

THE REBEL BRIDE

By MAY CHRISTIE

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THE REBEL BRIDE

BY
MAY CHRISTIE

AUTHOR OF
THE GARDEN OF DESIRE,
HEARTS AFIRE, ETC.

REVISED EDITION



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The Rebel Bride

CHAPTER I

Love at Sea

On the slippery deck of a New York-Southampton liner, with the Atlantic running mountains high, Marcella Field—the young, gay, vividly alive Marcella who for five enchanted days had been “ship’s belle”—flung out a steadying arm as a super-roller hit the vessel, caught at the nearest pillar of support (which proved to be a tall, good-looking man in no way averse to this attention), and laughingly cried out:

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Holden, but any old port in a storm, you know.”

Miles Holden—rising young English sculptor, whose visit to New York had been a professional triumph, but whose pulses could accelerate to Marcella’s pretty voice with quicker beat than to the praise of all the art critics in the world—flung back:

“You’re not afraid to face the storm?”

His dark blue eyes, with the questing light in them that sailors who have spent long years at sea possess, softened as they rested on the piquant little features with their frame of wind-blown curls.

“Afraid?” She tossed her head provocatively. “I’m not afraid of anything.”

Subconsciously she knew that was a challenge, and, at any rate, exaggeration. For even the prettiest girl on board an Atlantic liner—home of ephemeral triumphs and brief flirtations—may have her peace of mind assailed.

And Miles Holden, despite her vaunted poise and worldly wisdom, had assailed that hitherto invulnerable fortress—Miss Marcella’s heart.

“Let’s go for’ard, then,” he suggested, holding her arm more tightly, for

the ship was rocking like a swingboat at a country fair. “There!”—as they reached the boat-deck in the first-class quarters, and clung to the forward railing—“isn’t that magnificent?”

Mountains of green water towered above them like an avalanche. The liner’s forty thousand tons danced frailly like an egg-shell, up, and up, and up . . . then down, and down. . . .

“I love it,” said Marcella, with little fronds of salt spray clinging to her curls, and cheeks aglow. “It’s like life . . . a constant battle . . . civilisation against the primitive.”

“Yes?” He hoped she would go on, although, he reflected, the average man would be quite content to watch Marcella’s beauty, without investigating her mental processes.

“Life’s just a sort of storm,” she added tentatively. “It’s the constant making of decisions that wears one down. Don’t you agree?”

Her thoughts winged to that all-too-imminent decision that, like the sword of Damocles, hung over her. And yet—a week ago—the thought of marriage with the rich and influential Warwick Treman, who adored her, and would be waiting at the dock to claim her, had been something she could view complacently, if without a thrill. For, hitherto, thrills were outside the scheme of well-poised Miss Marcella’s life.

Miles Holden moved a little nearer to her.

“If I weren’t afraid of being impertinent, I should say you are too pretty to philosophize.”

“That’s just a caveman’s speech,” she said reprovingly, yet with the eternal Eve aglimmer in her sparkling eye. “Nowadays, if women haven’t brains and don’t cultivate them hard, it’s devil take the hindmost.”

He laughed softly, the well-modulated laugh that was one of his especial charms.

“So men are ravening wolves?” His glance was quizzical.

And just because she was afraid she loved him, and still more afraid that he might guess it, she made answer, womanlike:

“Men are all right to play with and to amuse oneself with.” The statement ended in a careless shrug that to Miles’ sensitiveness was a “DANGER! STOP! LOOK AND LISTEN!” signal.

Marcella, then, had flirted with him!

A little pause followed. White gulls were wheeling overhead, calling and crying to each other, and the sound was dirgelike on this waste of waters.

“You were speaking about the making of decisions,” he forced himself to remark, lightly. “But life must be very simple for a girl like you.” How hackneyed that must sound to her! Yet every man who met her must surely be attracted. . . .

It was her turn to laugh.

“You’ve jumped from the caveman period to the Victorian, when maidens sat at home with their fancy-work, and waited for some male creature to come along and change one brand of monotony for another.” Her tone definitely implied that life, real life, held other things in it than men—and love. “No. Nothing’s simple, if one is ambitious.”

Ambitious? Yes, he understood the meaning of that word. It had been his lodestar up to five days ago, when after a long *tête-à-tête* that had been the commencement of his friendship with Marcella, he had wondered if, after all, the achievement of a great career were everything in life.

“If there’s any way in which I can help you, will you look on me as a—a friend?” he blurted out. “If there’s anything worrying you in a decision—some disturbing element, maybe—” He broke off shyly.

Some disturbing element? With a queer ache at her heart and a rueful little smile about her lips, Marcella knew that the disturbing element in her big decision was none other than—himself.

A week ago, how easy to have definitely engaged herself to Warwick Treman! A week ago, how difficult to understand the meaning of the word Romance.

The wealth and socially secure position of a man like Treman had attracted her, upon the material side. That alone, even in the old Marcella, with her poise and rather worldly outlook, would have been insufficient, were it not that the forceful personality of the man had held a sort of curious magnetism for her in the past—a fascination that (as now Marcella understood the meaning of the word) contained no genuine love, but was a product of pleased vanity that the social catch of many London seasons should pour out homage at her immature young feet.

The pursuit had started just four years ago, when Marcella was eighteen. She had met him at the winter sports in Switzerland. Whether she would actually have accepted him or not was a moot point in her own mind. But—being storm-stayed one night in a lonely mountain hut with Treman, after a

moonlit ski-ing expedition of which her chaperon was unaware—Marcella had agreed to the announcing of their engagement, believing that the bond would only last long enough to satisfy the gossips.

Since then, the courtship had been intermittent, due to the fact that Marcella had proved *difficile*, and that Treman's business interests had taken him on protracted trips to various parts of the globe.

But the man's ardour and determination had not cooled, and these New York and Long Island visits had been looked upon by him as Marcella's final bow to girlhood ere she entered the bonds of matrimony with himself. It was time the affair was settled, and Marcella was really much too pretty and attractive to hop any longer on the single twig. All men were poachers, but it would go ill with any one who tried to poach on *his* preserves . . . here Warwick Treman's jaw would set with the bulldog look his business opponents knew so well.

"Only two days until we land." Miles Holden's pleasant voice cut into her meditations. "It's been a marvellous trip for me." A wistfulness lay in the words that made his listener's heart leap with a new hope. Was it possible their interviews had meant anything to him?

"You took New York by storm," said she demurely, purposely misunderstanding. "Every front page had your photograph, and the reporters' adjectives were so ecstatic that their repertoire was really taxed to the limit, and——"

"I don't mean that," he interrupted hurriedly, for praise of his work made him feel awkward as a schoolboy. Besides, he longed (yet feared) for her to know just how he felt. "It's the—the—voyage—and meeting you—that's been so wonderful. Your sympathy—and our talks—they've counted so much more than the New York success, gratifying, of course, as that has been——"

His shy stammering told a truer tale than all the glib phrases of Warwick Treman. And the girl's heart thrilled within a bosom that, after all, was neither cool nor calculating nor as worldly as she once had thought it was.

"I'm glad," she murmured, unconscious that she moved a shade nearer her companion, so that the wind swept a tendril of her curly hair across his cheek. An electric current flowed from her slim, young body through the point of contact at his shoulder and, so, straight to his heart, causing a tumult there.

