped my wife and any friends of mine that might be interested in coming would drive out there to tea some day this week. She said Ben Raphael had mentioned a Mr. and Mrs. Parker as friends of mine, and she hoped you'd care to come with Irene."

"So's to be less embarrassing," Irene suggested. "Just having the wife alone out there to look over would certainly be——"

"Can't you let me finish?" he said. "The way she's acting," he explained desperately to Arlene, "I'd simply say 'Hell, we won't go!' except I'm sure she'll get the same feeling about Mrs. Ives that I have as soon as she sees her; then, after that, when she gets to *know* her, she'll understand me better and share all my——"

"It's to-morrow," Irene interrupted. "She called him up this aft and told him to get us out there to-morrow about four. Admission free, but don't leave newspapers and sardine cans on the lawn. What you going to wear, Arlene?"

"I can't go," Arlene said in a low voice. "I can't."

"Oh, please!" Ernie begged. "She's having just a very few people and she really was extremely anxious to——"

"Really streamly anxious?" his wife inquired, and added immediately, "Then I can't go, either."

"What? Irene, you told me this morning——"

"Changed my mind!"

"But you said——"

"No. Changed my mind *intirely!* Arlene doesn't want to and neither do I." Irene rose and walked languidly toward the door. "Tell you what you do, Ernie. If she wants to meet me and Arlene, call her up and tell her to come here, instead."

"What?"

"Yes, tell her to drop in here at the Lorenzo along about noon, and I and Arlene'll trot her up to Schwartz's luncheonette and feed her a Hamburg. She can keep looking at me while she's eating it. I'll turn all round for her and everything. Go ahead and call her up now on Arlene's telephone; I'll wait."

Ernie jumped up and began to pace the floor again. "She can always do it! Always, always!"

"How about it?" his wife asked, in the doorway. "She's the one wants to see us, not us her. What's the matter her coming to the Lorenzo instead of Arlene and I dragging all the way out to her old Foxglen Farms. How many farms has she got her poor husband to give her? There's an idea, Arlene. Let's have some new cards engraved, and instead of putting just 'The Lorenzo' down in the corner let's have 'em make it 'The Lorenzos.' *That'll* fix it up for you, Ernie—so you won't be ashamed. Call her up and tell her we'll expect her to-morrow at the Lorenzos. What you so upset about? Isn't it her place to call on us first?"

He appealed again to Arlene. "Arlene, please, you'll accept? You'll——"

She shook her head. "No. I couldn't."

"Sure not," Irene said cheerfully. "Me either. Listen, if you're not going to call her up and invite her to the Lorenzos, why, I got some beauty sleep to get in and I'm going to bed. Don't keep me awake walking the floor and arguing at me I got to go out to all those

farms just because you told her you knew I'd simply love to. You coming?" She gave Arlene a sly but triumphant glance of happiest understanding. "G'by, hon. See you tomorrow. Let's go down to Shipo's about four."

The badgered husband's voice had become husky. "You can't treat me this way! You *said* you'd go and you've *got* to! You *told* me you——"

"No; it'd bore me," Irene said, yawning; kissed a hand roguishly to Arlene and disappeared into the hallway.

Ernie made a gesture as if helplessly explaining his own departure, hurried after her; and Arlene heard his voice speaking in passionate remonstrance even after the door to the outer corridor had closed. It wasn't difficult to imagine, later, what would be taking place in the Foots' apartment, down there three floors below. Irene had sketched that when she'd said, "Don't keep me awake walking the floor and arguing at me." Ernie would be not only arguing but beseeching, Arlene thought; and upon the pillowed, lovely face of Irene, though the eyes would be closed and the dark lashes without a quiver, there would be just faintly the traces of a hidden smile—to hear herself despairingly entreated to do what she meant to do.

This imagining of Arlene's was proved correct by Irene's eager telephoning, next morning. "Ernie's just gone downtown. You ought to see him—all hollow-eyed and pretty near foaming at the mouth! Wasn't he a scream last night, not dreaming how he was spilling his beans? Acting exactly like some high-school kid gone cuckoo over the teacher and raving at the folks at home for kidding him about her! He still thinks we're not going out there this aft. Rather cut off his right hand than tell her his wife declined the invitation! Oh, yes; talked like that right along. Going to call me up at noon from the Old Windsor Wholesale for my semi-final decision. I'll have a little more fun with him before I get obliging. What you think I better wear, hon? Listen, if you wear your brown——"

"No, no!" Arlene interrupted hurriedly. "I can't go. I meant what I told Ernie. I can't."

"Gosh! You got to; you got to back me up. Wait, I'll come up there."

When she came, hurrying and urgently pressing, she was overwhelming. "You *got* to go, Arlene! It's a big day in my life. *He's* going to be there; I had a 'phone talk with him downtown yesterday aft and he said he wouldn't miss the chance to look at me. I got to have backing, though. I might lose my nerve if I get out there alone; but with you with me, I know I won't—I'll make her see stars! You know how it is—all by yourself you get the jitters; but if you just got *somebody* you *count* on with you——"

Arlene was distressed. "I know; but I can't."

"You can! I know what you mean, Arlene. You mean Gillespie Ives is one of the names from your old Griswold days that Roy Parker gets upset about—you can't even speak it before him. That's what you mean, isn't it?"

"Yes—that's it." Arlene's voice was low but steady. "That name more than the others, Irene."

"What of it?" Arlene was sitting by a window with the sweater she was knitting for Ola in her lap. Irene, standing before her, put out a hand and stopped the slow and absent movement of the knitting needles. "We said we'd be pals, didn't we? Roy Parker himself asked you to stand by me, didn't he?"

"Yes, but he didn't mean——"

"I *got* to have you, hon!" Irene cried. "Listen, we'll be back before Roy gets home, and you don't need to tell him about it, do you? Nobody'll tell him. You won't and I won't and Mr. Ernest Foot will have too many other things to talk about by *that* time, I give you my word! Don't go back on me, hon; tell me you'll go."

"No. Instead, tell me you won't."

"What!"

"Don't go," Arlene said. "I don't deny it looks like she's after poor Ernie; but you can see he's doing his best to keep it from being mush. Stay home, let him go out there alone, and when he comes back just be nice to him and laugh as if he'd been doing something a little silly but you only think it's funny. If you want to put her in a hole that'd do it. Don't try to trade him for a lemon. Don't——"

"Lemon? Lay off o' that, hon; I like him. Listen, she went after mine first, didn't she? You aren't going to turn me down, are you?"

Arlene looked up at her helplessly. "No matter what I say, no matter how I beg you, there isn't any way on earth of stopping you from going out there, Irene?"

"No! Nobody could. Never! If I haf to go alone I guess I'll get a bash in the eye; but I'll go. Don't turn me down. Tell me you'll go with me!"

A man of heart will do much for a comrade; but what a woman of heart will do for any cause or creature she has befriended is without limit. "All right," Arlene said. "I'll go."

"Bless your soul!" Irene cried, and kissed her. "Which you think, hon; my new wine-colored crinkled crêpe or the green skirt with the ivory blouse and tweed coat? We'll riot 'em, hon! Which you think?"

SUBSEQUENT telephonic consultations took place between the eighth floor of the Lorenzo and the fourth, and between the fourth and the Art Hardware Department of the Old Windsor Wholesale, where a customary business routine must have commingled, so to speak, with strong social apprehensions and emotional excitement. The Art Hardware Department put an almost tremulous stress upon the fact that at Foxglen Farms four o'clock meant four o'clock. Ernie couldn't leave the Old Windsor Wholesale until twenty minutes before that hour; he would therefore take a taxi and meet the two ladies at the door of the Manor at four precisely, when simultaneously they would arrive by means of the Parkers' sedan.

This vehicle, accordingly, with Arlene driving and Irene lovely beside her, left the Lorenzo at about a quarter to four, and, crossing from Garfield Avenue to Gillespie Boulevard, turned north upon this prosperous thoroughfare and glided onward toward Oldwood.

"Gosh Pete!" Irene murmured. "Me riding out Gillespie Boulevard to Oldwood! Me and you going to tea at Foxglen Farms with Mrs. Gillespie Ives, Arlene! Six months ago if somebody'd told us, we'd 'a' 'phoned their sanatorium to hurry and come get 'em, wouldn't we? You sure this crinkled crêpe is right, hon?"

"Yes. You look lovely—just beautiful."

"You look nice, too, hon. That brown and black and the wide black hat's always awful becoming to you. You know, with all the money he lets her spend on dress, I never saw one picture of her yet that looked like the really well-groomed woman—not with that long nose and fat face, and Golly, that mop of hair!" Irene was silent for a time, looking out of the window beside her. "Swell street, hon, Gillespie Boulevard. It was named for his grandfather. Who do you suppose lives in all these smart houses and where on earth do they get all the money?"

She prattled on nervously, while increasing excitement enriched the color in her cheeks, brightened and brightened her exquisite eyes. The sedan passed out from between the two long rows of opulent houses, left Gillespie Boulevard behind, crossed a park and came into an area of woodland, though most of the trees stood aristocratically behind hedges, stone walls and garden walls of brick. The road was winding here; seclusive driveways of crushed grey stone departed from it at intervals and curved about sweeps of lawn toward reserved glimpses of masonry and slated gables.

Arlene abated the pace of the car as they came near two brick pillars, the supports of tall wrought-iron gates that stood open. On each side of this gateway an imposing brick wall nine feet high stretched up and down the road, and, behind the wall, the great leafless

forest trees rose haughtily toward the already darkening winter sky.

Arlene stopped the sedan. "I was out here driving once with Mabel Finch," she said in a timid voice. "I think Mabel said this was it. Yes, that's right. I remember there was kind of an iron peacock on those gates, and there it is." She started the car. "Yes—here we are, Irene."

"You don't suppose the fool let her build this brick wall all around all those farms, do you?" Irene laughed hysterically as they passed between the tall pillars. "Yes, here we are!"

A hundred yards from the gate, the driveway, like a brook opening into a pond, expanded into a large oval area of crushed stone before a brick house that incurred immediate criticism from Irene. "Big, yes; but look at the bareness of it! Gosh, not even a piazza or pillars—nothing but just that ivy and a couple stone steps to the vestibule!" The sedan stopped before these steps; the two ladies descended and Irene complained, "I don't see anything of Mister Ernie. Making all that fuss about four o'clock and not here himself! Think we better wait for him?"

"Yes—no—I don't know." Arlene was nervous. "Maybe we better."

"No, I'm going to ring the bell." Irene glanced toward the opposite rim of the oval, where waited a high old-fashioned automobile attended by a mulatto chauffeur who lounged beside it and alleviated tedium with a cigarette. "That private chauffeur over there'll think we're terrible rubes if we hang around like we're scared to go in. Look how he's looking at us already."

The chauffeur, in fact, did more than frowningly look at them; he crossed the oval, approached them and spoke to them in peevish remonstrance. "Listen, I'm Mrs. Harold I. Scheffer's chauffeur. She's in there and her legs ain't so good. I got to have room to get up in front the door. I got to move your car out the way, see?" He stepped into the sedan, and, annoyed, allowed them to hear him grumble as it moved forward, "Ought to know better'n leave a car right in front anybody's doorway!"

Arlene looked as she felt, abashed and sat upon; but in the eyes of her beautiful companion there flashed blue anger. "What's he take us for—bringing home the wash? Look at that old Noah's Ark he belongs to—Nineteen twenty-five model if it's a day! He better look out how he talks to me; some day he might not get allowed in this place if he's not careful—no, nor his old Mrs. Howard I. what's-her-name, either! To the devil with Ernie, I'm going to ring that bell!"

She strode into the shallow vestibule and with vigor pushed the small black disk beside the door, kept her thumb upon it long. Arlene protested. "Better not keep pushing it, Irene. Probably it's ringing somewhere in the——"

"How do they expect anybody to know?" the angry Irene asked. "You could freeze to death out here without ever knowing whether they heard you or not. Who'd that chauffeur say he works for that's got bad legs? Mrs. Howard I. what? I'm going to see that he gets _____"

Her threat remained incomplete. The door was opened by a young man who surprised both visitors by his remoteness from their conception of what the aspect of a butler should be, most of the fashionable outer doors known to them theatrically having been operated by butlers. The young man was of a fragile appearance, had hair and eyelashes so pale

they were almost white. His grey clothes were somewhat preciously set off by a pale green neck-scarf, tender in fabric; but this did not shake Irene's conviction that at Foxglen Farms her first encounter would be with a butler. She extended two calling-cards to the young man.

"Here!" she said. "You take these cards to Mrs. Gillespie Ives and kindly tell her we're here."

He looked at the cards, though without taking them, smiled and said cordially in a delicate, high voice, "Oh, thanks; but you won't need the cards. It's Mrs. Foot and—ah—yes, Mrs. Parker, isn't it? Mrs. Ives is expecting you. Won't you come in?"

"Why, certainly," Irene said, and they entered a dark, capacious hall. The young man made a hospitable gesture toward an open wide doorway on the right.

"If you'll just wait in yonder for a moment I'll——" He spoke tentatively, not finishing the sentence but leaving it to them to comprehend that he intended to notify their hostess; then he walked lightly away, disappeared into dimness at the other end of the hall and left them moving toward the wide doorway.

Irene clasped Arlene's arm. "Got a sissy butler! Wouldn't you know she *would*?"

They passed through the doorway, found themselves in a vaguely dark large room rather crowded with furniture and showing walls paneled in a brownish wood that looked unfinished and crude to Arlene and Irene. At the upper end of the room, near small-paned windows where the light was stronger, two women sat talking; but after a moment one of them rose to go. The other, remaining seated, was fat, elderly, querulous-looking and had a crutch across her lap. The one who had risen wore what the visitors defined in their minds as rather rough and shabby "sport clothes"; but neither of them gave much immediate thought to her apparel. Her hair was concealed by a mannish cloth hat; she seemed about thirty, and the windows still gave light enough to show a round face with the one emphasized, incongruous feature, a distinguished thin long nose.

Irene sharply drew a breath audible to her perturbed companion; then, advancing decisively, "Listen!" she said. "I guess that butler didn't know you were in here; he's gone looking for you. Ernie made a big point about four o'clock; but he hasn't showed up yet and——"

"What?" The woman in the rough clothes stopped her. "I'm not Mrs. Ives. I'm her sister, Mrs. Posting. If you wish to see Mrs. Ives, you'll probably find her out in her studio." Then, not rudely but seeming to feel that she'd done all that the circumstances required, she turned again to the stout elderly figure in the chair. "I suppose you've seen it—the studio?"

"No," the elderly woman said grimly. "No, and I don't want to. I don't care for modernism, thank you."

"Oh, nowadays we're nothing but!" Mrs. Posting said, and laughed. "We've taken all the preliminary steps. Gone up the whole staircase. Been through Monet and Manet to the accompaniment of Brahms and Chopin; then the primitives, Flemish, Italian and Spanish with a touch of Île de France Gothic and candlelight and Seventeenth Century chamber music and Lorenzo de' Medici melodies. After that, we were all Van Gogh and Gauguin with readings from Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine and a headache or two from Proust—but now we've absolutely gone Matisse. Even *passed* Matisse! Really, you'd better go out and

look in on it.”

Irene stood staring at Mrs. Posting; then she returned to Arlene at the other end of the room and the two sat down. “Polite, aren’t they?” Irene whispered. “How’s she expect *me* to know where the studio is? Same as tells me to run along and then begins talking Chinese to old Mrs. Bum-legs with the cute chauffeur! Say, get these walls; they don’t look so hot to me. Got all the knots left in ’em and——”

“Sh, Irene! They’ll hear you.”