"It has been wonderful—Marcella!" The words escaped from him almost against his own volition. His big brown hand, with the sensitive, beautifully formed fingers of the sculptor, closed over the small white one that clung so

tightly to the railing.

The blood humming in her ears was an accompaniment to the song which the blue bird of happiness was carolling in her breast. She had never lived before . . . the great miracle was coming, coming. . . .

Then, like a black cloud blotting out the sunshine of her mood, arose a queer and eerie premonition, and she shivered, staring with lovely, troubled eyes focused far ahead into the gathering dusk.

“Have you second sight, Marcella? What do you see?” Miles Holden knew that this girl’s mother, long since dead, had come from a lonely island in the Outer Hebrides, and perhaps the Celtic “sixth sense” had been bequeathed to her.

Marcella shivered, then said queerly, cryptically:

“All I can see is the storm about us—and a bigger storm ahead.”

CHAPTER II

The Woman of Mystery

Two hours later, in the confines of her pretty state-room on the promenade deck, Marcella tried to dress for dinner—a none-too-easy feat with the four walls jazzing up and down, the toilet articles on her dressing-table running like startled crabs in all directions, and the floor rising and falling like an elevator with the *accelerando* button pressed on hard.

She struggled into a filmy frock of blue georgette, fastened a little diamond-studded watch upon her wrist, slipped over her head a slim chain of platinum from which hung a large, gleaming diamond, then—as a great wave slammed against the thick glass of her state-room window—gave up the struggle, and ringing for her stewardess, informed the latter that she would have a little something in her cabin, and not go down to the saloon for dinner.

It was good to be alone, to think over the miracle that had occurred. Miles Holden had not said so, in so many words . . . but love had surely shone in those fine eyes of his. . . .

Marcella started as a queer, stifled little sound of sobbing came from the next state-room. It was a woman's voice, although it sounded almost like some tiny animal in pain.

Marcella listened. The tenant of the cabin had been looked askance at by the other women on the ship. A man's woman, and of the wrong kind, she had been dubbed. Certain it was she was associated with a band of crooks who were plying their trade in the card-room of the vessel every night and on till the small hours of the morning. "Peroxide blonde," "adventuress," and worse—the ultra-virtuous and back-biting ladies who adorn the passenger-list on most Atlantic crossings had taken pleasure in the exchange of epithets anent the thin, nervous, gorgeously attired little woman with the strained expression on her face.

But Marcella had felt sorry for her.

The sobbing didn't stop, and the girl rose at last and gave a tentative tap upon the panel of the communicating door, then tried the handle, which gave under pressure, revealing a dramatic little picture in the room beyond. In a kimono which, trailing off one shoulder, revealed a big bruise, huddled desolately on the floor with her blonde head upon the day-couch, was the

peroxide little lady who for many days had afforded gossip to the tabbies of the ship.

“I’m so sorry. Can I help you? What’s the matter?” stammered Marcella, startled.

The woman raised a tear-stained face. Marcella’s advent neither surprised nor embarrassed her. In a world of ups and downs (principally downs) she was beyond that sort of thing.

“Nothing’s the matter, except the appalling rottenness of life,” she answered drearily. With a weary gesture she pushed back the thick and too fair masses of her hair, drew her kimono closer round her slim figure, and rose to her feet. “You’d better not stay here,” she added laconically, though with a quick look over her bruised shoulder towards the other door.

“I’m afraid you’re in trouble,” Marcella said kindly. “Forgive my intruding in this way, but I thought I might be of some use. Your shoulder——” She broke off rather awkwardly.

The woman reddened.

“Oh, that’s nothing. I bumped it this morning against the wardrobe, for the ship was rolling so. It’s good of you, all the same. There aren’t many women aboard who’d be so kind. They all hate me.”

“Come into my state-room, and keep me company for a bit,” Marcella urged, on a sudden impulse. “The sea’s so rough that I’m not going down to dinner. I’m not too wonderful a sailor. Are you?” Subconsciously she knew that this stranger was intensely lonely and unhappy, and here was a chance to exercise real sympathy.

Listlessly the woman followed her.

“I’ve done this crossing sixteen times; and the sea doesn’t worry me a bit.” Then glancing round Marcella’s state-room, which the girl had made extremely pretty with fresh flowers which came daily to her from the ice-chambers of the ship, and with photographs in silver frames, she halted before one of the latter, and, with a sharp intake of breath, said suddenly:

“Who’s this man?”

“A friend of mine, in London.” Marcella’s tones were cool. It was one thing to take pity on this semi-boycotted person, and quite another matter to be cross-examined by her.

“D’you mind telling me his name?” This almost breathlessly.

“Of course not. He is Mr. Warwick Treman.” She looked curiously at her interrogator. “Have you met him?” (That, of course, was quite impossible.)

“Not under that name,” came the surprising answer. Then, hastily, as though realizing the peculiarity of the reply: “This gentleman here must be the double of the man I knew. It was twelve years ago in Winnipeg—but of course it’s not the same——”

Nevertheless, she looked long and keenly at the photograph.

The stewardess arrived with a plate of cold chicken and some salad, and Marcella ordered a second portion for her new-found guest. When Mrs. Tomkins had withdrawn, after a dubious glance at the visitor, Marcella pleasantly remarked:

“Speaking of names, I don’t know yours yet. Mine is Marcella Field.”

“And mine’s Deirdre.” The woman’s glance suddenly rested on the valuable pendant round the other’s neck, and then travelled to the diamond and platinum wristwatch that the girl was wearing. “It’s none of my business, of course, but if you take my tip, you’ll deposit these in the purser’s safe for the remainder of this voyage. And—and don’t let on to any one that it was I who gave you the hint.”

Marcella looked astonished.

“D’you mean that there’s a thief aboard?”

“I’m not saying anything,” said the woman called Deirdre, relapsing into apathy again.

The stewardess brought her meal, and she partook of it in silence, sitting in a low chair near Marcella, with a tray upon her knees. Her hostess surreptitiously studied the pretty, common, rather peaky little face, of which the obvious make-up was ravaged by recent tears.

Marcella was at a loss for conversation. Something must be said, however, so—“Have you enjoyed the voyage?” she asked banally.

Deirdre gave a low, mocking laugh.

“Yes—like poison!” She turned her queer eyes on the speaker. Fires seemed to be smouldering in their depths, making them oddly beautiful, and Marcella gazed, half fascinated, half afraid.

“It’s only men I hate,” Deirdre added quickly, “not women, although always they hate me.”

“Why should they?”

“Ah, that’s a long story. No time just now to tell it. Besides, it’s not a very pretty one, although a man”—her dilated glance turned for an instant to the photograph of Warwick Treman, seemed to revolve a thought, then dismiss it as improbable—“a man was at the bottom of the tale.” She suddenly drew out a cigarette-case in wrought gold.

“D’you mind if I smoke? My nerves are shot all to pieces, and it sort of soothes ’em.”

“Why, certainly. May I have one, too?” Marcella was anxious to put this strange Deirdre at her ease.

But the other drew back instantly.