“Gosh, what I care? *They* don’t care if I hear *them*. Listen to ’em!”

“‘Young intellectuals’!” the elderly woman was saying crossly. “Lord, how I hate aesthetes! Got some out there now with her, has she?”

“Most likely. Don’t you want to go look at ’em?”

“Not I.” With the help of the crutch and an arm of the chair, the elderly woman, grumbling, struggled to rise. “Get me up, will you? Give me a pull. I’m going, too. Drop you on the way, if you like. My nephew may be a bad boy—everybody always says he is—but I’ll be shot if your sister hasn’t led him a life in return for all she’s had from him. There, I’m on my feet. Let go me.”

Mrs. Posting released the thick arm she’d been pulling. “Oh, I don’t know,” she said coldly, as the two began a slow progress toward the doorway. “She might have done pretty well for herself without——”

“Couldn’t, either!” the elderly woman interrupted brusquely. “Neither of you could. Neither of you’d ever got anywhere. Don’t tell *me*! Posting was his friend or you’d never got a chance even to meet him. How’s anybody to live in a Bedlam? What it’s always been, Bedlam!” They passed the seated Irene and Arlene without even glancing toward them and disappeared into the hall, where the brusque voice continued its grumbling. Just before the front door closed it out, it was distinctly heard to inquire of Mrs. Posting, “What’s this talk I hear about her and some little clerk from a hardware store?”

“Ernie!” Irene gasped. “That’s a fast one to save up to hand him! Say! Old gal talks when she talks, don’t she? Is that how they do in society? Tell you to go some place else but not how to get there, and then, when you sit down in the same room with ’em, act like you’re just part of the air! ‘Some little clerk from a hardware store’! So *her* crowd’s talking, too, are they? Boy!”

“Let’s go,” Arlene whispered hurriedly. “Let’s get out of here. Ernie isn’t here; something might’ve happened so he won’t come at all—let’s get out and go home.”

“Not for a million dollars! I won’t *take* it! I been insulted by that old haystack’s private colored chauffeur and treated like dirt by that long-nosed sister in the potato-sack skirt; but *she* wants to see what I look like and I’m going to let her! Our dear city’s best old rich families don’t scare me a nickel’s worth, hon! I——”

“Sh!” Arlene put forth a long arm and clutched Irene’s wrist. “Sh!”

The fragile young man in grey appeared in the doorway. “She wishes you to come out to the studio,” he explained amiably. “I’m Harry Shaftsbury, Mrs. Ives’s secretary. If you don’t mind coming along now?”

“Mind?” Irene said, as she and Arlene rose. “That’s what we’re here for!”

Mr. Shaftsbury laughed indulgently, and led the way. They followed him into the hall

and then through a narrower passage of some length until they came to an unpaneled metal door bleak with a studied blankness. "This is where the *new* part begins," Mr. Shaftsbury explained. "Everything from here on is entirely of her own design, modern but wholly original with her. Everybody's intensely excited over it. I'm sure you'll be intrigued to see how she's worked it out." He opened the door. "This is the anteroom to the studio. Absolutely nothing here at all, you see—nothing except her Rose Picasso."

Neither Irene nor Arlene at all understood what he meant by "her Rose Picasso"; no Italian lady was present. The anteroom seemed to them like the glossy, vacant interior of a black glass box. Opposite them, as they entered, were two metal doors of the same dismal simplicity as the first; and upon one wall there was something they supposed to be intended for a picture, since it had a frame, though they could make nothing of it except that it seemed to hint of a dismembered violin or guitar. From beyond the double doors there came a sound of voices, a murmur so decorously subdued that it was only a little louder when the doors were opened by Mr. Shaftsbury.

"Here we are," he said. "Aklid Lockett's going to play; but I hope she'll give you time to study the murals a little before he begins. If you'll just step in, please? She likes the doors kept shut."

They crossed the threshold and he followed, closing the doors softly behind them. Arlene and Irene stopped hesitantly just inside, like strangers entering a rich church and uncertain whether the ushers will give them a pew or reprove them for expecting one. The studio, indeed, seemed to the ladies from the Lorenzo as large as such a church and as impressively hushing. Overhead a great glass skylight was dusky now; the light came from horizontal long metal reflectors that glared downward upon startlingly vari-colored walls, yet elsewhere diffused a warm and agreeable illumination in which everything was softly clear to the eye.

Clearest of all to the eye of Arlene and Irene was the red-haired woman who stood talking to a group of people near a concert piano at the other end of the room. Diffused as was the light in which she stood, it seemed to converge and intensify brightness upon this woman—upon the subtle pale rosiness of her round face, upon the distinction of her thin long nose, upon the red of her eyebrows and flaming hair, and upon the light fabric of her slim chiffon dress of pale grey. Talking rapidly in a rich contralto low voice to the seven or eight people about her, and using almost as many crisp little gestures as words, she nevertheless instantly perceived the entrance of the newcomers and came forward to meet them.

Ten feet from them she impulsively put forth a graceful hand. "Mrs. Foot!" she exclaimed, and, sweeping on, seized the hand of Arlene Parker in cold fingers, looked up at her cordially. "How nice of you to come, Mrs. Foot! I'd have known you instantly and anywhere from Ernest's description of you. We're all quite excited about Ernest, you see; all so very, very fond of him. Such a very dear, dear boy!"

BEFORE ARLENE, overcome and breathless, could interrupt her, Mrs. Ives turned graciously to Irene. "And this, I suppose, is his friend Mrs. Parkins? So sorry Mr. Parkins couldn't come; but Ernest telephoned me he's out of——"

"Listen!" Irene said, and her laugh of politeness was all too plainly artificial. "My husband must be quite a describer if he's told you I was about six feet tall! Just like a man, though, isn't it? She's Mrs. Parker; it's me that's got the privilege of being Mrs. Ernest Foot, I'm afraid—anyways up to date."

"Stupid of me," Mrs. Ives said. "So glad you both came." She smiled upon Irene; but the cordial hand she had extended to Arlene seemed to have done its duty; it was used to place a forefinger against the round chin, enhancing a quick posture of thoughtfulness. "Let me see—you must meet some of these people if there's time enough before Aklid Lockett plays. Yes, you could meet one or two of them. I wonder which."

"You wonder which'd be willing?" Irene inquired, ostensibly with an amiable humor; and she added politely, "Don't put yourself out. We can wait till after the music all right."

Mrs. Ives seemed unaware that Irene had spoken. "I'll fetch Wallie Mazzich," she said. "He's grown such a great friend of Ernest's I'm sure he'd like to talk to you—for a moment." She turned back toward the group at the piano, calling, "Wallie! Oh, Wallie Mazzich!" in her rich low voice; and left Irene and Arlene staring after her.

Neither of them had ever imagined that the "mop of hair" familiar to them in uncolored pictures was red, tossing that aura of flame about the imperially held head. To Arlene this unexpected brilliancy of coloring made Mrs. Ives appear more formidable; but to Irene, in whose already daunted eyes there nevertheless gleamed an ever angrier light, the red hair flung red challenge.

"You get that, Arlene?"

"Get which?"

"What she really said," Irene whispered. "Being such a friend of Ernie's, this Mr. Mazzich of hers can stand talking to me—'for a moment'!"

"No, no, she didn't mean——"

"You can't tell *what* she means. Don't you see? She's the kind that says things you don't know whether she's just dumb or you ought to smack her down. You don't think that was a *mistake* she made calling you Mrs. Foot, do you? She was looking straight at me till she got half way across the floor and I saw her expression as she swung towards you. I practi'ly *caught* her making up her mind to do it. Who'd she say she was going to bring us—'for a moment'?"

Arlene hadn't time to answer.

A black-haired sallow young man had detached himself from the group about the piano and joined Mrs. Ives; she returned to her new guests bringing him with her. "This is Mr. Walter Mazzich." Her hand upon his arm, she turned him toward Irene, who assumed that air of social sweetness customary with her at parties or when she met strangers. "This is Mrs. Parkins—no, Parker!" Mrs. Ives then laughingly corrected herself again. "Do forgive me; I'm stupid once more. This one's Mrs. Foot, of course, Wallie. You must tell her something of what we all feel about Ernest. And *this* one's Mrs. Parker. Ernest's late. I'd hoped he'd be here before Aklid Lockett plays. Aklid's going to do some of his own compositions. We call them the 'Lockettesques', and Ernest finds them exciting. However!"

She turned away quickly and swept back across the expanse of floor to the piano. Mr. Mazzich looked distrustfully at the two ladies. Unwilling, he seemed to share with them a desert island, far from civilization; but he roused himself to perform his duty, and, glancing after his hostess, chose her for an opening subject.

"Even her walk has something electric in it, hasn't it?" he said in a monotonous undertone evidently his habit. "We all feel she never makes the slightest movement that hasn't significance. People are always asking for beauty, meaning the spurious late Greek tradition, of course, and candy-box covers—the commonplace thing the populace loves to mouth as 'beauty'. They never by any chance mean significant form or any poignancy of expression; they mean Greuze and Jean Leon Gêrôme and Bougereau and every other sleek sugariness. Yet all the while there are women like that—the most excitingly beautiful type known to us."

Irene, with enlarging eyes, gave him an incredulous scrutiny; her lips parted and she stood open-mouthed, astonished by this strange male creature. For the first time in her life a man, immediately upon meeting her, spoke of the beauty of another woman—and that woman one already vindictively defined in Irene's mind as "freakish-looking".

"Listen!" she said in a dazed voice. "You mean Mrs. Gillespie Ives? You mean you think she's pretty?"

"Pretty?" Mr. Mazzich's sallowness became faintly tinted with pink. "God forbid! She asked me to tell you something of our feeling about your husband; perhaps we'd better stick to that. One doesn't need to know Ernest Foot long to find very rare qualities."

Irene recovered herself somewhat. "That so. Such as?"

"Such as the finest naïveté," he replied in his expressionless voice. "The naïveté that absorbs truth and culture simply—just takes them up naturally, as blotting paper does."

"Well, well, isn't that nice? My friend Mrs. Parker here and I got *two* compliments for Ernie now when he comes. Out in the other part of the house we heard a cute old lady calling him something that had to do with hardware, and here *you* go, telling us he's just some blotting paper!" Irene laughed archly, as if in polite badinage and nudged her worried companion. "Two good ones for Ernie, huh, Arlene?"

Young Mr. Mazzich, not responding, looked at Irene thoughtfully; then glanced toward the piano. "I think Lockett's going to play now." He made a gesture toward two chairs near the wall, close by. "I think perhaps she'd prefer for everybody to sit down during the music."

With that, he walked away, joined their hostess and seemed to speak with her gloomily. Dashed, Irene and Arlene, going to the two chairs he'd indicated, sat down and conferred. "Making us feel right at home, aren't they?" Irene said. "Right at the start got us parked forty feet from anybody. Look at him yonder now—complaining to her of being stuck with us all that half minute he was trying to talk Chinese to us!" Her voice shook and she trembled elsewhere than in her voice, as Arlene saw. "'Excitingly beautiful'! You hear him say she was? *Her!* Can you take it? It burns me up!" Irene laughed shakily but aloud, whereupon Mrs. Ives, as she sank softly into a chair close by the piano, turned and looked at her inquiringly. The pianist, in position, with white hands poised floatingly above the keys, was conscious of Mrs. Ives's movement, paused and also looked at Irene.

"Hush! Don't laugh!" Arlene begged. "She's looking at us and so's everybody else!"

"They got no business to; they never been introduced!" After that, however, Irene was silent for some moments, brought forth her gold and tortoise shell case and with an unsteady hand lighted a cigarette. Then, breathing rapidly and visibly, she leaned back in her chair, crossed her knees and tried to assume an air of languid indifference. "Shoot, professor, if you're going to!" she murmured.

"Careful, Irene. She looks like she thinks we're still disturbing them."

"Well, they got their own party over there; they oughtn't to mind us just whispering a little at ours out here in the suburbs. Say, did you get what that squirrel meant about everything being cheap and common that the population call beauty? Said God forbid her being pretty; she was 'excitingly beautiful' and honest to Pete you could see he meant it! Stick an oyster shell in the side of a tomato for a nose, and that's beauty, not the cheap population kind—like me! That's what he meant. His face acted like his liver hurt him every time he looked at me. I bet she *knew* he'd pull that line o' stuff. She——"

The pianist let his hands droop upon his lap and sat looking down at them with an air of despondent patience. Mrs. Ives, with her face still turned toward the two remotely occupied chairs, smiled a little chidingly and made a slight but authoritative gesture with her right forefinger. "Would you mind?" she asked, making her hushed and hushing voice heard distinctly across the room. "Would you mind, Mrs. Foot—just a *very* few minutes?"

There followed a pause of painful noiselessness throughout the great room. Irene's quick breathing became more visible; then she called out, "Go ahead!" and the impact of the two words seemed perceptibly to produce a spiritual shock all about the piano, where the silence deepened.

"Get her that time?" Irene inquired, muttering out of the left side of her mouth. "Handing it to me pretty fast, isn't she? You wait!"

Then, save for fluttering breath and twitching fingers, she was still; while the pianist, recovering, again poised his hands and, bowing his head over them, struck abruptly upon the keys. He began to produce discords and harmonies unrelated to one another except by the continuous fact that from no sound thus created could any hearer predict the next to follow. Arlene Parker tried to understand what he was doing; but to her ears the piano gave forth nothing recognizable as music, made only discomfiting noises. She observed, however, that Mrs. Ives, her elbow upon the arm of her chair and her chin upon her hand, seemed to listen intently and that all of the group about her were rapt, lost in profoundly interior experiences.

Of this attendant group only two were women; middle-aged and both of them spectacled, they seemed rather dowdy to Arlene, whereas all of the gentlemen were young, well-dressed and two or three of them good-looking, though by no means so handsome as Ernie Foot. Her eyes wandered from them to the painted walls of which she had all the time been troubledly conscious—as of some outside tumult pressing for an attention necessarily postponed by vital events closer at hand. Now, with these events temporarily quiescent, the walls seemed to Arlene a turmoil indeed, a hurly-burly of raw colors all striving, like the sounds battering out of the piano, to be where no one could have expected them to be.

Under the glare of the long reflectors the colors were not only raw, they were savage. Orange and yellow, metallic blue, Noah's Ark red, arsenic green and flat black seemed exploded all round the room against a jagged background of pewtery silver. Some representation of human-like shapes seemed intended; for, outlined by black edges half an inch wide, deformed people appeared to be engaged in assuming contorted attitudes among such skyscrapers, automobiles and cemeteries, as a child demoniacally energized by utter liberty in a paint shop might have drawn and colored.

The deformed people, moreover, though flat, were all ponderous where it's least agreeable to be so; most of them were undressed but soiled; all wore dreary expressions curiously degraded. Arlene, to whom all this was new, could make nothing of it, was uncomfortably mystified.

Irene, observing the direction of her friend's gaze and its bafflement, began to whisper again. "Guess all that must be what they call her murals. Pretty, what? Nearly all naked; but over yonder she's got an old man with his hat on—or maybe it's only the rest of his head; you can't tell. What's this disease they catch in the jungle—elephant something-or-other? She certainly dotes on it!"

"Look out!" Arlene whispered. "Better not talk. I think she's noticing again."

"She couldn't hear. Anyway, we're talking about her own pictures, so she ought to be glad. Everything her own original design, that siss secretary said, didn't he? Look at the furniture—sofas with books in the ends of 'em and chairs made out of plumbing, like that model modern room they had at Marcy and Burton's. Original, Gosh Pete! And as for all this painting the papers yammered about——"

"Irene! She *is* noticing."

"Listen," Irene went on. "If Ola couldn't draw better pictures than that you ought to take her out of school. Say, look at *that* one; I just spotted *him*." She pointed at the wall. "Look! He's pushing a lawnmower on top of a cow. Isn't it a cow? It *looks* something like one and I bet——"

Across the room the secretary, Mr. Harry Shaftsbury, leaned against a metal door, his arms folded and his spelled gaze upon the dark skylight overhead. Mrs. Ives beckoned to him; he caught the slight gesture instantly, hurried noiselessly to her, bent over her and received whispered instructions. Immediately, like a blown feather, he crossed the room to the two exiles, stood before them smiling, leaned forward and whispered apologetically, "Mrs. Foot, if you *really* don't mind——"

"If I really don't mind what?"

"Just a moment or two longer—if you don't mind? Mrs. Ives is terribly sorry you're

bored with music; but really if you don't mind just a few minutes longer—just a *few* minutes, Mrs. Foot?”

His smile became caressive; he made placative gestures, and retired, returning to his place against the door as if assured that his errand had been successful, as indeed it was. Irene had been made to appear an oafish schoolchild publicly suppressed by the teacher, and everybody knew it; she best of all. Gulping, she made Arlene hear one last whisper.

“Got to just sit and take it all, I do. Golly, I'm *human*, ain't I?”

Arlene, helpless, felt a hot championage rising within her; but knew it for a useless emotion—she could do nothing to help this half-whipped friend. Over there on the other side of the big strange room, with her supporting cohorts about her, Mrs. Ives sat listening to the incoherent piano and apparently oblivious to the humiliation she had put upon one of her guests. Gracefully serene, she sat, seeming unaware of anything but the music she cared for. Yet was she? Arlene thought not.

It seemed to Arlene that Mrs. Ives wasn't really listening to the music at all but was solely intent upon Irene Foot; was thinking of Irene Foot as concentratedly and emotionally as Irene thought of her. The strange sounds of the piano hammered on upon Arlene's ears; the strange violence of the painted walls pounded upon her eyes; everything was strange to her—strange and ugly. Strangest and ugliest of all was her feeling that she sat watching a bitter, unequal duel between two women, and that the less merciful of the two held all the weapons. To Arlene, that seated motionless figure across the room seemed to emanate a watchful and calculating enmity; the splendid red tresses were the plumes of a cruel victor.

XVIII

SUDDENLY, and of course unexpectedly, the piano was silent. Voices nearby murmured, “Exciting!” “Amazing!” and “*Immensely* exciting!” The pianist swept the keys again, played stormily, bending his back to the work—then played tinklingly, stormed again, tinkled again, was thunderous abruptly, and finally, at the very top of an uproar, dropped his hands upon his lap and sat flaccid, as if exhausted. A buzz of approbation rose about him; and, murmuring enthusiastically, the nearer members of his audience left their chairs to talk to one another. In the midst of this decorous commotion Ernest Foot came from the double doorway by which Irene and Arlene had entered and near which they still sat; they’d never been far from it.

He didn’t see them, or appeared not to see them, but walked quickly across the broad open space of the room, hurried to Mrs. Ives. Irene looked at her wrist-watch. “Quarter after five. Think he lost his nerve—got scared of us? He looks like it to me. White as a sheet!”

Ernie was, in fact, pale enough for his lack of color to be observed at that distance, and Mrs. Ives was perceived to be solicitous. Retaining his hand, she looked up at him anxiously; but he smiled, shook his head, and Arlene guessed that he was speaking reassuringly of his health. At least, Mrs. Ives seemed reassured; she smiled in return, removed her hand somewhat lingeringly, and then, with a frankly affectionate gesture, placed it for an instant upon his shoulder and with a glance and a nod called his attention to the two guests near the distant wall. He turned his head, looked their way, nodded briefly and unsmilingly, then resumed his conversation with his hostess.

“You ever meet that fellow anywheres?” Irene inquired, lighted another cigarette and added, “Seems like I have. Can’t remember where, though. I thought he sort of spoke to us as if he recollected maybe being introduced to us some place, didn’t you? Look, she’s pawing him again. What’ll we do if he comes over to talk to us and we can’t remember his name?”

Mrs. Ives clapped her hands softly. “Quiet, please, everybody! Aklid’s going to make up to Ernest for what he’s missed by playing the second Lockettesque, the short one.” She glanced across the room amiably. “This’ll be a very *little* one, Mrs. Foot—if you just don’t mind a few little minutes—a very, very short piece that Ernest likes? Now shall we all sit down again, everybody?”

The suggestion was followed immediately; Ernie took a chair next to that of Mrs. Ives, folded his arms and looked fixedly at the back of the pianist. “Making it pretty plain, isn’t he?” Irene said. “Spoke to us all he’s going to, huh? You s’pose he thinks that’s society—not to notice your wife at a party? Or maybe teacher’s told him I had to be bawled out

before the whole school for disgracing myself whispering, so he's ashamed to be seen talking to me."

That wasn't Arlene's thought upon the matter; she was perplexed and alarmed by Ernie's not coming near them and by his unusual pallor. She had been more and more poignantly wondering what detained him, and vague suspicions disquieted her—suspicions concerned with the Lorenzo bunch and the curiosity of its members. Something must have happened to make Ernie Foot so late and so pale; and Arlene hoped shiveringly that Mabel Finch wasn't at the bottom of it.

"Look," Irene said, as the piano got well into its work again. "All right to talk now, just so it's the right party talking to the right party. See?"

Her allusion was to Mrs. Ives, whose glorious head almost touched the dark locks of Ernie Foot as she leaned sidewise from her chair to speak to him, not briefly, behind her hand. He listened deferentially, even devotedly; yet it seemed to the perturbed Arlene that he had the appearance of a man suffering from shock. Irene gave her little time to meditate further upon this.

"Guess I got a right to do what she did to me, haven't I?" Irene's breast heaved; she was frightened—afraid of what she herself was going to do—but she dared do it. Leaning forward, she made gestures as if to attract her husband's attention; at the same time she gave utterance to a hissing whistle. "*Pssst! Pssst, Ernie!*" Then she called out to him distinctly, though with a strained affectation of hushing her voice. "Ernie! *Sh!* You're disturbing the piano with all that talking. Mrs. Ives likes it *quiet* while the piano's going. Hush up, Ernie!"

The effect she produced was more than she wished or expected. The sensitive piano stopped despairingly; mild commotions, principally condolence, took place about the pianist, and Ernie Foot became as scarlet as he had been pale. So, moreover, did Mrs. Ives herself; she went swiftly to a great silver disk that hung from a lacquered gallows not far from her and struck upon it, with a baton, three loud blows.

Irene was laughing jerkily. "What's that for, Arlene, the cops? She going to have me hauled downtown in a police car?"

Mrs. Ives evidently didn't intend to go that far. The double doors opened to admit two white-clad colored men who brought with them a long, folding table, set it up quickly in the center of the room and covered it with a silvered cloth. More, Mr. Ben Raphael, sleekly dark and sleekly smiling, exquisite in dress, came in just afterward, went to his hostess and made a Continental bow over her hand, which he kissed.

Then he turned immediately and came to Irene and Arlene. "Well, girls?" he said. "Fine time?"

"Great!" Arlene informed him. "Ben Raphael, this is once in my life I'm glad to see you. Maybe you can help me do something with her."

"Maybe, instead, he could get my husband to come speak to me!" Irene said. "I've just had to call Mrs. Ives down for talking to him during the piano, Ben."

"No!"

"Oh, yes! With their heads just about touching—and guess what she did to *me* a while ago for just whispering a little to Arlene. Made a spectacle of me! I been used for a doormat ever since we got here and don't know just how much more I'm able to take. I've

stood about enough!"

"Too bad, too bad," Raphael said; and, though he perceived the agitation she sought to control, and his compassion was genuine, what he thought fit to add in a sympathetic tone was not soothing. "You were so confident, too, poor child! You were so sure you could _____"

She interrupted him pathetically. "Stick around, will you, Ben? Stay with me and Arlene. Don't go back over there to them."

"No, no, I'll stay; I won't leave you."

"It'll be a little help," she explained. "I can't fight a whole gang, and she's got 'em all behind her, especially my own husband. If I could get up something of a gang behind *me*, maybe I could stand up for myself a little better. She—she's pretty near got me down. You see——"

She paused, staring. Across the room and beyond the piano was the door against which Mr. Harry Shaftsbury had been leaning raptly; it opened, giving a glimpse of trees and shrubberies in deep twilight beyond it, before it closed behind two gentlemen of worldly and convivial appearance. One was the blond and stoutish Gillespie Ives and the other the portrait of an elderly country gentleman, grey tweeds, sherry complexion, portly waistcoat, clipped white mustache and twinkly eyes between rosy puffs—precisely the companion-piece to be coupled with the younger and rakishly debonair Ives. As they came in, Irene saw them instantly, jumped to her feet and uttered a little outcry.

"Ah, now," she said. "Now!"

Ives saw her at once, and, paying no attention to anything else, came across the room, bringing with him his companion, an air of high good-fellowship and the aroma of liquor. "Upon my word, this is jolly!" he said, and, seen close at hand, appeared flushed and a little unsteady. "How d'ye do, Arlene? That you, Raphael? Captain Robbie, Mrs. Parker. Irene, I think you already know bad old Captain Robbie."

"Yes," Captain Robbie said, and added with husky bonhomie, "Mrs. Parker, too, Gillie. Perhaps she's even an older friend of mine than she is of yours, my lad. Eh, Arlene?"

"Welcome, sailors!" Irene cried, laughed exultantly and placed her right hand upon Gillespie Ives's shoulder, her left upon Captain Robbie's. "Welcome to Robinson Crusoe's island! That's where Arlene and I been living at this High Art party." She dropped her hand from Captain Robbie's shoulder, but allowed the other to remain where it was. "Listen, Gillie! By the way, you don't s'pose your wife'll mind my calling you Gillie, do you? Think she'll be surprised?"

"She might," he admitted, glancing over his shoulder. "Ah—I haven't happened to mention——"

"Not even that you know me? Naughty!" Irene's new hilarity continued. "Maybe you're safe, though. She's so busy with my husband over yonder she hardly seems to notice. Guess what the old ladies in your Oldwood crowd call him. 'A little hardware clerk'! Yes, they do; I give you my word! We heard it. Look, they're putting food on the table. How about some hot dogs, now our gang's all here?"

"Hail! Hail!" Captain Robbie sang ingratiatingly, though with noticeable hoarseness. "Hail! Hail! The gang's all here! What the——"

Gillespie Ives stopped him. "Hush up, will you? See here, Irene; let's you and I and Robbie and Arlene slide out o' here. Let's go over to his house—we just ducked in to see if we couldn't get you. Let's not hang around here; my wife's probably going to have some more music or anyhow there'll be something about her murals. Somebody'll start in and read an essay, and we'll get stuck for it if we aren't careful. We can slip out that door yonder where Robbie and I just came in and——"

"Certainly we can!" Captain Robbie seconded him. "I live right next door; it's not two hundred yards by the garden path behind the house, and we can have a nice little spread over at my place. Widower's Hall, you know. Just a jolly little supper for old time's sake, what, Arlene?"

"No!" the uplifted Irene cried. "Afterwhile maybe; not yet. I got an idea *this* party might get better from now on!" She stepped between Ives and Captain Robbie and took an arm of each. "It might turn out not so frosty after all!"

Thus, with her two escorts, she moved boldly forward to the silver-covered table whereon were set dainty foods and ample drink. Ben Raphael followed; and so, perforce, did Arlene. At the same time Mrs. Ives, Ernest Foot, Mr. Mazzich, the secretary and the greater part of the company approached that laden cloth from the opposite side; and these two groups, though apparently ignoring each other, were confronted across the silver gleamings like opposing armies with a brook between them.

On Irene's side, she and Captain Robbie were lively; the Captain's too plain tendency was to be uproarious. Ives, a little tipsy, nevertheless showed uneasiness as Irene laid constant little commands upon him—"Gillie, hand me those sandwiches" . . . "Gillie, run bring me that chair from over yonder" . . . "Mix me an old-fashioned, Gillie, and don't dawdle about it!" . . . "Can't you hold that lighter steady, stupid?" Thus she sought to display him to his wife in the act of jumping over sticks; but, so far as human eye could detect, both Irene's mastery and his faintly protesting obediences were unnoticed by her for whose benefit they were projected.

On Mrs. Ives's side of the table, clumps of two and three, supplied with toast and tea, stood talking solemnly; but Ernest Foot and his hostess, withdrawing somewhat from the others, seemed immersed in an exclusive preoccupation with each other.

"You see those looks she gives him?" Raphael said to Arlene. "Looking down, then looking up full into his eyes for just a second, then down again. Ah, that isn't only to show Irene! This time the Venetian lady is in love."

"Oh, I'm afraid so!"

"Yes, it's serious. She's stood all she will from this stupid husband of hers; she's had about enough of him. Poor Ernie's very pale. I wonder——"

"Yes," Arlene said. "So do I. He was that way when he came."

Captain Robbie ended these confidential exchanges. "No secrets, Arlene! What you up to, Ben Raphael? Trying to get one of my old crew away from me? Arlene used to be my quartermaster on the good old ship Griswold. No secrets! We're all just happy boys and girls together!"

Captain Robbie's voice seemed unable to be anything but loud, perhaps through long competition with tempests. Arlene, watching Mrs. Ives, caught the glint of an icy glance in his direction, and the bluff Captain may have seen that glance, too. At any rate, he was

aware of his unpopularity with his friend's wife, and, pot-valiant, brazenly made light of it. He lifted a brimming amber goblet and called to her sonorously, "Your health, Eugenie!"

She seemed unaware; continued in low-toned talk with Ernest Foot.

"Your health, Eugenie!" Captain Robbie called again. "Not still sore at your bad old neighbor, the Captain, are you? Here's how!"

Upon this, Mrs. Ives turned slightly, so that her back was toward him. Irene laughed at him tauntingly.

"Eugenie really thinks the world of me," he protested, jovially addressing everybody. "Acts cross sometimes, pretending I lead her husband astray! Me! When I haven't been in a scrape these ten years that didn't happen through trying to follow him and make a better boy of him, so help me heaven!" Again he lifted his glass. "Eugenie! Quit making eyes at that young fellow and be jolly a while with your bad old neighbor. Don't be a clam, Eugenie!"

He evoked a gasping silence in the studio, which had received another spiritual shock. Only one voice dared reward the Captain's hardihood; Irene Foot's laughter rang out in the otherwise still room.

"You did it *that* time, Captain!" she cried, and slapped him upon the back. "You better be carefuller who you tell to stop making eyes and call a clam!"

Mrs. Ives turned her head slowly, not to look at the Captain but to give Irene conspicuously over the shoulder one of those glances that are more deadly than any words, and harder to bear. The glancer's attention seems caught for a moment, though not detained, by the would-be intrusion of some ignoble trifle too slight to be worthy even of disdain. Having deliberately completed this look, Mrs. Ives turned away, put a hand upon Ernie Foot's arm, and the two walked slowly across the room to the chairs near the deserted piano. There, aloof, they sat and resumed their talk, wearing the air of people who have responded to vulgarity by moving outside its besplashing orbit.

"Whew!" Captain Robbie whistled ruefully. "*You* got it from her that time, Irene. *Boo!* Talk about the Arctic circle!"

Gillespie Ives, more flushed and unsteady than when he'd arrived, pulled at Irene's elbow. "Come on, for God's sake!" he begged. "I knew we'd get in trouble if we stayed here. Let's go over to Robbie's. He and I'd better slip out first, and then you and Arlene can——"

"No!" Irene, breathing hard, stared at the two seated figures near the piano. "No!"