“I’m sorry—no. These cigarettes wouldn’t suit you. You’d best stick to your own kind—I mean, if you’re not a good sailor, and the cabin’s pitching so——” She had flushed, and the hand that held the cigarette-case shook a trifle.

“You’re quite right. I shan’t smoke at all,” replied Marcella quietly, yet bewildered. “You were telling me that women hate you,” she added. “Why? Is it because they’re jealous?”

“Not so much jealous as afraid. Oh, not your kind, of course. I couldn’t hold a candle to a girl like you. But”—frankly—“in a hard school I’ve learnt the art of pleasing men. And generally I do succeed—although I hate them.” She blew a ring of smoke into the air and watched it circle. “But sometimes I let go and tell ’em so, although it never pays——” and she hitched the gorgeous kimono over her bruised shoulder. “Bah! They’re like children, if you go the right way to manage them. Flattery is all they want.”

The woman’s mood had, all of a sudden, changed to liveliness, and her eyes were sparkling. Marcella glanced at the thick, tumbled hair that was like sunshine, and Deirdre, following her glance, put up a tentative hand and touched it.

“Gold for gold,” she said mockingly. “My hair used to be as dark as yours until I dyed it. My pal—brother, I mean—says it makes me look younger this way, and of course that’s important.”

“As a cat’s-paw for the crooks up in the card-room,” thought Marcella shrewdly, wondering what this woman’s life had been in the past few years to bring that hard look to her face.

“I must go now,” said the latter, rising, the meal finished. “Storm or no storm, I’m needed to make up a fifth at poker. Look here, kid”—she caught Marcella by the arm abruptly—“are you interested in that young chap Holden?”

Because, if so, keep him out of the ship's card-room, will you? Every time he goes there he will lose—and lose.”

“But—he's a good player.” Her listener was mystified.

“Do as I say,” went on the other. “I'm telling you because I like you, child, and you're the only person on this ship—the only woman, that's to say—who's been decent to me. And”—lowering her voice—“keep the bolt between your room and mine locked, always, and the other door bolted every night as well. Also, if you take my tip, you'll go straight from this conversation to the purser's office and have that watch and pendant and any other valuables you've got stuck in his safe. D'you hear?”

In a moment she was gone, leaving Marcella with a creepy feeling that was chiefly wonderment.

Nevertheless, she did deposit her valuables in the purser's office, for the warning lingered. And, retiring early, she bolted the door between her cabin and Deirdre's.

But the storm outside had necessitated the closing of her window.

“And I must have air,” said Marcella to herself, hooking the other door five inches open, as was her usual custom. It was silly to be frightened of intruders. . . .

Soon she was in her berth and fast asleep.

She dreamed of Miles Holden, yet the dream was troubled. Outside, the storm increased its fury, and at last it jerked her back to consciousness. But—*was* it the gale? What was that stealthy, creeping sound? The pad-pad of bare feet on her state-room carpet? Marcella, suddenly wide awake and with every nerve on edge, knew what cold terror meant. . . .

The light in the corridor outside had been extinguished, contrary to custom. The cabin was in darkness. Yet, straining her eyes, Marcella could (yes, she was almost certain) glimpse a moving shape. . . .

She tried to scream, but, paralyzed with fear, her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth. Nearer and nearer came the stealthy footsteps. Something was surely breathing close beside her pillow. And then a cold hand, groping, touched her face.

Marcella's cry was stifled by a sudden grip upon her throat, a sudden ghastly sense of suffocation as a sheet was flung about her head.

Deirdre's warning! Robbery! But the intruder meant to murder her! Yes, this was death. . . .

Then, with the unexpected rush of strength that a trapped animal will sometimes show, the girl came to, and struggled like a little tigress. It seemed like years, but was in reality a bare two minutes when her head was free, and she could scream for help.

And scream she did, so loudly that it rose above the storm, and the night steward in his cabin a corridor away came running.

He found the state-room empty, save for Marcella, who was sitting up in bed with a ghastly face.

"Some one . . . tried to choke me . . ." she gasped out.

"But, madam," said the steward in astonishment, "no one has left this room. The moment you cried out, I switched the light on in the corridor, and could see your door from that instant up to now. No one came out. And look, the place is empty."

Without a doubt, the girl had had a nightmare, he decided.

"But the other door, just beside me, into the other cabin . . . it's unbolted," gasped Marcella. "I bolted it before I went to bed."

The steward tried it, and found it locked on the other side. He rapped sharply on the panels.

"Open, please."

There was no answer.

"You've been dreaming, madam," he said soothingly, turning to the frightened girl. "Look; your room isn't in disorder. Nothing's been taken or disturbed. Let me just bolt this communicating door, and you get up and lock the other door after me, and you'll be as right as rain. There's an empty cabin opposite, and I'll spend the rest of my watch in there, I promise you, so don't be frightened."

It was true that none of her belongings had been touched. Luckily, her jewellery and valuables she had deposited only a few hours back in the purser's office. Flinging on a dressing-gown, she rose, and with the steward's help, made a thorough inspection of the state-room.

"You get back into bed now, madam. And I'll be near at hand, remember, so don't worry. Just lock the door behind me, and have a good sleep." The man felt sorry for her, yet her story seemed impossible. He had had experience of

these nightmares, especially in stormy weather.

CHAPTER III

The Enchanted Hour

Day dawned so calm and beautiful that last night's happenings seemed to Marcella like some queer and hateful dream. Of course, the captain of the ship must be informed. But before Marcella's mental vision was the memory of Deirdre's pleading, tear-stained face.

In Miles Holden she confided.

"I've a little revolver in a suitcase in my cabin. Tonight I'll lend it to you," said that young man decidedly. But on going to his cabin he was amazed to find the weapon of defence gone.

The captain and the ship's detective got the story, although Marcella—wishing to spare Deirdre—made no mention of the latter's warning of the night before.

"Leave the affair in our hands, and, meantime, forget about it," said the captain kindly, noticing Marcella's troubled looks.

In Miles Holden's company that injunction wasn't difficult. She spent a happy day, which terminated in a peaceful night.

So the last hours aboard ship came. On the eighth morning the boat was due to dock at Southampton, and on the night before a dance was held.

The acknowledged belle was Miss Marcella Field. She was besieged with partners.

But always her thoughts turned to Holden. . . .

They had had five dances, then an *interim*, during which Marcella did her best to sparkle for the benefit of others.

But when the tenth dance came, and brought the one man who, to her, made all the others seem insignificant, Marcella wasn't loath to accompany him up to a moonlit corner of the boat-deck, and, away from the music of the saxophone and ukulele, gaze over the shining waters to the rugged western coast of Ireland.

"So, tomorrow, all this ends." It was the man who broke the enchanted silence first.

"All good things must end," rejoined Marcella, conscious of the triteness of

that observation, and considerably keyed up.

“Why?” He turned and looked at her in the clear moonlight. Her beauty was irradiated with a white transparency that made her small face as exquisite as a gardenia. She was the loveliest girl he’d ever known . . . the most desirable. What a curse the lack of money was! But would she really mind that lack, supposing that she, by a glorious materialisation of his dreams, could learn to love him?

Little did he guess the tumult that was going on in his companion’s mind.