"Irene! Irene!" Arlene entreated. "Let's go home. It's *time* to go. Let's go home!"

"Home? When she's just got my own husband to help her insult me? No thanks! If you think I'm going to let——"

"Hush, please, everybody!" It was the secretary, Mr. Harry Shaftsbury, who spoke. He had received an almost imperceptible nod from Mrs. Ives, though she did not interrupt her murmured conversation with Ernest Foot. "We're asking you all for a few moments of your attention," Mr. Shaftsbury went on. He bowed smilingly toward one of the spectacled ladies. "Miss Miriam Birney of the Fine Arts Quarterly has paid Mrs. Ives the compliment of coming a long distance to see the murals, and, as we all know, our good friend Mr. Mazzich's address upon the occasion of the formal opening of the studio was

an inspiring comment. His closing remarks, in particular, we all found almost as exciting as the murals themselves. Miss Birney has asked Mr. Mazzich to repeat for us to-day those last remarks of his, and Mr. Mazzich has kindly consented to do so. Now Mr. Mazzich—if you're ready?"

"Very well. I shall not be tedious." Mr. Mazzich put his hands behind him, looked at the floor and spoke in a dead voice. "Such art as this is not for the obsolete mind, not for the reactionary. It is not for those embryonics whose vile sweetheart is prettiness. Surrealism, yes, and edited by Neo-Romanticism; but nevertheless organized, architectonic. Swept clean of representationalism, of accidents, it is also ruthlessly shorn of all save biting significances evoked from the subconscious impulsive. True, Eugenie Ives still concerns herself with rhythms in tri-dimensional space, the spatial relations of essential form. I have stood before an El Greco and I have grown dizzy. Works of Cézanne, of Vlaminck, of Polcek, of Casper Smith, of Alexis Kor and of Eugenie Ives have had the same exciting effect upon me. A sense of the universal psyche itself comes burning out of the color, overpowering me, almost suffocating me. No more exciting work than this is being done to-day. In its deliberate naïveté, in the power of its impact upon the untutored cerebrum of run-down academicism, if perhaps it stems from Modigliani, Ribera and Gauguin, yet it has the individual surging passion of tormented Van Gogh, of Tintoretto and of Hugo Miller. Eugenie Ives is for posterity."

He paused, bowed slightly to Mrs. Ives and to Miss Birney; then moved away to an accompaniment of softly pattering hands, an applause not sufficient to drown out a voice that spoke from the center of the room, near the table, affecting a confidential jocularity yet taking care to be heard. Irene, goaded beyond bearing and luckless in possessing too bold a heart, failed to be warned by what had already happened to her. Again and again she had dashed to the assault, only to be flung back, bleeding, by the stone wall behind which lay the enemy. She made a last grotesque attempt to mock that overwhelming rival.

"Fine!" she said, applauding, too. "What'd he say your wife's for, Gillie—prosperity? You know what, Arlene? I'm going down to Marcy and Burton's art department first thing to-morrow morning and buy me a cute little mural, myself. They got a lot of 'em. I'm going to get me one and hang it on the kitchenette wall in my and Ernie's apartment at the Lorenzo."

"Indeed!" Mr. Harry Shaftsbury exclaimed, approaching. "Did you say you were going to buy a mural to hang on your wall, Mrs. Foot? You mean a nicely framed mural, don't you?"

"Sure. Why not?" Irene frowned at him suspiciously. "I don't claim to know much about art; but——"

"Art? No," he said, and burst into a peal of girlish laughter. "I was thinking more of a dictionary!"

Upon this, all of Mrs. Ives's party, except Mrs. Ives herself and the pallid Ernie, loyally joined Mr. Shaftsbury in merriment. Irene, dumfounded, turned to Ben Raphael.

"Do they think I made some break? Is that what he meant?"

"It's nothing, poor child. It doesn't matter."

"No? Doesn't it? You don't know all that's been done to me here this afternoon! On top of it, do you think I'll let them laugh at me? Think I'll let her first insult me over and

over, then make my husband help her do it—and then *laugh* at me? *Laugh!*”

Irene’s straining voice broke, as did all that was left of her self-control. She swept aside the hand with which Arlene Parker clutched at her, and, striding, crossed the room startingly to stand before Eugenie Ives and Ernie. What she said was like an act of public violence. “Ernie Foot, your wife’s been laughed at and insulted in this house to-day and you haven’t even spoken to her. I’ll give you a last chance. I’m going home now if you’ll come with me—or else I’m going to another party. Which do you want it to be? Are you going to keep on sitting there or are you coming with me?”

Arlene, fluttering, reached her. “Irene, for mercy’s sake, let’s go. Let’s go!”

“Go?” With eyes that suddenly glistened along their lower lids, where tears of passion and despair appeared, Irene stared down at the two people seated close before her.

Neither had so much as glanced up at her. Ernie Foot’s right hand, upon the arm of his chair, twitched a little; but Eugenie Ives leaned slightly forward and for an instant set gentle fingers upon that hand, in authoritative reassurance. Then, seeming unaware of any interruption, she went on talking to him, almost inaudibly; while he, his pallor deathly now, smiled with a sad gratitude to her, and went on listening.

“Go?” Irene cried again, and, weeping, laughed aloud. “You bet your damn life I’ll go! Come on!” She ran to the door that opened into the garden, the door by which Gillespie Ives and Captain Robbie had entered. She jerked it open. “Good-by, Ernie Foot!” she shouted, and ran out.

THE ONLY friend she had in the world followed her. Darkness was wet and heavy outside the door. Arlene found herself in a cold drizzle of rain and among confusing shrubberies. Advancing slowly, calling, "Irene? Irene?" she kept a guarding hand outstretched before her, and it encountered the hard wet trunk of a tree. "Irene, where are you?" she called, and had no response until she heard a sobbing that came from a little distance.

The pathetic sound was continuous and guided her to the weeping, vague concentration of darkness that was the form of her friend. "Irene, you poor thing——"

Irene drooped upon Arlene's breast, clung to her. "She's got him, Arlene—she's taken him away from me. You saw it! They all saw it! He wouldn't even look at me, wouldn't speak to his own wife—and everybody looking on! He knew it, too; he knew everybody was looking. He let me *die* there, right before them all. He let me die just to please her!"

To Arlene, who had just seen Ernie looking at Mrs. Ives, this didn't seem a great exaggeration. "Never mind, dearie. What we care? Men are crazy, let 'em go! Come on, hon, let's get back to the Chev, if we can find the way. We got to get home."

"Home?" Irene could only sob and cling. "Where *I* got any home now? You don't believe it; but I used to love Ernie Foot. He's stuck on himself—it'd make you sick how much he looks at himself in the glass—he's stuck on himself and stingy—I wouldn't have the clothes on my back if Ben hadn't loaned me some money—but I *did* used to love Ernie! Honest I did! You were right about Gillie Ives; just as a fellow, he isn't half the man Ernie is. All Gillie knows is what you said—just making love to a woman and trying to get hold of her. Outside of that, he's dumb. Look the way they looked in there where you could see 'em both—Ernie pale and kind of grand-looking and Gillie puffed under the eyes and silly soft fat-looking—and tight at that. And she had Ernie! She's been after him from the day he first took those rotten chromium hinges out there, and now she's got him. She's got him! She's got him!"

"What we care?" Arlene said valiantly. "Let her keep him if he's turned out that kind of a fellow. What we care? What we want now, hon, we got to get back to that Chev. Guess we must be somewheres in behind the house; but that darned studio hasn't got any windows—I can't see a thing. Come on, though, let's——"

"She's got him! He used to tell me he loved me. It must 'a' been a lot if she could take him away from me like that! She's cold-blooded. Think she'd ever married Gillie Ives except for the money? Nobody but a cold-blooded woman could do to another woman what she's done to me to-day right from the minute we got to the house. All the time before, I was sure if she tried anything I could show her where to head in. Almost the first thing they pulled, that yellow-faced Mazzich told me I didn't even have the looks on her.

They've made Ernie think that, the fool; and she's got him! I thought I could out-smart her. Oh, *Gosh*, Arlene, ain't it awful, awful, awful!"

"Come on, dearie!" With an arm about her, Arlene urged her to move forward. The drizzle was heavier, drove chillingly against them on the winter wind, and the darkness was thick, broken only by two faint oblongs of light at a distance and seemingly high in the air. "There," Arlene said. "Somebody's lit a room upstairs in the back of the house. I think now we can work around to the front where we left the car. Come on, dearie; we don't want to catch our death of cold."

"I do!" Irene sobbed. "If I can't even keep my own husband from a red-haired woman with a face like that, what's the use?"

A shaft of light flared through the darkness, not touching them but momentarily revealing tossed strands of rain, the glistening trunks of trees and raindrops gliding down the stems of leafless bushes. Opaque bulks moved in this light close to its source, human figures emerging from the studio door, which closed with a crash, leaving the night black again except for the two high, faint windows. The voice of Gillespie Ives was heard.

"I've let her go her own way, haven't I? What the devil's she mean taking me to task for going mine? Making an exhibition of herself in there right now with that fellow and then daring to say such things to me! Now where are those girls? They wouldn't wait long in this beastly rain. You see 'em, Robbie?" He called out, "Mrs. Foot? I say there, Mrs. Foot! Irene?"

"Don't answer," Arlene whispered. "Don't——"

"We're here!" Irene called, choked, laughed gulpingly and called again, "Here we are! How long'd you expect us to wait standing right under Niagara Falls? We wouldn't been here except we couldn't find the way back to our car. Where are you?"

"Wait!" the husky voice of Captain Robbie responded. "I've got a flashlight. We'll show you the way."

Arlene looked into the bright core of the flashlight; there was husky laughter, and the light, descending to the ground, showed a narrow path of small flat stones winding through the flat grass.

"I'll go ahead," the Captain said. "Just follow the light, the rest of you. Weather, what? We'll be out of it soon and all snug. Follow along, boys and girls; follow along!"

"Where?" Arlene asked sharply. "Follow where?"

Gillespie Ives had reached Irene and taken her arm. "We can't get round the house the way you were going," he said. "Just follow along and you'll be all right. Come, Irene."

They moved after the disk of light that flickered over the ground before them, and Arlene, though following, too, knew that the way they took didn't lead round the house to her car. She protested, and had but fragmentary responses from ahead, "Can't hear you!" and "Hurry!" and "Let's get out of this deluge!" Thus, continuing to object without avail, she still unwillingly followed, and after a time was aware of a figure walking beside her, keeping pace with her. The shoulders stooped and the hatless head was bent to meet the rain. Arlene wasn't sure.

"That's not *you*, Ben Raphael?"

"Yes, I'm here."

“Then this is one more time,” she told him, struggling with her flapping, watery hat. “Second time in my life I’ve been glad to see you. How’d you get here?”

“My two feet,” he said. “I’m not invited; I just came. Irene’s old-fashioned emotional exploit rather broke up the party, and made our host and hostess old-fashioned, too. They had words just after you left.”

“Quarreling?”

“A very short talk at a little distance from the rest of the company—but with gestures! Naturally she’d wish to know how he’d met Mrs. Foot and how he’d never happened to mention knowing her so well. At least, that was my guess. He’d better look out. The fair Eugenie means business—yes, and so might Ernie Foot! His expression’s pretty queer.”

“Yes. I’m scared to death to guess why, too.”

“Yes,” Raphael said. “You might be right. Everybody in the Lorenzo bunch always wants to know everything about everybody else in the bunch. They live on it. What’s more, none of them can bear knowing anything without seeing that all the others know it—especially if there’s one that *oughtn’t* to know it. Telling it to that one is really what makes life worth living.”

“Oh, Golly!” Arlene said. “Then you think so, too.”

“Think what, too?”

“Think that’s why Ernie was late,” Arlene said. “You think Mabel picked to-day—of all days on earth!—and got Art to feel it was his duty to get hold of Ernie and tell him about seeing Irene keeping a date with Ives on the South Side!”

“Well—it might be.”

“Oh, Golly! What’ll Irene put on top of that now?”

His muttered reply was lost in the noise of the rain and wind. “Hurry!” Captain Robbie called back. “It’s coming on harder; but we’ll soon be out of it if you hurry. All flat ground ahead, so run; you needn’t fear. Run for it!”

Arlene, drenched and scurrying, heard floundering ahead and a bitter swearing. “It’s Gillie,” Mr. Raphael explained. “He fell down; but she’s got him up. He wasn’t too sure on his feet in the studio, I noticed. Here. There’s a little hole in a hedge to squeeze through.”

Arlene, fumbling, felt only wet twigs; but Raphael took her hand, led her through the narrow gap; they pressed forward and saw lighted windows before them. Then a door opened, and, against the brightness of the aperture, dark silhouettes could be seen moving and mingling as the three in advance crossed the threshold. “Captain Robbie’s cottage,” Ben Raphael said. “You knew that, didn’t you?”

“Yes. Hurry. They might shut us out.”

“Us? No, only one of us, Arlene. The idea is a little party of four.”

He was right about that. Captain Robbie, in the doorway, welcomed Arlene warmly. “Come in, girl, come in! Side door and this is my little dining-room; but there’s always something on the sideboard. Widower’s Hall, you know! Nobody on earth I’d rather see here than you, Arlene.”

Then, as the two dripping figures passed him and came into the room, the change in his voice showed that he was surprised but not delighted. “Oh, Raphael, is it? You came

along, too, did you?”

“Yes, it seems so.”

The room, paneled in wood painted white and enlivened by sporting-prints in color, a moose’s head and a tarpon, was cosily warm. Opposite Arlene, as she came in, and beyond the glossy mahogany round table, a coal fire glowed under a white marble mantel. Irene and Gillespie Ives stood there, drying themselves and already supplied with small glasses of brandy. Irene’s face was still wet with rain and tears; but during the stormy short walk she had changed. Fever was in her cheeks and in her eyes; she looked both dazed and reckless, and was laughing noisily.

“Hello, Ben Raphael!” she cried. “Well, when there’s hell to pay, the more the merrier, says I! Here’s how!” She drank, waved the little glass and set it down on the mantelpiece, empty. “Look at Gillie, all covered with mud and got a cut on the chin. His wife ought to see him now, oughtn’t she?”

Ives, with a handkerchief to his chin, protested thickly. “Drop it, will you? Always ragging!” He put his hand on her shoulder. “Turn round and look at me. You never do look at me full in the eyes, Irene, and I want——”

She shook off his hand, went to the table and sat. “Sit down, Ben. I want you to talk to me. You know art, and I want you to tell me about it. Honest, I want to know about art, Ben.”

Captain Robbie, bringing bottles and glasses upon a tray from the sideboard to the table, interposed. “No, no; we’ve already had enough art to sink us. Scotch and soda and old Blue Grass Bourbon, honest elixirs; I hate cocktails and I hate art. Widower’s Hall, everything free and easy; but no art, thank you! Besides, Raphael’s only stopped in to ’phone for a taxi; he doesn’t want to stay.”

“He’s got to,” Irene said. “Sit down, Ben; do you hear me? Sit down!”

“Since you ask me.” He took the chair opposite her.

“Tell me the truth, will you?” Elbows upon the table, she leaned forward, looking at him searchingly. “Honest, wasn’t it terrible, all that mess she’d made on those walls?”

“Who can say? If you mean does she know anything about painting something that’s difficult to represent, why, no, she doesn’t. Nothing at all. If you mean could she take a pencil, or a piece of chalk or paint and a brush, and model an orange so that you could be sure it wasn’t a setting sun or a pumpkin or a poker chip, why, no, I doubt if she could. On the other hand, she can decorate in a modern way, can express herself, can develop patterns, can——”

“Listen!” Irene struck the table a blow with her fist. “I thought so! Couldn’t I if I tried? *Couldn’t I?*”

“Possible,” he said placidly. “You might, if someone first showed you a little about the _____”

“I thought so!” Irene drank quickly and deeply from the glass Robbie had placed before her. “I could do it. I thought I could and now I know it! Soon as I saw ’em I knew I could make these murals or whatever they call the damn things—make ’em till the cows come home! So that Mazzich bug was just feeding her applesauce, wasn’t he?”

“No, he meant it. He’s very genuine, very sincere, very——”

“Sure! The squirrel’d be the same way about mine, too! Listen, Ben, I want to know _____”

“Here! What about me?” Ives came forward plungingly and dropped into a chair next to Irene, at the table. “I’m the lad you’re supposed to be with, you know. Don’t I hear enough about art at home—when I have to go there?” He addressed Robbie indignantly. “*You* heard what Eugenie said to me, Robbie. Why, she’d been nowhere if it weren’t for me—nowhere at all—and yet she presumes to talk to me like that! Who *was* she in this town till I gave her the chance? Just a nobody of a nobody family. *You* know that, Robbie.”

Robbie, urging Arlene to sit at the table, paid no attention. “Just a little while, Arlene—just for sweet old time’s sake.”

“I won’t. I’ve got to get her home. Irene, do you know what *time* it is? We’ve got to _____”

Irene waved her off impatiently. “No, I’m talking to Ben. He says I could make those cuckoo murals as easy as she can, and Ben knows. Ben says——”

Ives seized her waving hand. “Here! You keep forgetting *I’m* the lad you’re with. You’re with me and Arlene’s with Robbie, and that’s all the party, darling. Didn’t you hear Robbie say Raphael only stopped in to telephone for a taxi to come out and get him? Robbie’s got a colored man in the kitchen who’ll do us a very passable little meal afterwhile, and we four will——”

“No, we won’t,” Arlene said. “Ben doesn’t need a taxi; he can go with Irene and me in my car. We’ve got to get home for dry clothes in the first place, and in the second——”

“Dry clothes?” Captain Robbie laughed heartily. “Didn’t I tell you this is Widower’s Hall? Your clothes’ll be drying while we have a bathrobe dinner. Just you and Irene hop upstairs and——”

Arlene bent over Irene. “Dearie, won’t you come home? Don’t you remember what I told you about my coming out here with you? I can’t get home now before he’s there. It might be bad for me, dearie—awful bad. *Won’t* you come now?”

Irene looked at her absently. “You go on home then. I got to stay, you see.” She turned to Ives, who still retained her hand. “You’re *sure* you meant everything you said to me, Gillie?” She smiled upon him winningly. “Every single word?”

“Dearest girl,” he said with ardor. “Dearest girl!”

ARLENE APPEALED despairingly to Ben Raphael. "I've got to get home, Ben; I've just *got* to! I can't go without her. What can I do?"

"Do?" Captain Robbie echoed gayly. "I'll tell you; *I've* got the idea. What's the use everybody getting wet? One'll be enough. Raphael's a good fellow; he won't mind going for your car. He can trot right along back the way we came and round the Manor to the parking space in front and get your car and drive it out to the road and then turn in my driveway and bring it right up to my front door. Sorry you won't stay; but if you've got to go, why, that's the best way."

"Would you, Ben?" Arlene glanced at Irene, who, murmuring caressively, was touching her glass to that of the ardent Ives. "Would you, Ben? I didn't lock the car. I'd rather go with you, but——"

"No, no," he said, rising. "I'll bring it as quickly as I can."

At the door, however, he hesitated, and glanced doubtfully at Captain Robbie, whose face was benevolent. "I don't know," Raphael said. "Maybe it would be better if——" Then, seeming to make up his mind, he opened the door abruptly, and was gone.

"Admire me, everybody!" Captain Robbie exclaimed in warm self-congratulation. "When you can't show a gooseberry he is a gooseberry, why, just be polite and let him find out for himself! The water company dug a ditch straight across my driveway this afternoon; but there's a red lantern there; he won't get into any trouble. If he leaves the car in the road and walks in, all we have to do is not hear the bell. If it rings too long we can disconnect it." The Captain burst into a roar of laughter. "Widower's Hall, what? Always hospitable—but only to the right people!"

"You idiot!" Arlene cried. "Do you think his not getting in's going to keep us here?"

"No, no. It only gives us more time to persuade you."

Arlene sat down by the fire, and, without speaking to him, pushed away the glass he urged upon her. "Irene," she said. "Ben Raphael'll have the car out on the road for us in a few minutes, and he'll come back here to let us know. You'll come home with me then, won't you?"

Irene shook her head. "Home? Why, no! That's all off, don't you see?"

"You mean you won't come, Irene?"

"Why should I?"

"On my account," Arlene said. "You remember what I told you. Don't you see what you're doing to me?"

"Me? No. I told you to go ahead, Arlene. No use your getting in trouble at all—

certainly not on my account. If Ben comes back hammering on the door, you go straight along with him.”

“No,” Arlene said. “When you go I go, and not before. So what happens to me is up to you, Irene.”

Irene, listening to Ives, seemed not to hear her; he was again speaking of his wife’s ingratitude. “Everything on earth she wanted she owes to me, and look at the life she’s led me since almost the day we were married. Nothing but one fad after the other, house kept full of freaks and men I don’t know. Marriage nothing but misery——”

“Just misery!” Irene interrupted eagerly. “That’s all *I*’ve had out of it. Just selfishness and stinginess and him always trying to make the hit and take the lead and——”

“Take the lead?” Ives cried. “That’s exactly the trouble. She’s always got to be the leader—no rest for a minute, nothing but turmoil in the house, just restlessness, restlessness, restlessness! You and I’ve both had terrible married lives, Irene. We ought to make up for that to each other.”

“We will,” she said. “That’s just what we’ll do from now on. We’ll make up to each other all the rest of our lives and everything’ll be different from now on.” She took off her hat and tossed it upon the table. “It’s sopping wet,” she explained sweetly. “I know you wouldn’t want me to wear a wet hat, Gillie dear, and I’m going to do everything you want. I promise never to paint any murals—I could if I wanted to; but I won’t. I won’t, just on your account, Gillie; there’ll be lots other things I can do. I won’t have my picture in the paper all the time, either—only just every now and then. I’ll do everything you want me to and I’ll——”

“Irene!” Arlene said sharply. “Put down that glass and listen to me. Don’t drink that.”

“Why not?” Irene drank and extended the empty glass toward Robbie. “I’m chilly; it’ll keep me from taking cold. I think I ought to have some more.”

Captain Robbie supplied her copiously, and, pulling a chair close to Arlene’s, sat down and became plaintive. “Arlene, you used to be the best little pal in the world; all this Puritanism’s pretty hard on your old friends. Turning the cold shoulder on us—it isn’t kind and it isn’t fair. Be natural. You used to be the life of the party, and I know all that good-fellowship’s still right under the surface and wants to come out. Let it come! Just between us two old friends——”

He continued; but Arlene, mechanically pushing away the arm he tried at intervals to put round her, was aware of him only as one is aware of some minor persistent annoyance. She understood that even if she were alone with Irene now she couldn’t hope to reach her mind or her emotions; though, for that matter, there seemed no way to be alone with her. Both Ives and Robbie were in the unpredictable stage of intoxication, and Irene herself was no longer sober. More, she had lost even a woman’s rudimentary policy; all the provocative guile that until now had withheld everything was gone, collapsed in the shock of the afternoon’s defeat.

Arlene thought of Roy at the Lorenzo; he would be there now, had been there probably half an hour, waiting. If, when she came, she had to tell him that for the sake of his own peace of mind he’d better not ask her where she’d been, the benefit to his peace of mind would be problematical. What was she doing to him as well as to herself—and in heaven’s name why was she doing it? For Irene’s sake? But Roy was incomparably dearer

to her than Irene was; his little finger was worth a hundred Irene's. Arlene jumped up.

"Irene, we're going out to the road now to meet the car. Get out of that chair, put on your hat and——"

"Why, no," Irene said, mildly surprised. "He and I are going to spend the rest of our lives making up to each other for what we've suffered. He wants me to stay, and I can't begin by doing what he doesn't want."

"You can't? Not when I tell you this is the very last place on earth where *I* ought to be? Do you understand, Irene, I've tried to be your friend and in return you're ruining me?"

That did somehow touch Irene. She looked up, blinking; sneezed, coughed and got to her feet. "I guess maybe I *am* catching a cold," she said apologetically to Ives. "Don't you mind, sweetie, because I'll see you first thing to-morrow—and right along every single minute after that, the rest of our lives; but I kind of feel like maybe I'm getting kind of a sore throat, so I expect maybe I *had* better run along now."

"What?" He looked up at her reproachfully. "Just the very first minute we're trying to make up to each other for all that, you're going back on me?"

"No, no; I'll never go back on you! But just now Arlene says——"

"Arlene?" he cried. "Are you Arlene's or are you mine?"

"Yours! I'm going to be yours for better or worse until death doth us part. Yours!"

"Mine? Then you've got to stay!" he said; and, as she leaned smiling toward him, where he sat, he took her about the waist and pulled her down upon his knee. "There! Darling, we'll both be so happy!"

Captain Robbie had a thought for precautions and perceived one he'd thoughtlessly omitted. "Perfectly lovely," he said, "but just a little too much of a tableau with the window-shades all up. Still raining, but this is a gossipy neighborhood and I wouldn't put it past that old Mrs. Behrman, next neighbor on my other side, snooping around in any weather to look in on the bad old Captain. Can she talk! Since the party's getting so pleasant I'll just pull down the shades."

Rising, he crossed the room, caroming from the table as he went, and would have lowered the shade of the window nearest him; but Arlene had an instinctive impulse to prevent him, strode after him and caught his uplifted hand.

"Don't do that!"

"What? Why not?"

"I'm not going to be cooped up here with the shades pulled down!" she said fiercely. "Let it alone!"

He was delighted. "Isn't that like a woman? Afraid of being seen, so she wants everybody to see her! Listen, Arlene——"

"*No!* You don't pull 'em down—not while *I'm* here!"

"Now, darling——" Laughing, Captain Robbie tugged at the shade and she strove to push him away. Nothing loth, he struggled with her. "Kind of fighting I like!" he said.

Through the window Arlene saw vaguely a face outside in the rain. "Ben Raphael's back!" she cried. "I'll——" She meant she'd open the door for him, and it was not the wrestling with Captain Robbie that kept her from finishing the sentence. The face outside,

approaching into the shaft of light from the window, was not Ben Raphael's.

Under a tweed cap and above a grey raincoat buttoned to the chin, it revealed itself dimly and wetly but with sufficient distinctness as the face of the delicate young man, Shaftsbury, Eugenie Ives's secretary. Behind him two figures advancing under the shelter of an umbrella became discernible. The rain was now half snow; soggy flakes gleamed waterily upon the top of the umbrella, which tilted back to give those beneath it a better view into Captain Robbie's dining-room—where Irene sat fondly upon the knee of Gillespie Ives, and where Arlene stood transfixed with Captain Robbie's arms about her.

The tilting of the umbrella gave to view the face of Mrs. Ives herself and the pallor and burning eyes of Ernie Foot. Arlene, as she stared out through that fateful window, was conscious of details—of the melting snow on the umbrella, of the protuberant, excited and delighted stare of the secretary, of the whiteness of his eyelashes, of nausea in the expression of Ernie Foot and of a glittering satisfaction in the gaze of Eugenie Ives. Ruin was there irretrievably for Irene Foot—but not for Irene alone.

Captain Robbie's shoulder was toward the window. Laughing, enchanted with his wrestling, he was at first pleased when Arlene's resistance stopped and she stood rigid. Almost immediately, however, her expression disturbed him; and, with his face close to hers, staring at her as she stared through the window, he saw horror in her look. His laughter perished in a series of husky anti-climaxes, like the sound of a saw growing feebler as it cuts through the last shreds of wood, and stops.

"What——" he said, turned and saw three figures and an umbrella disappearing from the rhomboid of light outside the window. "Who was that?" He goggled at Arlene. "Who were they? Who were those three people?"

"Ernie Foot!" she gasped, and added indistinctly, "Gillie Ives's wife and that secretary—Ernie Foot——"

Ives was pulling Irene's head down to his. "Oh, be kind to me, dear—at last!" She was willing; but, almost as their lips touched, he became better aware of what passed on the other side of the room, by the window; he half realized that Arlene had just uttered words of import.

He forgot to kiss Irene. "What did you say?" he asked in a puzzled voice. "What were you saying, Arlene? Who'd you say was where?"

"Your wife! Ernie Foot and your wife and that secretary!"

Ives frowned. "What about them?"

It was Robbie who answered, a Captain Robbie with no laughter left in him. "Your wife! Her husband and your wife and Shaftsbury. They came right up to the window and looked in."

"What window? When?"

"This window! Now! Just this minute!"

"What?" Irene looked at Arlene. "Ernie was there? He saw me?"

"Yes. She did, too. They saw us *all*."

"Then that settles it!" Irene began to weep and to exult at the same time. "Serves Ernie right! Yes, and her too! It's what they both wanted and now they've got it. It isn't our fault, Gillie; they pushed us into it. They got just what they been asking for, both of 'em!

Maybe they can put us in a hole in court; but that won't last long, so what do you and I care? You and I'll have a thousand times the best of it afterwards. Ah, just let *her* try go living in a Lorenzo flat for a while with a man that's——”

“Court?” Ives said; and, rising, pushed her from him. “Court?” He turned incredulously toward Robbie. “One of your practical jokes? *I* didn't see anybody at the window.”

“No; you weren't looking.” Captain Robbie, indeed no longer the jolly old sea-dog ashore, was sobered. “Joke? You'll find out if it's a joke. It's a terrible business. For myself I don't care; but I've got a good old sister that'll just break her heart if the newspapers——”

“Newspapers!” Ives said angrily. “You don't suppose I'm going to let it get that far, do you?”

“No?” the Captain asked with satire. “What'd they have Shaftsbury with 'em for except for a witness? What comes out in court'll all be in the newspapers, won't it?”

“Court!” Ives said again. “I'm not going to be dragged into court; I won't stand for it!” Frightened, he showed agitation; his voice shook, so did his gesturing hands, and all at once he was haggard. “She asked me for a divorce again three months ago. I told her 'never!' and I meant it.”

“Lots of good that'll do you,” the Captain said. “She doesn't have to ask you now; she can just go and get it.”

“I won't stand for it! She can't——”

“But—but—Gillie!” Irene stammered. Her mouth dropped open; she was in a lamentable perplexity. “But, Gillie, it's just what we *wanted*. We were just saying so. What's the matter? Don't you think the sooner it comes the better?”

“The sooner what comes?”

“Why, divorce. She's been after him since the first time she saw him—anybody can see that now—and so, well—*let* 'em! We'll have it on 'em in the long run, won't we? We'll be married and laughing at 'em.”

“Married?” Ives said. “*I am* married!”

She lifted her arms toward him pitiably. “Yes, but after the divorce you and I'll be married of course.”

He made gestures expressing his unbearable annoyance and his despair of ever understanding women. “For God's sake, don't talk that to me now! I've got to think how to get out of this.”

“You aren't going to marry me, Gillie? You mean you never wanted to?”

“*I am* married!” he said again, with a worried kind of indignation; but mitigated this tone at once and went on hurriedly, “I'll see you again—if we get this straightened out. You just get on home now as fast as you can and try to fix it up with your husband, so *he* won't make a row, too. Tell him we were just fooling—had the shades up and everything. Tell him——”

“What?” Irene said weakly. “Instead of me—you want to stay married to a woman like that?”