And, anxious to gain command of herself, Marcella’s voice was rather cool as she replied:

“I have always found, in life, that it’s a mistake to let anything grow stale through repetition.”

“Even a wonderful experience?”

“Can any experience continue to be wonderful, on repetition?” she countered, conscious of the nearness of this fascinating man.

“I was just thinking”—he drew closer—“how wonderful the most ordinary repetitions of life could be, under certain conditions.”

Afraid of the too pregnant silence, she leant over the side of the boat, gazing down at the gleaming phosphorescence on the water.

“Lovely, isn’t it?” she remarked with an attempt at lightness. “But just an illusion, like so many other things.”

He, too, looked down.

“The phosphorescence, do you mean?”

She nodded.

“But it’s no illusion. That light’s given off by millions of microscopic creatures in the water, on whom fishes feed. Fireflies playing round the hedge ashore are just the same.”

“Will-o’-the-wisps?” inquired Marcella. “When I was a tiny tot, I used to spend hours chasing them, trying in vain to capture them.” She laughed.

“The little girl that used to be can sympathize with me, then,” came the odd reply, voiced very low. And his listener’s heart beat fast. What did he mean?

“Do you want the unattainable?” That was a risky question, but she couldn’t keep it back.

As though he hadn't heard it, he went on:

"The firefly gives off light, but not a scrap of warmth. So even if one caught it, the long chase would only end in disappointment. Isn't that so . . . Marcella?"

"Why do you ask me?" she said in a half-whisper, with a pulse throbbing in her throat. "Why should I know?"

"Because the firefly has its parallel among the humans. For the last week, the radiance of one has dazzled me so that everything else seems dull and commonplace, and even my work, that used to seem so all-important, is in a sort of haze. . . ."

She turned her face up to him in the moonlight, and her beauty shone with the soft sheen of pearls.

"But tomorrow, when you go ashore, the firefly will have gone, and you will see everything in the right perspective——"

He caught her hands in his, and looked deep into her eyes.

"Like the little girl you used to be, Marcella, I shall only want to follow that light, even though it takes me months and years to capture it. Perhaps—who knows?—a miracle might happen, and I shall find fires kindled there."

"You think the—the person—half butterfly, half firefly—is—is worth it?" came her whisper very low. An electric current flowed from his strong hands into hers, and her whole heart melted towards him with a rush that almost frightened her.

"Worth everything in the world, Marcella . . . darling! Don't you know that the sea and the moon and the stars were only made as a setting for—for love? Listen to the whispering of the waters. They're telling you what I'm afraid to tell you . . . that love is the only thing that really counts . . . the only thing that can endure, Marcella."

He caught her in his arms and held her close. The girl closed her eyes, and in the intoxication of that moment it seemed as though their spirits winged across the seas to an Elysium for two where no one else could enter.

"Love is beauty, and beauty is just love, although I never fully realized it, till now," went on the sculptor to whom beauty was a god. "Sweetheart . . . Marcella, the loveliest name I've ever known"—his voice lingered on the syllables—"tell me there is some hope. I—I love you so."

She raised her face to his, and, though she did not speak, the lovelight

shone in her dark eyes, and he could see it there.

“I’ll do everything in the world to make you happy, sweetness, if you’ll let me have the right. I never knew—I never dreamt—that I could feel like this. It’s past belief——”

Their lips met in a long, lingering kiss, and the moonlight cast a halo on them, like a benediction. Marcella touched a pinnacle of happiness that made her dumb. Miles Holden—superman—the handsome, fascinating sculptor, whose good looks and charm and genius had brought New York to his feet, and to whom every one must feel attracted—he had fallen in love with her, humdrum Marcella Field, whose counterpart could be met with by the thousand, anywhere! Which goes to show that love had made Marcella humble.

How long they stood there in the moonlight, in each other’s arms, Marcella didn’t know. But the spell at last was broken by the sound of approaching feet. The lovers drew apart as Mr. Sparks, the wireless operator, hove in view.

“Radiogram for you, Miss Field.” He handed her a paper. “I brought it up myself, because I’m not quite certain of the sender’s name. Tresmand, or Tremond?”

She was scanning it, and in a strained voice, answered:

“Tremen, thanks. No, there’s no answer.”

Mr. Sparks moved off. Those two were evidently in love . . . it was a shame to interrupt them . . . but wasn’t it going to be infernally awkward for the girl when this Warwick Treman chap, who seemed so sure of her that he would even put words of love into a wireless message, should turn up at the dock tomorrow morning, and carry her away?

Two young men passed him on their way to claim Marcella for a dance. She was the prettiest girl aboard, and trans-Atlantic love affairs were usually short-lived. But the look on the faces of young Holden and herself had been so ecstatic that he wished them luck . . . and maybe some wise fate might stop the Treman chap from butting in and spoiling sport.

CHAPTER IV

Love or War?

It was raining when the boat docked in Southampton on the following morning.

“But my car’s waiting and we’ll be up in town in no time,” announced Warwick Treman in possessive tones, claiming Marcella as she stepped off the first-class gangway, with Miles Holden close at hand. “This a friend of yours, my dear?” He flung a condescending glance in Miles’ direction which clearly seemed to say: “Hands off! This is my property, and don’t you dare forget it!” He added with perfunctory courtesy, “Sorry I can’t offer you a seat,” and drew Marcella determinedly off to collect her luggage. “It’s glorious to have you back again. We’ll celebrate tonight.”

Her heart sank painfully. It was going to be hard to tell this take-it-all-for-granted suitor that his inning definitely was ended. Besides, her conscience pricked her for the past encouragement she had given him—before she met Miles Holden.

Tomorrow she was going to meet and dine with Miles. That thought must give her courage for the task that lay immediately ahead.

But, once in the seclusion of the big limousine, Treman was curiously obtuse. The gist of what she was saying didn’t seem to penetrate. It was only when she blurted out: “And so, Warwick, you understand that it’s just a—a great friendship between us—that I like you awfully—but nothing beyond that —” that, turning, he caught her hand in his so tightly that it hurt, and his jaw set in the bulldog way she knew so well.

“If you think I’m ever going to let you go, you’re mightily mistaken,” he announced. “I’ve waited long enough for you, my dear, and this tomfoolery and shillyshallying have got to end. Tomorrow I get the licence, and this very week we marry, or——”

Marcella paled. Subconsciously she had always known that Warwick Treman had a certain ruthlessness in him. “Strength,” she had called it hitherto.

“D’you remember that holiday in Switzerland four years ago?” went on the level tones beside her. “The evening that, unknown to your chaperon, we went ski-ing in the moonlight, and, going too far, were overtaken in a blizzard, lost our bearings, and had to spend the night in a little lonely shelter on the

mountain-side? Child that you were, you thought the whole thing a joke until, in the early morning, I explained to you the view that your conventional little world—the women, in particular—might take. You were frightened then, and when, leaving the hut, we breakfasted at the chalet of a Swiss peasant woman, I paid her to return to the hotel with us and bear out my story to your chaperon that you and I had taken refuge in her cottage. The lie was for your sake, Marcella——”

With an effort the girl pulled herself together.

“I wanted you to tell the truth at the time. We had nothing to hide . . . you *know* we hadn’t.”

Her hearer gave a little twisted smile that wasn’t pleasant.