Staring at him with rounder and rounder eyes, she moved backward from him until she

was stopped by the table. Still facing him, she put her hands upon its surface behind her, for support, and said slowly and wonderingly, as the revelation came at last, "Oh—I see! You were just fooling with me. You've got to stay where the *money* is. So it must all be hers. You haven't got any. I—see."

Ives appealed plaintively to Arlene. "Just get her home, will you? You always were a good sport, Arlene; get her home and help fix it up with her husband while Robbie backs me up with my wife. He and I've got to get over there and smooth this thing out as soon as we——Oh, murder! What's the *matter* with her?"

His desperate allusion was to Irene. Leaning back against the table, she had begun to sink. She slid downward and ended by sitting upon the floor, sagged forward. She said nothing, but shook and quivered in a fit of sick coughing.

Arlene knelt beside her, striving to get her upon her feet. "Expect me to carry her home all alone after what you and your wife have done to her?" she asked of the distracted Ives, and added bitterly, as the outer door was tried and the latch rattled, "Have either of you got enough sense to open that door or are you still expecting to keep this just a little party of four?"

THE SNOW, though stiffened on a colder wind and not melting now, was still soft enough to cling to whatever it touched. The formless black night developed itself into a landscape sketched in grey chalk; and, on the road outside Captain Robbie's driveway gates, the Parkers' sedan projected twin long cones of light wherein the nearer flakes twinkled like diamonds, those beyond showed as flitting white, and the farthest were almost indistinguishable from the general grey. Snow covered the top of the car, lodged on the windows and remained here and there upon the occupants; though two of them had done what they could to brush it from the third, Irene, who was half prostrate upon the back seat. Ben Raphael, in front, brushed snow from his still hatless head and from the shoulders of Arlene beside him; but she seemed unaware of his thoughtfulness. When she had the car in motion she was intent upon only the half-moon of glass kept clear before her by the strokes of the faintly squeaking wiper, and within half a minute she had pushed the sedan into a speed that made Raphael anxious.

"Easy! Easy!" he said. "These Oldwood roads twist and dip, and it's skiddy, Arlene. We're all right now; we've got her out of there. There's no need for such hurry now."

"Isn't there?" She sent the speedometer a little higher. "Oh, no! No need for hurry now!"

They heard Irene's voice from the seat behind them. "Bragging! Did you hear him bragging over and over about his wife owing everything to him?" Her tone was one of childlike petulance and complaint. "That old woman with the crutch said the same thing, too. She's his aunt, I guess. Said those two sisters'd never got anywhere except for him. What's the sense of that kind o' talk if he never had a cent? I bet he hasn't, either—not a cent to his name! Oh, glory, but I feel rotten! I'm sick and I'm pretty near froze. Say listen, where are you hauling me?"

"Never mind." Raphael leaned over the back of the front seat and adjusted a rug that had slid down from her. "Hold this closer round you, Irene. We'll be home soon."

"Home? Oh, my glory! Home! Guess you mean the Lorenzo; but don't say it, don't make me any sicker or you'll be sorry." She sneezed, laughed shudderingly and was peevish again. "I got a sore throat. You're a nice little fellow, Ben Raphael, you are! I bet you knew it and never told me. I bet you knew she had all the money. I bet you knew he was lying when he said he'd given her everything. I bet you knew——"

"No," he said. "I didn't *know*. I knew he'd given her what's called position, because he comes from an important family and I've heard she didn't—of course that's what he meant when he complained of having 'given her everything'. I've only known them a little while—since she heard through Mazzich I had ideas about art and asked my advice

upon her murals. People in my position aren't likely to know the circumstances of people in theirs."

"No, nor in mine," Irene mumbled. "My position! That's a fast one, isn't it? 'Flower of the Lorenzo', Emma calls me. That ought to put me in the Rotogravure Section, oughtn't it?" Abruptly she sat upright; her voice became high and strained. "Oh, Golly! Only this afternoon I was going to have that high-yellow chauffeur kept out of Foxglen Farms for getting fresh with me! I thought I was within about a week of being the big show myself at Foxglen Farms, I did. Gosh Pete, but I'm sick! As if any fool couldn't 'a' seen by the way everybody acted it was her that had it all! Plain enough now; but that's what they call hindsight, isn't it? You're a tricky little fellow, Ben Raphael, and you're smart. I bet you did know."

"No, no, I didn't," he protested, and went on trying to exculpate himself. "I may have had some idea; but I didn't know. It's only very lately that I heard——"

"I thought so! Everybody in town knew it, until you get down to the Lorenzo bunch, and even there Ben Raphael knew it, but kept it to himself. Gosh, I'm like ice! Great little friend, Ben Raphael; knew Gillie Ives lived on his wife, but wouldn't tell me! Knew it all the time, but——"

"I told you he was the stupidest man on earth," Raphael said doggedly. "I thought that would be enough."

"Yes, you did!" Irene cackled with a laughter that was broken by a fit of coughing. "What's it matter? You weren't—weren't the only one that knew it. Ernie Foot! So look what I've done! A rich woman after him all the time, and nothing but I and Ernie fighting at home—she purring over him, getting him cultured all up on art and feeding him Virginia ham and French pastry and silver filigree, and me either not speaking to him or razzing the ears off him! Him wanting to lead the finer life! Well, I've fixed him all up to go ahead and lead it—with a rich wife! So now he can. And *will* he? *Boy!*" She collapsed upon the seat again, pulling the rug about her convulsive shoulders. "Ought to thank me, oughtn't he? Just sat down on Gillie's lap a minute—and made Ernie rich! Just that easy! Yes, and here *I* am—on the town! I'm freezing and sick with rotten drinks and broke and got no home and on the town. Fixed myself pretty, didn't I? Glory, glory, glory hallelujah!"

Raphael tried to speak to her again in defense of himself; but he no more than made his voice audible before Arlene sharply bade him be silent. "Let her alone!" Irene lay half extended, shivering, coughing, mumbling and sometimes sobbing under the rug she clutched about her and pulled partly over her head. The car, at higher speed, swayed, heaved and seemed to bound under its passengers. Descending a slope into the broader parkway, it slid sidewise prophetically, and Raphael, with no voice to do more, uttered a squeak of protest. Arlene got the wheels controlled, sped forward again and asked grimly, "Want out?"

"No, not now that I've got my breath back. I don't see why you take such chances, though."

"You don't?" Arlene said. "She's chilled through, isn't she? Maybe you haven't noticed that."

"Yes, but a difference of a minute or two won't——"

“Maybe not, Ben Raphael. Perhaps you’ve forgotten what I told you while we were dragging her out to the car?”

“That her husband and Mrs. Ives and Shaftsbury looked through the window? No, I haven’t forgotten that.”

“Yet you don’t understand why I’ve got to get to the Lorenzo before Ernie Foot does? You don’t understand that?”

“But you can’t, Arlene. You can’t be there before Ernie is.”

“I will, though!” she said. “I will unless he had the start of me.”

“I think he did,” Raphael told her. “It’s not my fault; you can thank Captain Robbie. When I got to your car I didn’t even stop to go in the house for my hat and overcoat; but your engine was cold. I was forever starting it. Then when I came to the red lantern outside Robbie’s driveway the snow was so thick I thought it was the rear light of another car turning in there and I sat and honked for it to go ahead. That French car of Mrs. Ives’s went by me; but I don’t think she was in it. Her chauffeur was driving and there was a man on the back seat; I think it was Ernie.”

At that, Arlene’s shoulders drooped; but she said nothing, nor abated speed. It had taken time to get Irene out of Robbie’s house and to bring her down his driveway and round the ditch and into the car—as much as twenty minutes, Arlene thought, perhaps longer. Ernie Foot, on his way to the Lorenzo, might be half an hour in advance of her; and now she hadn’t a doubt that he was on his way to the Lorenzo. Misery loves company; so does excitement, and so does a betrayed husband. If Art Finch, contentedly married, had felt it a duty to undeceive Ernie Foot about his wife, how much more promptly would the conscience of Ernie Foot, in turmoil, drive him, as best friend, to tell Roy Parker that they two shared a common lot and were both betrayed!

What had been seen through Captain Robbie’s window was as damning for one woman as for the other. Since seven o’clock every moment that passed was just one more spent in wondering by Roy in their apartment, where for the first time his wife was not waiting eagerly when he had been away. Now it was almost eight and Roy had been there an hour. How long had Ernie Foot been with him?

The Lorenzo would feed fat to-night.

THE SMALL sedan swept out of the parkway and into many-lighted Gillespie Boulevard; the speedometer's indicator did not descend until the car was almost abreast of a Stop-and-Go light set against it. Ben Raphael, recovering from the jerk, uttered a prayer of thankfulness for a respite. "It's my only other weakness," he explained. "Automobiles have always frightened me—automobiles and what I would do for Irene."

Arlene gave him a hard look. "Yes. How much of this have you done for her?"

"Of this? Of what?"

"When you went back for the car, did you first go into the house and tell them we were at Robbie's?"

"Good heavens, no!" He was genuinely horrified that she could suspect such a thing. "I told you I didn't even go in for my hat and coat. They didn't need any help to know you'd gone to Robbie's, and, for that matter, Shaftsbury was doing all the listening he could around that silver table."

"So? That the only reason you didn't go in and tell 'em?"

"Arlene! I don't claim I wouldn't take advantage of events; but I wouldn't create them. I'm not plottingly treacherous."

"No, maybe not," she said; for here he was sincere, and she knew it. She struck the steering-wheel with her fist. "How *long* before that light's going to change and let us through? Half an hour?"

As she spoke, the half-minute for which the light was set elapsed; red was replaced by yellow and yellow by green. Arlene was across before the green shone through the snow and she passed the next Stop-and-Go sign, three blocks below, on the succeeding yellow. Thence onward, thickening traffic began to impede her—sedans moving after dinner toward the downtown theaters—and twice more she was held by the red light and cursed it in raging whispers. Then she turned toward Garfield Avenue, however, and had better luck at the intersections; she was within a block of the Lorenzo when she heard Ben Raphael muttering exclaimatively.

"What's the matter?"

"Mrs. Ives's car again," he said. "It just passed us going back to Gillespie Boulevard—going back to Oldwood, I'm sure."

"Who was in it?"

"I couldn't see anything but reflections of the street lights on the glass. I imagine it was empty, though, except for the chauffeur. I suppose she just sent Ernie in to the Lorenzo and the car's gone back. Don't you?"

“Yes.” With a dry throat Arlene swallowed what seemed to be a lump but was nothing. “He’s there, all right!”

They stopped at the curb before the apartment house. Ben Raphael stepped down into the strip of light that came from the glass entrance doors and lay upon the snow like a fleecy white rug stretched across the pavement. “Get back in the car,” Arlene said, descending to stand beside him. “You drive it around to the garage. I’ll attend to her.”

“But you’ll need help to——”

“I won’t need any from you,” Arlene informed him grimly. “Hoping to act as trained nurse? Get back in the car.”

He obeyed; she opened the rear door, and, half-pulling, half-supporting, got Irene out to the pavement. Irene stumbled, leaned flaccidly upon her friend and stared at the luminous glass doors. “Where is this? Where you dragging me?” Then she uttered a lamentable laugh of recognition. “Oh, my God, I knew it; it’s the Lorenzo!”

“Come on. We’ve got to get up to your apartment.”

“Mine? How could it be mine? I haven’t got any money to pay for apartments.”

Raphael spoke from the car window. “Really you’d better let me——”

“You go on,” Arlene said. “Don’t come around when you get back, either! Irene, you’ve got to *walk*! I’ll keep my arm around you, but you’ve *got* to walk through that corridor. Stand up! Keep your mouth shut and walk!”

“All right.” Irene straightened her back, held up her head, was silent, and, with her friend’s arm about her, went bravely forward. They found no one in the corridor except the gloomy Swede who looked after the building at night and succeeded Emma at eight o’clock in the elevator. He showed no interest in them as he took them up to the fourth floor. Neither Arlene nor Irene expected to find Ernest Foot in the apartment, and he wasn’t—Arlene, in her mind’s eye, saw him with Roy Parker on the eighth floor—but the turning on of the light showed them that he had been there.

“Look!” Irene said, pointing to an open door. “The clothes closet!” She went, unaided, to this ominous receptacle; stared. “He left it open so I’d notice. He never had a trunk; he just had a suitcase and a big telescope-bag. He’s got his clothes and gone. Pull down the bed for me, will you, hon? Honest, I’m feeling pretty rotten.”

Arlene already had the bed in place. “You’ve got nothing on me!” she muttered, unheard; and here she referred not to their physical but to their spiritual condition. She meant that disaster moved as certainly upon herself as upon Irene, with the difference that in the one case a long combat between man and wife reached a dreadful culmination; but in the other there had never been a quarrel to break the shock. Thus, it seemed, these two young wives returned in an equal state from their afternoon’s excursion, though one of them had undertaken the adventure only in loyalty to her friend—generous loyalty how useless and how ill-omened! Months ago, before Ernie Foot had brought his wife to live at the Lorenzo, Roy Parker had hoped that a “true friendship” might lead into a finer life: Arlene’s friendship for Irene had been all too true and had led, instead, to what?

Arlene couldn’t know the full answer to that until she could get up to the eighth floor. She pulled off Irene’s slippers and stockings; put a rubber hot-water bottle to wet and icy feet. Irene did almost nothing to help herself; but, with closed eyes, lay shivering and twitching upon the bed until she was undressed, nightgowned, wrapped and under the

covers. Then, though steam clanked in the radiators and the room was hot, "I'm cold!" she complained between chattering teeth, and with uncertain hands tried to rub her shoulders. "Honest, hon, I'm *awful* cold!"

Arlene brought a rough towel from the bathroom and began to rub her vigorously. "I bet I'm going to die," Irene moaned, shivered as much as before and could not control the clicking teeth. "I guess I won't, though—it's always the wrong people that die, not the right ones. It'd be just my luck not to!" Then, as the bell rang and there was also a knocking upon the outer door, she sat upright in the bed. "It *couldn't* be him, could it? No, no; it'll never be him again. Go *see!*"

Arlene opened the outer door. Mabel Finch and Lida Rice came in hurriedly from the corridor and stood in the apartment's narrow hallway; both were grave. "We were looking down from my window and saw you getting her out of the car," Mabel explained. "We didn't know whether you'd want us to help you with her or——"

"Yes," Arlene said. "It's about time you did something to help."

Irene sank back upon the pillow as they came in; but she had spirit enough to make them welcome ironically. "Hurray, girls! We been having a big afternoon, me and Arlene. Come in, the ice is fine!" With a shaking hand she clutched Arlene's wrist. "Go on now; you better. They'll take care of me a while. Run, will you? Run!"

Arlene did run. On that floor she ran to the elevator shaft, and on the eighth she ran from the closing elevator to her own door; but, when she strode through the hallway within, she came into an apartment where there was no one. Ola's door stood open; but Ola was not in the little room, nor in the kitchenette nor in the bathroom. White-faced, Arlene had been moving to and fro for five minutes perhaps, staring through one open doorway and another; then she realized that someone had pulled down the window-shades, and thus she found the note that Ola had left. It was pinned conspicuously upon one of the window-shades and should have been the first thing to meet the eye of anyone entering the apartment. Arlene didn't remove the paper from the shade; but, stooping a little, read what her daughter had written or, rather, had printed in large letters of thick-lined black ink.