“It’s an unbelieving world, my dear, and every pretty woman has her enemies. What would you say if I were to tell you that, two weeks ago in Mürren, I ran across this Swiss peasant . . . she wants to come to England, and begged me to recommend her to some friend as lady’s maid. I thought of speaking to Lady Warrington, who’s looking out for a French or Swiss sewing-woman.” From his pocket-book he took out a name and address scrawled in a foreign hand. “I can get in touch at once with our alibi of that all-night escapade—I’ve only got to wire, in fact——”

“You thought of bringing her over here as sewing-maid to Lady Warrington?” faltered Marcella, thunderstruck. “But I’m going down to stay with Lady Warrington, and——”

“Then the plot thickens,” said Warwick Treman, still with the cruel little smile about his lips. “You and your alibi will meet, and it’ll be dashed awkward for you, Marcella, unless——”

“Unless what?”

“Unless you drop this darn-fool nonsense, and agree to marry me within the month,” he said triumphantly.

“To marry you within a month?” repeated Marcella automatically, and scarcely comprehending the import of the words. “You—you cannot be in earnest! You are joking!”

She contrived to shake out a little nervous laugh. The best—the *only* way was to treat the thing as humorous, though deep down in her subconscious mind she knew that a sense of humour wasn’t Warwick Treman’s forte.

She knew, too, he realized that she was frightened. He was extraordinarily acute in reading moods. His insight into the normal workings of the human

mind had placed him high in the business world, and he would go still higher.

“Joking?” It was the man’s turn to laugh. He did so, grimly and deliberately. “You underrate your own powers of fascination if you think I am not serious in every word I say.”

Marcella’s breath came fast, and her heart fluttered in her bosom like a prisoned bird. This caught feeling was absurd . . . as though any girl, these modern days, ever need marry against her inclination . . . but, none the less, the situation was fraught with all sorts of hidden dangers.

How foolish she had been to blurt out the story of her love for Miles! Why not take time and break the news gradually, diplomatically?

“These are modern days,” she said, striving for nonchalance of manner, “and you can scarcely carry me off by force, can you? As for using the Swiss episode as a—a lever—why, I was only a kid at the time, and acting on your own suggestion. You wouldn’t stoop to methods of that sort. You’re far too square.”

An appeal to the chivalry innate in every man would soften him, she hoped. Which goes to show Marcella’s ignorance of the type.

He leaned back in a corner of the limousine, from which point of vantage he could see each flickering expression on her pretty face. What a child she was! And how desirable! Doubly desirable, now that this unexpected fear of losing her had cut into his complacency like a goad, to spur him to fresh efforts.

For Warwick Treman loved a fight. Battles in business were the primary interest, naturally. He had never put love before business, not even when he met and was attracted to Marcella.

But now he saw he had neglected her. Her fickleness—he called it that—had been the natural outcome of his neglect. The man’s innate vanity assured him this was the reason for her changed attitude towards himself.

Yet, even if she loved the other fellow, he would cut him out. Hang it, didn’t even the poets say that all was fair in love and war? He wanted Marcella. He would have her, willy-nilly.

“Have a cigarette, my dear?” He handed her his gold, monogrammed case. “It’s soothing to the nerves. I’ll have one, too.”

He regarded her between half-closed lids. Jove, she was pretty! New York had taught her how to dress. In spite of her present perturbation, he could see how vastly she had improved—in poise, in gesture, in the very air with which

she wore her clothes.

He didn't want a girl with money. He had plenty of that himself. Women with money of their own grew tiresome and up-stage. He had no use for independence in a wife. She must come to him for everything, like a grateful subject to its monarch.

He would be good to her—in reason. Naturally there were many little things to be corrected. Modern notions that ill became a woman, who, after all, belonged to the inferior sex.

Once pretty Marcella was his bride, he would teach her that her future aim in life was to minister to her husband's pleasure, to make her interests subservient to his—indeed, to have no interests that did not circle round himself, his home, his happiness and comfort.

The breaking in process would be amusing. As a boy, he had broken in many an untamed colt in his uncle's stables. He had been rather cruel, sometimes, but had always won. It was stimulating to contemplate a similar success with this high-spirited, rather *difficile* young woman.

The big car purred along with a soothing sound. The rain had ceased, and sunshine lay athwart the fields and hedgerows, turning the landscape to a mellow golden green. Marcella was staring out of the window, her clean-cut, youthful profile showing a troubled perplexity.

“Turn round and listen, my dear,” said her companion suddenly. “You and I have lots to talk about. But, first of all, let's investigate this board-ship flirtation of yours. No, don't be angry at the word! It was merely a passing fancy, I am positive. I've crossed the Atlantic several times myself—and so I know.”

He gave a light laugh, though his eyes were unsmiling.

Marcella met his gaze.

“You don't understand in the very least,” she responded bravely.

“Oh yes, I do. The affair with me had grown a little humdrum. I didn't play the ardent lover. I was too busy making money for our future, dear. *Ours*, understand? But all the same, though I didn't make the pretty speeches of this pretty boy of yours”—his thin, well-shaped lips curled in a half-sneer—“I have always wanted you, Marcella. And now—now I don't intend to lose you, even if I have to force your hand.”

His eyes held a curious mixture of triumph and desire, so that the young girl shivered, and drew farther into her own corner of the car.

“That isn’t real *love* speaking.” She must not let him see she was afraid. She must answer him in his own language. Strong men had the bullying instinct in them, and this one was no exception.

“If a man really loves a girl,” she went on quickly, “he doesn’t seek to injure her reputation. And he wants to see her happy with the man she cares for!”

Warwick Treman flung back his head and laughed aloud. The counterfeit of mirth was excellent.

“I’m not ready to wear a halo yet, my dear. Such heights of altruism are beyond me. I’m not a saint.” Then, sobering: “I’m merely a very human individual who loves and wants an equally human person, and who intends to have her, even if the means to the end are not as pretty as he’d prefer them to be. But he has to use what weapons are available. That’s life and common sense.”

Marcella turned clear eyes upon him.

He reached over and caught her gloved hand in his.

“Come, don’t be silly. This namby-pamby chap has filled you up with all sorts of high-falutin’ ideas that could never stand the light of day. You’d tire of poverty with him in no time. As a practical business man, I’ve no use for these so-called artistic chaps, and pity the woman who’s ever fool enough to be taken in by their claptrap, and their talk of temperament and ‘art for art’s sake’ and the sickening line that is their stock-in-trade.”

“I should be obliged if you wouldn’t drag *him* into this conversation.” The girl’s tones had the sharp clink of ice. “You’ve given your opinion; leave it at that. I shan’t contradict you, because even you yourself would see how wide of the mark you are, were you to meet Miles Holden——”

“Miles Holden? That’s the name, is it? Now, where have I heard it before?” And Warwick Treman straightened, knitting his brows thoughtfully for a moment. “Holden? Holden? I have it! He’s a friend—a great friend—of little Leonie Day.” And the man smiled a meaning smile that was not lost upon his listener.

To love is to suffer—stupidly, unreasonably—and to know the painful pangs of jealousy. Marcella was no exception to the normal girl in love.

She despised herself for saying, “Who is Leonie Day?” but for the life of her she had to ask.

“Oh, quite a fetching little thing! Plays merry havoc with the men all right.

Cute, pretty, clever. Knows how to flatter. She got round this Holden fellow beautifully. He set her up in a little hat shop of her own, and she's really doing awfully well in business. Trust her to come out on top!"

He gave a careless laugh, half admiring, half contemptuous, that definitely classified Miss Leonie Day.

Marcella sat up very straight.

"Miles Holden—set this girl up in a hat shop! It can't be the same man!"

Her breathless eagerness, her evident chagrin at the linking of this other woman's name with that of Holden, the quick jealousy in her very tones—did not all these prove the extent of her infatuation with the fellow?

It pleased Treman, therefore, to hurt her further, for he was annoyed and vexed himself.

"It is the same chap, positively, unless there are two sculptors of that name. The girl was his—er—model, till he paid her off." He gave a meaning pause to allow the last remark to sink in properly. "She has a lovely figure. Come, what on earth's the matter?"

"I don't believe a word of it," cried Marcella, giving herself away completely, and heedless that she did. "You are inventing stories just because you know I—I admire him so!"

The man pretended to look amazed.

"Are you really so ignorant of art as not to know that these sculptor-johnnies work from life?"

"It isn't that. It's your—your—hateful insinuations—paying her off—the hat shop——"

His lip curled sarcastically.

"You're afraid that your saint has feet of clay? My dear child, I know nothing of the morals of the man. But it would be news indeed to learn that artists, of all people, are exempt from the ordinary weaknesses of life. Use your intelligence and common sense, and don't let this idle infatuation run away with you."

"You must tell me more. I have a—a *right* to know," breathed Marcella, casting prudence to the winds.

Treman shrugged his shoulders lightly.

"I'm sorry I mentioned the matter, since you're so upset about it. But I

certainly can't go back on what I've said. I've attended to some small investments for Leonie Day, and when your friend set her up in the Maison Léonie, as she calls her place of business, the transaction was put through by my firm, and there's no denying the fact that the Holden chap put up the money. Why, he walked right into my office with the girl! Now that I come to think of it, his face at Southampton was vaguely familiar. Nice looking chap, I grant you. This happened about a year and a half ago—maybe more. The girl's doing nicely."

Marcella clutched at a straw.

"He—he gave her the money out of kindness. He's so generous and quixotic, he would give everything he had to—to anybody——"

Treman touched her hand.

"Wake up, my child. As though needy sculptors were in the habit of handing out three hundred pounds to 'anybody.' Don't you believe it . . . not unless they got full value for the money!"

A very painful pause ensued. Marcella, with averted face, her underlip bitten till it nearly bled, so that its trembling might be controlled, stared unseeingly out of the window of the car. The lovely landscape had grown dim and all its beauty gone.

Treman went on, suavely:

"Of course, the girl's not in your class, Marcella, and I shouldn't be surprised if the fellow's tired of her by now. The trouble is that she's far from being tired of *him*—in fact, she dotes on him. D'you know, she burst into my office only yesterday, saying how vexed she was she had to go off to Paris for a few days because she'd miss seeing him here on his arrival? If I'd had my wits about me, I'd have known he was coming on your boat. Rather odd if the fair Leonie had come down with me to Southampton, and we'd both found our best-beloveds had no further use for us, but were infatuated with each other! Eh? Ha! ha!"

There was no mirth in the attempt at joviality, and Marcella knew intuitively that the speaker did believe that an affair existed—or had existed—between Miles Holden and this hat-shop girl. From his own point of view he spoke the truth.

"Come, let's forget it." Again he caught at her hand. "What are they to us, those people? You've known me for four years—you once were very fond of me, Marcella—give me a sporting chance to rouse the old affection once again! It isn't dead. It's only sleeping. I'll do everything to please you. I swear

I will. I've neglected you, I know—for business. But now I'll leave the office early in the afternoons, and we can go golfing, or motoring, or dancing—anything you want. And I'll buy you the most expensive engagement ring that you and I can find. And there's a two-seater car that would be the very thing for you, a little coupé, handy for shopping. It's yours if you'll just say the word."

The girl's hand lay inertly, unenthusiastically, in his own. She made no attempt to return the ardent pressure.

"I can't, Warwick," she said dully. "I'm not in love with you."

"Huh? What's that?" His face was near her own, intent and listening. "You don't know your own mind. In a few days, I'll wager, you'll have totally forgotten this board-ship flirtation, and be as fond of me as ever you were." The self-satisfied, complacent look of the successful man came back again. "Cheer up. Smile."

"And—and if I find I can't—" she prevaricated, her thoughts all in confusion and circling round the mysterious Leonie who seemed to have some prior claim upon the man she truly loved. Or was it, as Warwick Treman said, not love, but mere infatuation on her part?

"H'm. If you can't—?" Marcella could sense the chill that lay behind her suitor's words. "There is no such word as 'can't' in love, when a girl's best interests lie that way. I offer you position, money, a splendid home, devotion, freedom from worries, all a woman wants. I can gratify your every wish. A yacht? Yours for the asking. A car? I have offered it already. A town house and a country house. Horses. A box at the opera. Winters in Cannes or Monte Carlo. Trips round the world if you want to travel. Everything, Marcella, that can make a woman happy."

"Everything?" The cool inflection of her voice did not escape him. "You mean everything that is material? Worldly goods and so-called pleasures? Don't you think there's something else in life than these?"

The man beside her made an impatient gesture.

"Oh, I know that line of talk. Plain living and high thinking. Sounds very fine and noble, but means nothing. All poppycock. You're the very girl who'd luxuriate in worldly comforts. At heart a little salamander, my dear child."

"I wonder," said Marcella slowly, thoughtfully. "There is a side of me like that, I know. And I suppose, if I let it, it could grow and grow until a lot of finer feelings and instincts became blunted. Prosperity so often does do that."

“Come, Marcella, what fault do you find in me? I’m pretty decent as an average man. And I’m in love with you.”

She looked at him gravely.

“You’re so—unspiritual. You measure everything in terms of money and worldly power. Success is your god. But you can’t see that there are other successes perhaps finer than your own, successes that aren’t blazoned about in terms of yachts and mansions and gorgeous dinner-parties and limousines——” She broke off with a little helpless gesture, for under the quizzical gaze it was difficult to explain adequately just what she meant. Besides, was he capable of understanding her?

“And your new suitor is so spiritual, is he, eh? Leonie Day might tell a different tale!” sneered her companion. “Well, if you won’t listen to reason, Marcella, let me warn you that I shall try another tack. What I said about the Swiss woman holds good. A line from me will bring her to this country as the personal maid of your friend Lady Warrington. A woman of that class seldom keeps her mouth shut. She will tell how we bribed her to pretend we’d stayed the night at her chalet——”

“*You* bribed her! It was your own idea! I was too young, too simple, not to believe that you were acting for the best!” Marcella’s eyes flashed fire. Her small hands clenched and unclenched themselves in nervous wrath. “You said it was the only thing to do to quiet the gossips’ tongues! And now—now you would play upon my previous ignorance, and use it as a weapon against me, to force me to your wishes! How—how despicable!”

Warwick Treman smiled a slow, triumphant smile.