IMPORTANT

POPS BE SURE READ THIS

DEAR FATHER

MY MOTHER HAD A CALL TO GO HELP A POOR SICK WOMAN WAY ON THE EAST SIDE OF TOWN THAT HAS NOT GOT ANY FOOD OR MEDECINE AND TOLD ME TO WAIT AND EXPLAIN HER ABSENSE TO YOU BUT IT COMMENCED TO SNOW AND SHE FORGOT HER RUBBERS SO I HAVE GONE TO TAKE THEM TO HER SO PLEASE DO NOT GET ANXIOS OR MAD IF WE ARE NOT BACK TILL LATE BECAUSE THIS IS A DUTY HAS TO BE PERFORMED

FROM YOUR LOVEING
DAUGHTER

OLA

Arlene went down to the street, stared north, stared south; then began to walk rapidly northward on Garfield Avenue through the electrically lighted white storm. She had just crossed Thirty-fifth Street when a slim young figure flitted out from a grocery's recessed doorway, ran to her and flung excited thin arms about her waist.

"Ola!"

"Don't go home!" Ola cried. "Mom, you got to keep away from the Lorenzo until _____"

"No. I've just come from there, Ola."

"What! *When?* You been up to the flat? When'd you get back?"

"About half an hour ago, Ola."

"Gosh! It must 'a' been while I was in the drug store getting warm! I been peeking around on the watch for you ever since before Pops got home; but I got so cold I went up to the drug store and had a hot chocolate, and that's how I must 'a' missed you. It was awful dangerous for you to go in the Lorenzo, Mom; but I guess I've saved you anyways." From inside her coat Ola produced a pair of rubbers. "First put these on, Mom, because when I saw you weren't going to get home before he did, I wrote a note and——"

"Yes, I saw the note, Ola."

"Then get this right," Ola said breathlessly. "Those Stems and Finches were talking out in the hall and I heard 'em; so I knew Mrs. Foot was in wrong with her husband, and you and she were somewheres terrible risky. So when it looked like Pops'd get home first, I fixed up this alibi for you and all we got to do, it's sit tight and he can't pick any holes in it because you just ask me to swear I took the rubbers to this old sick woman's and I'll raise my hand and swear I found you there so you *couldn't* been anywheres else. It'll be lots better for us not to go in and be there when he comes back again, because if he's sitting there all warm he'll be sorrier for us when we come in cold and with snow on us and we prove we got that way from doing good deeds. I don't think he'll be long this time, because, wherever he and Mr. Foot went, it was in a big car that had a chauffeur and started off awful fast and so——"

"He and Mr. Foot?" Arlene's voice was not steady. "You saw your father leave the Lorenzo with Mr. Foot in a car that——"

"Yes, just before I went to the drug store. It was an awful fancy-looking car, Mom, with a——"

"I—see," Arlene said; and what she did see, in a sudden glimmer of tragic imagining, was the figure of her husband entering the broad hall of Mrs. Ives's house at Oldwood, whither Ernie Foot brought him and where would sit a dark council of four people—two shattered husbands, a glittering-eyed insulted wife and that eager witness, her secretary. Ben Raphael had seen only reflected lights on the glass of Mrs. Ives's car as it returned to Oldwood; but behind those glossy brightnesses had been Roy Parker and Ernie Foot. Ernie had come to the Lorenzo to take Roy out to Oldwood to hear for himself what had been seen through Captain Robbie's window.

Arlene put her arm about her daughter's small and nervous shoulders. "Come home, Ola."

“What? Not up to the apartment?”

“Yes. Right away.”

“No!” Ola protested passionately. “You can’t! Do you think I don’t know what’s always gone on between you and him? Think I don’t know you’re *always* covering up something from him? This time you’re in a dreadful hole; but I got your alibi all fixed up for you and if you don’t let me work it, you look out! He’ll *leave* you!”

“Don’t say that!” Arlene spoke sharply; but the unsteadiness of her voice had increased. “Come on.”

Ola began to cry. “All right if you make me; but you’ll see! You been somewheres that’ll just get him *crazy* and you could get out of it easy as not if you’d only let me——”

“No! Come on.”

Ola’s weeping continued. She gimletted half-frozen knuckles into her eyes, as she and her mother returned to the Lorenzo; she sniffled heartbrokenly in the corridor and in the elevator. When they reached the apartment she wept loudly, face downward upon the sofa, while her mother did the evening’s cooking in the kitchenette.

AT TEN O'CLOCK Arlene got the still disappointed Ola to bed, and, to make sure that there would be no surreptitious reading, brought forth firmly from the bedroom a book that had been concealed beneath the pillow, the memoirs of Miss Isadora Duncan.

The windows of the living-room were upon the Thirty-fifth Street side of the Lorenzo—when Arlene came from Ola's bedroom she went out to the corridor and to a window at the end of it, a window that looked down upon Garfield Avenue and so commanded the principal entrance of the building. Arlene had been at that window often during the past hour; but now, as before, no foreign car drew up to the curb as she stood watching. She stayed five minutes before she turned from that bleak prospect and descended to the fourth floor.

Outside Irene's door Lida Rice and Carrie Stem were whispering; and their expressions and attitudes had the preoccupied gravity that comes upon children whose frolic amazingly causes wreckage. "Mabel thinks we better get a doctor," Lida told Arlene. "Mabel had a year as a student nurse at the Central before she was married and she says she thinks it might be pleurisy or something. She's got a temperature of a hundred and three now; Mabe took it. Mabe's going to sit up with her till four o'clock and then I'll come on till noon, and Carrie'll stay the rest the day if she's no better. Been crying a good deal over everything that's happened and said she didn't have any money for doctors or nurses, poor thing! We'll do the nursing if she's going to need it. Mabe'll show I and Carrie how."

Arlene went in. Mabel, even graver than her friends outside, was putting cold compresses on Irene's forehead, and Irene, moving restlessly, murmuring querulously, gave the visitor a glance from blurred eyes that were but half open. "The girls are taking care of me, Arlene; they're being awful kind. What'd Roy say? Is Ernie——"

"They're not here, Irene; I haven't seen them."

"No, I guess not. Listen, Arlene. Mabe thinks I got pleurisy or something; but I bet it's going to be pneumonia and I'd hate to go into a hospital ward—I haven't got any money, so——"

"Now, now, dearie!" Mabel said, with a professional nurse's briskness. "Didn't I tell you quit worrying about that. You might be all right to-morrow morning; we can't tell yet. But anyhow we're going to take care of you right here; there's plenty of us to do it, too. Just you quit fretting, dearie!"

Irene, tossing, was nevertheless meek. "Yes, I'll do what you say, Mabe; you're being awful good to me. I don't know why because I certainly always looked down on you and Lida and Carrie and I guess I showed it. Rotten of me, wasn't it? I got a rotten disposition.

I'm getting my come-uppance for it, though! Life's certainly putting the heat on me. I guess nobody can ever tell what life's going to do to 'em. Then here's a funny thing—I bet if I die, Ernie'll be sorry and wish he'd come back to me; but if I don't and get well he'll hate me and marry that red-head! That's the way life is. Life's *mean!* Life——”

“Now, now, dearie, don't you fret; you're going to be all right.” Mabel continued her ministrations; she was quick, competent, yet soft-moving, and, as she worked with her patient and sought to soothe her, Arlene saw no piggishness in the plump pretty pink face. For the time, at least, something seemed to have refined that look out of Mabel Finch's features. She put a freshly dampened cold handkerchief over Irene's forehead and eyes, came quickly to Arlene and whispered, “I'm scared she's right—pneumonia! Tell Lide to call up Dr. Lanfiller. He's right by here and he's good. We better see what he says.”

What the doctor said when he came, however, was non-committal; he would know more when he returned to-morrow morning, he thought. It was after eleven when he thus expressed himself to Arlene and Lida and Carrie in the corridor outside Irene's door; and Arlene returned to the eighth floor and the window at the end of the corridor. Again she watched from that post in vain.

She went back into her own apartment, paced the floor, sat, paced again, sat again. Faraway steam whistles blew at midnight; a deep bell rang faintly from the cathedral half way downtown. Arlene found the bell harder to bear than the whistling; its sound lasted longer—but the silence afterward was worse than either.

One o'clock came and passed; and she was sitting staring steadily at the door when she heard his step, at last, in the corridor. She didn't move while he entered the little hallway and left his hat and overcoat there; she heard the slight squeak that meant he was taking off his rubbers. Then he came into the room; but didn't look toward her. His saddened eyes seemed unaware of her as he sat down and spoke in a tired voice.

“Ola's home, I suppose, of course?”

“Yes, Roy; she's in bed.”

He looked up slowly, not at Arlene but at a window-shade, and his gaze remained upon the oblong of paper still pinned there.

“You've noticed that, I suppose?”

“Yes, Roy. I forgot to take it down. I'll——”

“No—no matter,” he said, and continued to look at Ola's note. “I guess parents nowadays are all just helpless about their children and the movies and some of what they get hold of to read, too. Maybe it doesn't do much harm. Ola certainly has ideas, though.”

“Yes,” Arlene said. “I've tried to keep her sensible, Roy; but I've failed you.”

“No.” He shook his head. “You've been a good mother to her. She worships you. That note shows how she loves you and she's tried to do much the same kind of thing before—several times.” He passed a thin and sensitive hand over his tired forehead, sighed and let his glance droop to the floor. “Well——” Then without looking at her, he seemed to become conscious of the tensivity with which she leaned forward from her chair, clutched her hands together and stared at him. “I'm afraid you're kind of scared,” he said.

“Yes.”

“No use in that,” he said sorrowfully. “Being scared wouldn't do any good. What's got

to be's got to be, and people just have to go through it; that's all."

"Yes. *What's* got to be, Roy?"

At that, he gave her a brief side glance and looked down again. "I don't suppose you could possibly guess where I've been."

"Yes, I could. At Mrs. Gillespie Ives's house in Oldwood."

"You knew that? How?"

"Mostly by guessing, Roy."

"So?" He seemed to ponder, then nodded slowly in acquiescence. "Yes. You're smart. You guessed right. I hadn't been home very long—I'd been reading Ola's note over and over and thinking and wondering—and Ernie came in looking shot to pieces and said he had something terrible to tell me. He said he *wouldn't* tell me, though, except before witnesses that'd corroborate what he had to say. He wanted me to come with him, so I did, and he didn't talk any in the car—we didn't either of us say anything much till we got out there. I——" He paused, then went on, in a controlled voice, "I guess you know what they told me—Ernie and that red-headed woman and her secretary."

"Yes—I know."

"Yes," he said. "They were all three sure you saw them when they came and looked through that window. Between them I guess they didn't miss much of anything that was going on in there where you and Irene were."

"No—I guess they didn't."

"Well——" he said heavily, was silent again; then went on, "It looks like a pretty complete case. Before Ernie went out there this afternoon, Art Finch had told him Irene's been meeting that fellow; and Ernie told Mrs. Ives about it during her tea party. Put that on top of what they saw through the window and it's pretty complete. That fellow—I mean her husband—he'd been trying to get in and talk to her before Ernie and I got there; but they wouldn't let him in the house. He was trying to telephone her while I was there; but she wouldn't answer. She told that secretary to tell him he'd send his clothes and jewelry and guns and fishing tackle to him. Said it's all he owns, and she seemed glad of it. Spiteful kind of woman. Looked to me like she's glad it happened and was working on Ernie to feel that way, too. He's all just shot to pieces. After we left there he went down to the Y.M.C.A. and took a room, and I went with him. Been there talking the last two or three hours. Funny how much people'll talk when there really isn't any use in it."

"There isn't?" Arlene asked faintly. "There isn't any——"

"Why, no." He seemed surprised. "Mrs. Ives has got a case and nothing on earth'll stop her from going ahead with it. Ernie's through with Irene. She may be what they call 'innocent' in one way; I don't think he cares now whether she is or not. When a husband's been treated as he has, he's pretty liable to feel that way, isn't he?"

"I——" Arlene was barely audible. "I—don't know."

"Why, yes," he said, and his tone was decisive. "Arguing with him got just nowhere after what he saw, himself. Yes, and with other witnesses. He looked through that window and *they* looked through that window, and there they saw his wife—his *wife*——"

"Roy!" Arlene stood up, shaking all over. "You mean me. You're talking about me. This is your way of telling me. You mean they looked through that window and saw *your*

wife——”

“What?”

“You mean it’s a complete case against *me*. You mean when a husband’s been treated as you have——”

“What?” He looked up at her with amazed eyes in which there was strangely something apologetic. “You? Why, no. I’ve been talking about Ernie and Irene, not about you. You don’t come into it, Arlene—not to speak of.”

“But I do!”

“Why, no. When those three out there began telling me about *your* part in it and claiming they saw you with that old white-mustached whiskey-barrel trying to get his arms around you at the window—well, of course it was all a pretty serious business on account of Ernie and Irene; but I made pretty short work of *that* part of the story! I couldn’t help laughing.”

“What!” Arlene cried. “What?”

“Why, yes,” he said. “I had to laugh in their faces.”

“You did?”

“Why, naturally! I figured that old hulks was trying to do something you didn’t want him to—pull down the blinds or something maybe—and you were fighting with him to make him stop. Of course *I* knew you’d gone there just to stick by poor Irene and try to get her away. It was perfectly simple to understand *your* part in it and that you were having a tough time but couldn’t help it if you were going to show true friendship for Irene, like I asked you to. That red-haired Ives woman and her secretary made me kind of mad; but I told them where to head in and made them admit that must ‘a’ been the way it was, before I got through with ‘em. Of course I got Ernie to looking at it that way, too.”

“But *you*?” Arlene said. “How did *you* see it?”

“Why, just like I been telling you.” Upon his tired face there was a deepening of that look of apology. “It’s kind of awful to think my being jittery so long over the old days at the Griswold could get you scared. I don’t understand you, Arlene. I knew I saw the truth of the part of their story about you at the window; but of course even if it *hadn’t* been the truth I’d have *talked* to those people just the same way about it—yes, and made ‘em believe it, too!”

“You *would*?”

“Why, certainly.” He glanced toward Ola’s note again. “You don’t suppose that after all these years of living with you and you always as true and good to me as you’ve been—you don’t suppose Ola loves you better than I do or that I’d let her do more for you than I would, do you?”

Arlene began to cry as openly and copiously as a child does. “Roy Parker, you’re the best man in this world! You’re the best man God ever made!” She sank to her knees; sank all the way to the floor, embraced his embarrassed ankles and set her cheek upon his black shoes. “You’re just an angel! Angel! Angel! Angel!”

YOUNG-MINDED people speak authoritatively of the new order of living and the vast revolutionary social changes of the present day, unaware that they are repeating young-minded people of the immemorial past and enviably ignorant that bright new perfections all too soon become dull old errors. Old-minded people long ago learned that only nothingness is not a state of incessant change and that for the figure of Father Time the scythe is redundant; the hour-glass is sufficient. We say the pyramids are as everlasting as the mountains. True enough, for both are crumbling and will be stardust while the hour-glass goes on turning somersaults.

For our little individual human affairs, however, the old-minded are somewhat accustomed to see Time without either glass or scythe. They accept him as wearing the likeness of a scurrying stage-manager anything but sane and gifted with a crazy magic to make his actors shift their rôles, play heroes one moment, comic cravens the next, play love scenes and hate scenes almost simultaneously. In the rush of his theater frenzied lovers, ready to die if a wall or a father separate them, sweep into a scene wherein each uninterestedly beholds the other happy in somebody else's arms. The haggard young husband outside a hospital room hoarsely bids the surgeon "Save the mother!" and, when the stage-manager has waved a hand, smiles contentedly across a dinner table to where sits his children's step-mother. So, upon a movement of that same hand, the Lorenzo bunch made a festal evening the members would have thought themselves mad if they could have imagined when the Parkers gave their party for Irene and Ernie Foot.