“All’s fair in love and war,” said he. “It’s going to be love *or* war, Marcella! That’s my ultimatum.”

CHAPTER V

Gathering Clouds

Marcella's father, a retired professor and an ardent archæologist, occupied a big, old-fashioned house close to the British Museum.

"Let dad poke round skeletons and mummies, and he's perfectly content!" his daughter would aver, with fond tolerance. "The British Museum and—as an alternative—the clouds are his abode. He's the most unworldly thing I've ever known."

She was devoted to him and immensely proud of his scholarliness. Abstruse papers he would read aloud to her, and never, never did she yawn, no matter to what degree her boredom went. She would type his learned essays and speeches for him, and never was too tired to help.

Moreover, she made a perfect little hostess for his "musty-fusty" friends. The adjective was not Marcella's, but had been coined by some of her own especial younger set, to whom occasional encounters with the Great Ones were rather irksome.

The professor was delighted to have his pretty daughter home again. He was exceedingly fond of her, though he was not demonstrative. He blinked at her through his glasses like an excited owl.

"Dear child . . . looking so well. . . ." (He was near-sighted and could scarcely see her.) "Missed you so much. . . . Been very busy. . . . Read the Egyptian paper before the Geographical Society last night. . . . You should have heard me. . . . You'd have enjoyed it. . . ."

Marcella kissed him lovingly. He looked rather frail, she thought, and her heart smote her for leaving him so long.

They dined *tête-à-tête* and she noticed that he didn't eat much. When the excitement of her coming had died down, she felt there was something on his mind, that he was worried.

He was no strategist.

"Daddy, what's eating you?" She fell into the vernacular of the land she had recently left.

Puzzled, he looked at her.

“Those odd American expressions!” He smiled faintly. “I don’t understand.” Behind his glasses, his eyes looked tired, as though some other problem than ancient tombs and buried cities were perplexing him.

“You’ve something on your mind,” his daughter pointed out. “You see, I know you, daddy dear. Come on. Confess.”

“You can’t help this time, dear. Never mind. I must find a way out myself.” The professor sighed, and tried to smile—a wan attempt.

“Money worries, dear?”

He hesitated, and then inclined his silvery head.

“All my little investments have depreciated. And—and I bought a quantity of stock that has gone steadily down and down. Our finances are—are in very bad shape, Marcella. How bad I can scarcely realize. Something must be done. And yet”—he flung out his fine, blue-veined hands with a helpless gesture that went straight to Marcella’s heart—“I’m not a money-maker. I’ve been a poor father, and—and things seem to have gone from bad to worse since you went away.”

Yes, he had muddled things. A good-for-nothing fellow had persuaded him, against his better judgment, into a get-rich-quick scheme which had fallen flat, and left the shareholders even flatter.

And, to redeem the money, he had had a little flutter on the market, and his broker—careless chap—hadn’t telephoned him when the stuff dropped several points; so there, too, he had lost a bit.

Marcella listened with a sinking heart. *Money!* If she were only *sure* that Miles Holden truly loved her, and if only he had the income of a Warwick Treman, what a joy to remove the lines of care from her father’s fine, unworldly, clever face!

There was a painful pause, and then her father spoke again.

“Mr. Treman has been most kind. He went into my affairs with me, but his advice, of course”—another wan smile—“was like locking the stable door after the horse is stolen! What a splendid business head he has!”

“There is more in these remarks than meets the eye,” Marcella told herself, knowing her father was no diplomat. “Warwick has been hinting at his feeling for me, and daddy wonders if I care for him.”

Aloud she said, with apparent nonchalance:

“Did you see much of him while I was away?”

“He came to a couple of meetings with me, and took the most intelligent interest in a paper that I read.”

“Diplomatic Warwick!” thought Marcella. “Trying to get on daddy’s good books, so that the path of true love might run easier when I returned!”

“He—tells me—that he thinks very highly of you, my child. He seems a clever, honourable, upright man. And—don’t think I want these things myself—but he is so richly endowed with this world’s goods that surely you would have all the things that girls enjoy. I have been a bad father, Marcella, from the worldly point of view—and this man is in a great position, and he loves you as you deserve to be loved.”

His stammering ended at a look on his daughter’s face.

“You don’t want me to marry without love, do you, daddy?”

“No, no, of course not. But he has everything. Qualities of mind and companionableness. Would you not soon learn to love him? I mean”—he floundered helplessly—“is it right to let this good man go out of your life, my dear? Men like that are scarce these days. Your poor mother—she loved me, yes—but I could never give her the setting, the background that her beauty and charm demanded. I want everything for you, Marcella.” He broke off pathetically.

“Dear, blind bat!” thought the young girl ruefully. “He can’t read character one jot. Warwick has bluffed him into believing he’s the super-paragon.”

It hurt to see the harassed look on the fine old face. If only she could care for Warwick, how easy would her father’s life become. Dear, unworldly daddy! What a joy to help him, if she only could.

There must be some way out. Miles Holden would advise her. Of course he loved her! She would trust him absolutely. Warwick Treman’s hints and innuendoes were the product of a jealous, petty mind. This Leonie Day and her precious hat shop! If there had been anything in Miles’ life to tell, he would have confessed it on board ship, like an honourable man. Treman judged others by himself. And Leonie was in Paris, while tomorrow night she—Marcella—was dining with Miles and everything would be cleared up. How silly she had been, how wrong, to doubt him for a moment.

“Telegram for you, Miss.” A maid entered with an orange envelope. “The boy is waiting for an answer.”

Marcella tore the flap open, and read the message with a sickening sinking of the heart. She read it once, twice, thrice.

“There is no answer,” she said dully.

The message stated baldly that Miles Holden had been called to Paris on immediate business and would be gone for an indefinite period.

Paris! *Paris* of all places . . . Paris and *Leonie*!

CHAPTER VI

The Arch-Flatterer

In the lounge of the exclusive little French hotel which was her *pied à terre* during business visits to the capital sat Miss Leonie Day, toying with an after-luncheon cup of coffee, and at the same time shrewdly examining each and all of the other guests.

She was a smart young woman in more ways than one.

“A graduate from the University of Hard Knocks,” she called herself, with the dry humour she could occasionally evince.

That period of her career was past, however. Prosperity had come knocking at her door. She had flung the door wide open to receive it, but its advent had not turned her head.

For that clever, scheming, calculating little head of hers was screwed firmly in the right direction on her *svelte* young shoulders.

Her reflections, as she sat back luxuriously in the contemplation of her fellow-visitors, were of a pleasing kind.

Paris from this angle was enchanting. *Bien soignée*, an expensive marcelle in her hair, the *dernier cri* in hats drawn smartly down above the said marcelle, her sallow little face so artistically made up that it bloomed as naturally as an English rose, and a gown that was perfect in its quiet exclusiveness, setting off the lovely lines of her figure, it was a vastly different Leonie from the Latin Quarter *gamine* of eight years ago.

“And all due to my own hard work and cleverness,” thought she complacently. Also—though this thought did not shape itself so definitely—she was indebted for her *succès fou* to a really subtle gift she had of flattering men.