Yet all except one who had made merry at the Parkers' party were there again in the same three apartments, the Parkers', the Stems' and the Finches', on this later night of gayety. The red-legged bridge table had the center of the Finches' living-room; plates, piled napkins and plated silver were arrayed on white linen in that of the Parkers'; and against the Stems' walls the furniture was set back to make space for dancing to their phonograph.

The bunch, moreover, was a little larger than of yore. Young Mr. and Mrs. Bill Rice, brother and sister-in-law to Charlie, had moved into the fourth floor apartment a year ago disastrously vacated by the Foots, had proved congenial and were fully members. There was also a new sporting member, a noisy grasswidow from Carrie Stem's home town. Prosperous, she had taken Ben Raphael's apartment, for inappropriately the bunch now contained no bachelor. The evening's celebration was in honor of Mr. and Mrs. Raphael on their return from the Mediterranean cruise that had been one of Irene's stipulations.

Another, unquestionably, was the mink coat in which she arrived at the Lorenzo from still another, which was a "duplex" apartment at the Ambassador, 3645 Gillespie

Boulevard; and, about her wrists and neck, and upon her cloth-of-silver bosom, she wore yet others. To the ladies of the Lorenzo bunch the mink coat was already familiar, though not in the flesh, so to speak. Until to-night they had seen it only in the reproduced photograph that had appeared in the most recent Rotogravure Section of the Despatch News—a little through the efforts of the manager of the Ambassador—with the announcement of Mrs. Raphael's return from Europe to occupy her "duplex" for the winter. Beneath the picture, too, had become apparent one more of Irene's stipulations; for here, with a fresh Mediterranean inspiration, she bore, in valiant serenity, the label, "Mrs. Benito M. Raphael."

"She put in the 'M', too," Ben explained to Arlene, at the party. "Makes me look to be maybe Mussolini's adopted nephew or something. She was all cast down because she didn't get to meet him in Italy; but she made up for it on the boat with a Stock Exchange gentleman from New York that we just barely didn't have to visit on Long Island when we got back, because his wife got sick to stop it."

Arlene was sympathetic, though somewhat dryly; and Raphael seemed to value her as an audience for the recital of his foreordained tribulations; he was at her side most of the evening. As dark, as sleek and as smiling as ever, he showed in that puzzling smile of his an exquisite ruefulness, and yet, with fine detachment, formed part of his audience himself. "Oh, yes, the joke's on me," he said, appreciating that his rôle, though painful, must be viewed as purely a comic one. "I'm not a marrying man. I never had any such idea; but she was too much for me, and see what I've become—an errand boy and probably temporary, at that!"

Arlene couldn't deny his likeness to an errand boy. His wife—the radiant center of the party and this time without even a marital competitor—treated him outrageously, though occasionally with a brusque indulgence. She wouldn't dance with him, said, "Run away, Fido!" when he applied, and sent him to Ola's bedroom for her cigarette-case, or to the "card-room" to hunt for a handkerchief she thought maybe she'd dropped there. Seated, she beckoned, put out her foot at him, pointed at it, made him kneel and adjust her slipper, which didn't need it, while she went on chattering to others and said not a word to him. Then, dancing, she would call to him negligently over her shoulder to bring her a glass of water, make him follow her about the room with it until, pausing momentarily and beaming upon her partner, she would sip from the glass and hand it back to her husband without so much as glancing at him.

She was not less beautiful than she had been; the wondrous dress she wore, silver as if reminiscently, helped to make these Lorenzo apartments and the Lorenzo bunch itself into a somewhat dull and pewterish background for the one dazzling figure. The Mediterranean tour, moreover, had added something to her air and manner. The captivating former sweetness of her expression at parties was all there; but it had become the sweetness of one who revisits with gracious and even tender amusement an old and out-grown haunt—or, it might be said, the lady from the Hall danced and democratically even flirted with the tenantry. Flushed Mr. Bill Rice, for whom this was an overwhelming first meeting, had his poor little wife sitting in dark corners to conceal her expression while she watched him.

Only one error caused some moments of embarrassment at the party. This same newcomer, Mr. Bill Rice, had been famous among a previous circle of friends for the

singing of two songs. One of these was “Drink to Me Only With Thine Eyes”; and, in a late stage of the supper, to-night, he sang it throbbingly. Emotional, at the close, he looked full at Irene, said “To You!” lifted his glass of beer and inconsistently drank all that it contained. Being applauded, especially by Irene, he promptly offered as encore his other song, one he felt he did even better; and this was Mandalay. It would have been tactful to let him finish it.

Looking stern, manly and dramatic, he did in fact complete the first stanza and the chorus without interruption, and, continuing, had ruggedly asked to be set east of Suez where the best is like the worst, when Art Finch interfered. During the previous singing, Art had been in the Parkers’ kitchenette trying hard to read a wet recipe for goulash he himself had just written from Ben Raphael’s dictation, and for a time he was but distantly aware of adjacent vocalizings; then it dawned upon him that desecration was taking place. He dropped the recipe, lost it, and, listening, heard the rugged masculine words, “Ain’t no ten commandments and a man can raise a thirst——”

Art strode through the doorway of the kitchenette. With upraised, forbidding hand, he appeared before the listening company in the living-room. “Stop!” he said harshly. “Stop that sang; I mean song! That song can’t be sung here! That’s one song we can’t listen to!”

The dumfounded singer’s mouth remained open but became soundless.

“Not after the way it was sung here,” Art explained with solemn pathos. “There’s a—a reason we can’t go fully into right now. He was a—a Fraternity Brother of mine. It’s got to be stopped.”

Mabel took him in hand, not without ferocity; he was led out to the corridor explaining persistently that he wouldn’t have done it except being a member of the same fraternity he had to. Mrs. Bill Rice was delighted by the incident, which everybody else tried to cover up; and, as for Irene, she merely showed a heightened color, returned to the phonograph and the dancing, and presently sent her husband on more errands.

“I’ve made my bed; I must lie in it,” he said to Arlene. “I’ve discovered that in this world when we get our own way we may get it too much. If you examine Irene’s face very, very closely you will see, though just barely, the finest, slenderest almost invisible line from her right nostril to the corner of her mouth—the imprint of a hard experience she had, perhaps. It is almost not there yet, this line; but it’ll be a little more there—just a microscopic little more—every day. If I’m only temporarily her errand boy, as I suspect is possible, I shall have a great deal of suffering when she discards me—if she does it before that line develops further! You see my tragedy.”

“Your what?”

“Oh, yes,” he said, and laughed. “We comedians have as much tragedy as anybody else—naturally. While she’s still young and beautiful I’d suffer horribly to lose her. If she gets old-looking and sticks to me, then I mightn’t mind so much whether I’d lose her or not—but I couldn’t.”

“Golly!” Arlene said, and looked at him searchingly. “Don’t you care for her at all? Don’t you even *like* her?”

“Who knows?” For a moment he was serious. “I’m terribly in love with her. Who can tell until after that’s over?”

Arlene glanced at the tall and awkward figure of Roy Parker wandering hospitably

about with an open cigar box. "You can sometimes," she said, and, jumping up, took the cigar box away, put it down and danced with her husband.

Gayety was unabated until the very end of the party. Irene was charming in departure. She came from the absent Ola's little room wearing the mink coat over her silver; she looked merry, beautiful and wealthy, as all the bunch gathered about her to say good-night. "Hop ahead!" she said to Ben Raphael. "Skip down to the street and start the Packard's engine so the heater'll be working by the time I get there and my feet won't freeze in these *absurd* Paris slippers." Laughing, she pulled up her skirt to show stockings that were almost nothing and slippers already often observed during the evening to consist principally of jewelled straps. "For blizzards, what? Hop along, Ben! Dear little old Bill, here, says he'll see me down in the elevator. Hop, Ben, d'you hear me?"

"Absolutely," he replied in a melancholy voice, murmured, "I *must* hop, so I do!" and departed.

Irene put graceful, richly furred arms about Arlene's neck and kissed her; she embraced and kissed Mabel Finch and Carrie Stem and Lida Rice. "You dear blessed old things!" she cried, with feeling so genuine that the edges of tears showed in her eyes and instantly in theirs. "Don't think I'll ever, ever forget you saved my life! No matter what happens I'll always remember it's you who are *really* my best old friends." She gulped, then turned confidingly to the suffused and triumphant Bill Rice and warmly took his arm. "Come on, you dear little old Bill, if you're ready to see me safely into my car."

Dear little old Bill was radiantly more than ready. With her free hand Irene threw a kiss to everybody from the doorway—"Good-night, hons!"—and the party was over.

. . . Roy Parker smoked a final cigar while his wife capably and swiftly put their apartment to rights. "I guess she feels pretty cheerful," he said. "Anyhow she acted like it all evening. I suppose at a party, though, she'd act like it whether she is or not; wouldn't she, Arlene?"

"Yes; she would."

"I expect so." He frowned and sighed. "Funny. I've got an idea she's anyhow in better spirits than Ernie Foot is."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes," Roy said. "I put off telling you on account of getting ready for the party; but Ernie came in to see me this afternoon."

"He did?" Arlene paused on her way to the kitchenette with a piled tray. "You don't mean he came down to the Old Windsor Wholesale and——"

"Yes. What's more, I've got a notion he almost wished he'd never quit his job and was back there. Of course I might be wrong."

"You aren't apt to be," Arlene said, carried the tray into the kitchenette, left it there and returned to say, "If he and Irene could have just fought it out to reach some kind of peace——"

"Fought it out, Arlene? Strikes me they did!"

She agreed grimly. "Yes. They certainly did."

“Ernie’s kept on changing,” Roy said. “I don’t know how English people talk, exactly, except from hearing actors; but it struck me a little like that. I expect that red-headed woman wants him to—just the way she made him give up his job when they got married. After that, of course, he’s got to jump when she snaps her fingers. She’s an awful homely woman, too, I thought; but I guess she gives him presents when he’s good. I went out to the street with him when he left and he was driving a de luxe new machine.” Roy laughed feebly. “I guess he wasn’t referring to the car or his fur-lined coat; but it sounded almost like it—the last thing he said after he got in and was starting away.”

“What was that, Roy?”

Roy shook his head. “Poor old Ernie! He laughed; but what he *said* was, ‘Well, I’ve made my bed; I suppose I’ve got to lie in it!’ ”

“Roy! He did? He said that?” Arlene was amazed by the coincidence. “Ben Raphael said exactly the same thing to me to-night! *Two* of ’em! Both of ’em talking like that afterwards! Both on account of Irene having——”

She checked herself, as footsteps were heard in the little hallway. Mabel Finch came flying in, rosy, excited and bright-eyed. “D’you know somebody left your outside door open when they left?” she asked, and, in high spirits, rattled on breathlessly. “Been in Lide’s and Charlie’s talking it over. Lide wasn’t there at first; she was down on the fourth in Bill’s and Lena’s, trying to help Bill out; but Bill deserves it if ever a man did! His wife *already* looking like that, and then him sailing out with the Queen of Sheba to put her in her Packard after her pointedly sending her husband on ahead so’s to finish Bill up brown!” Mabel laughed uproariously. “Lide did the best she could; but says that apartment’s got a fight going on in it now like nothing it ever saw before, and it certainly used to see plenty! Lide just gave up and came away. Best thing to do; don’t you say so, Arlene?”

“I expect so, Mabel.”

“Gosh, what a party!” Mabel cried. “I got Art locked in my kitchenette ever since he pulled that boner about Mandalay. He’s all right, though; he’s learned to sleep on the linoleum till I get ready to let him out. Carrie was in Lide’s and Charlie’s, too, and we certainly all been whooping over how many times she got those slippers into the limelight and rubbed in the mink on us and slipped that in about the Packard, as a last blow just before she left! She was right sweet then, though, and I don’t mean I don’t like her; but Carrie says Ed says he bet Ben Raphael got the mink and the Packard from some family forgetting ’em when they moved out in a hurry before one of Ben’s wrecking jobs commenced. Guess he had to buy her the slippers right off the counter, though. ‘These *absurd* Paris slippers’! Did you get that—how she worked it in? Don’t you love it? Still got her *looks*, though; didn’t you think so, hon?”

“Yes,” Arlene said. “She’s prettier than ever.”

“Guess she is,” Mabel admitted. “Say listen, the whole bunch is sure the Lorenzo’ll never see much more of her. Oh, she may come around a few times; but not so often! Did you get that about always remembering us no matter what? How we’d be ‘*really*’ her best old friends? Yes, sir, the whole bunch is sure she thinks she’s on the stepladder. Ben Raphael better look out, too, *I* say; she might kick the ladder over behind her if she ever gets hold of what she’s reaching for! Gosh, what a party!”

Using this exclamation as an effect to close her lively little scene, Mabel skipped out to the corridor, shut the door reassuringly behind her and left the Parkers once more alone.

Roy seemed depressed. "Got the old hammers out for her again, haven't they? I been thinking about the bunch, Arlene, lately. I expect you remember when I first met Ernie how I thought getting to be friends with him and his wife might lead us into a—a finer kind of life. Well, looking back, I believe that was kind of what they call snobbish in me, Arlene."

"No, it wasn't, Roy."

"Yes," he insisted. "I think it was. I guess really I kind of felt the bunch wasn't good enough for us. I thought Ernie Foot was more—more cultured, you might say. Well—that's the way Ernie felt, himself, about that red-haired homely woman he's married and *her* kind of people. I expect there's maybe some high kind of culture that does make people lead a finer kind of life, likely; but I don't believe it's just the highbrow kind we ordinarily think of, do you?"

Arlene was puzzled. "I don't know."

He tried to explain. "I mean, look at the bunch when Irene was sick. Mabel looked like a ghost by the time the doctor said Irene was going to get well. You and Mabel and Carrie and Lide were up night and day, and the boys did everything they could, too. Any bunch'll get out the old hammers when you're flying *high*. One's probably the same as another. I mean this crowd Ernie's with now may *talk* highbrow and be different outside; but most likely that's the only real difference between them and our crowd that he got to thinking he was too good for. Anyhow, he doesn't seem to be getting anything more out of life than he did. Funny thing, her being so happy now and Ernie not."

Arlene shook her head. "She isn't. She isn't—not underneath."

"But look at her to-night. Why, she——"

"No; that was just her showing off—like Ernie's coming around in a de luxe car and talking that English way. It's like——" Arlene paused, frowning with the effort to put an elusive intuition into words. "Well, it seems like as if a couple of fancy-colored birds flew through the old Lorenzo, fighting which could show off the most, and got us all excited over 'em and then one flew out one way and one the other and left us in peace again; but *they*—why, they still go on fighting."

"How could they if they——"

"Still fighting which one can show off the most," Arlene said. "Anyway *she* is. Even to-night, somewhere inside her, she was fighting with him, showing off as if maybe she could put it over him for ditching her, even yet. Like once they let it get started it's got to go on forever."

"That seems kind of terrible, doesn't it, Arlene?"

"Yes," she said. "As if it was all for nothing."

Roy put the inconsiderable remains of his cigar in the ash-tray sadly. "It's hard to make out why things happen the way they do. He was a fine fellow, Ernie Foot. I used to think he was the—the finest man I'd ever known."

There was a catch in Roy's voice as he spoke, and Arlene understood that he was mourning for his friend—and for the lost friendship. She sat down beside him and took his

hand. "I feel awful sorry for people, Roy."

"Yes," he said. "For pretty much everybody. I expect everybody that thinks about it is sorry for everybody else." Then he was in fear that she might misunderstand him. "Except two of us," he said, and her old adoring gratitude came rosily upon her as he explained his earnest meaning, "Nobody'd ever be dumb enough to be sorry for Ola or me."

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *The Lorenzo Bunch* by Booth Tarkington]