She could flatter women too, adroitly. Becky Sharp in Vanity Fair had a near rival in Miss Leonie Day; in fact, the latter threatened to outstrip her. For where Thackeray’s historic heroine aimed too high, her downfall being all the greater, Miss Day’s ambitions were ruled by common sense.

She had achieved, in a small way, a business triumph. The Maison Léonie in London was a little dream of a hat shop, and her clientele both wealthy and exclusive.

But, like Achilles and the rest of us, she had one vulnerable spot, her passion for Miles Holden, if the feeling could be graced by such a term. It had nearly got the better of her business instinct, almost compelling her to delay her buying trip, just for the pleasure of a talk with him.

But the money-getting instinct had won out, and heroically she had gone to Paris, leaving a little note behind to await his arrival in the English capital.

Dear, handsome Miles! What a credulous, charming boy he was! How gullible, and how quixotic! And totally without a business head. To borrow the three hundred from him wherewith to set herself up in her own little millinery establishment had been as easy as taking pennies out of a blind man's hat.

And it must have meant actual sacrifice for him, too. For he had been—though famous—at that time comparatively poor.

It flattered Leonie to think he must have cared for her, although her natural acumen pointed to his carelessness in money matters and his generosity as the root of the transaction.

Yes, she would marry him. And she would make him very happy. She was artistic, too . . . hadn't she been around the studios in Paris, Rome, Vienna, London, as model, concierge, all sorts of things, for years and years? She had even daubed a bit, herself, on canvas, for she had a certain knowledge both of colour and of line, which had later proved invaluable in the millinery venture.

And she had the business instinct that Miles Holden lacked. That was the main essential.

He would go up and up in his profession. She was wide awake enough to realize that fact.

“Besides, I am in love with him!” Slowly, pleasurably, her mind seized the thought. (Had she not done an excellent morning's business, and was justified in a few moments' indulgence of the gentle passion?)

A tall, angular woman in the late forties strode into the lounge and dropped awkwardly into a chair beside the dreamer. The woman's hair was badly done and dusty. Her suit—of good material—was ill-fitting and of the wrong colour. Her hat, worn at the wrong angle, with a slightly backward tilt, looked as though it had been rescued from the dust-bin.

She was ungainly, yet she had an air about her. Even the waiters recognized it, for they flew to do her bidding. And, though her face was neither plain nor pretty, and at the moment looked as though a good wash might improve it, her features were aristocratic, and her dark blue eyes were really

fine.

“Lady Warrington, by all that’s lucky!” mentally exclaimed Miss Leonie, with a little intake of the breath. Here was an influential woman who could be of benefit to her, not only in a business way, but socially. Indeed, the two things were intertwined, for it was to Leonie’s best interest to cultivate all prominent folk.

“Eccentric, but has a wide variety of friends,” proceeded the young owner of the Maison Léonie, racking her brains to remember all she had heard. “Likes to think she’s Bohemian, and dabbles a bit in everything, being good at none. Husband dead, I believe.”

Lady Warrington had ordered coffee and a *crème de menthe*. When the waiter had withdrawn she glanced about her in search of the sugar.

“Drat the man, he’s forgotten it,” she remarked aloud pettishly.

Here was the girl’s opportunity, and she seized it.

“May I offer you mine?” She handed over a little bowl of sugar. “The waiters are rather forgetful——”

Lady Warrington thanked her effusively, peering with near-sighted eyes at the girl. She had so many friends, and knew such shoals of people that she felt she ought to recognize this well-bred, smartly-dressed young woman.

“Have we met before?”

“I am not sure—perhaps. I go about a great deal,” fibbed Leonie. “And, of course, I *adore* Paris. Don’t you find it very—*atmospheric*?”

Lady Warrington rose to the bait with childlike naïveté. The word *atmospheric* suggested a fellow artist and a true Bohemian soul.

“Paris expresses one’s every mood,” she chirruped; “all that is gay and young and romantic, that’s to say. I find no *tristesse* here.”

The trite remark amused Miss Leonie. Not for worlds, however, would she have smiled.

“Are you making a long visit?” Her manner left nothing to be desired in flattering interest. She must make hay while the sun shone.

“Oh, staying a day or two to get some clothes. Half a dozen hats have just arrived, and I’ve been trying them on, but, do you know”—an air of childlike disappointment came over the older woman’s face—“although they looked marvellous in the shop, when I put them on my own head something’s wrong! They don’t seem half so smart.”

Leonie could well believe it.

“If only I had some one to advise me—some one who understood line, and colour, and my type!” went on the lady plaintively, stirring the sugar in her coffee. “And yet I’m artistic myself. I really don’t understand what’s happened.”

Here was Leonie’s chance. She leapt at it.

“It would give me the greatest pleasure to help you, and I’m sure I could.” It was too early in their acquaintance to let this influential woman know she was a mere milliner. If things progressed favourably, time enough for that.

Lady Warrington turned towards her, beaming.

“You are an artist? Yes? Much as I love the dear creatures, I thought you looked too smart for one.”

This was very, very promising.

“And your own hat’s too marvellous,” went on her new-found friend, gushingly. “If I could only feel I looked one-half as well——”

Now was the time for adroit flattery. It could be laid on heavily. Leonie had already gauged the type.

“Forgive me for plain speaking, but, of course, you must know already that you have exceptionally fine features. So much character and strength, and yet—such *femininity*. I speak only as an artist. Whenever or wherever I see beauty——” And she broke off cleverly.

Lady Warrington was delightfully surprised. Clever, brainy, charming, good natured, she had many times been called. Her best friends could not have guessed how ardently she longed for physical beauty, and how—like so many of her plain sisters in the world—she would willingly have sacrificed all else for the radiant good looks she could see enjoying homage everywhere.

Leonie read these fluttering emotions, and proceeded to enlarge her theme.

“You have something more . . . do excuse my frankness . . . something *more* than mere good looks. Not only have you the *distingué* air which most women would sell their souls to possess, (but never can, because it’s a matter of heredity and blue blood), but you have that *je ne sais quoi* of subtleness . . . that Mona-Lisa air that is so intriguing.”

Had she gone too far this time? Would the foolish creature really swallow this wholesale flattery?

But Lady Warrington gave a delighted titter. Here was some one after her own heart. And how clever to guess—although, of course, this attractive young person couldn't possibly know her identity—that she really was talking to a scion of nobility, her father being in the peerage.

As for the subtleness——

“Men *have* told me that there was something rather mysterious about me—that they couldn't quite get to the bottom of the way I—I smile,” floundered the embarrassed but entranced lady, who was shallow as the day.

Men! Here was another sidelight for Miss Leonie. Poor, dear Lady Warrington fancied herself as a charmer of the opposite sex!

“I understand that perfectly,” lied the clever little milliner. “If I knew you better, I could explain lots of things about you.”

The bait was swallowed instantly. Lady Warrington, whatever her virtues, did not number reticence among them.

“Do, do tell me.” She moved nearer the speaker, quite enthralled. “I haven't met any one in ages who so interests me.” Which, in a way, was true, since it is human nature to find the topic of oneself absorbing.

“I have an almost infallible instinct in these matters,” quoth Leonie, enjoying her effect. “I sense things——”

Here a waiter approached, and Lady Warrington ordered two more liqueurs—a second for herself, and one for the fascinating seeress.

“I sense things,” proceeded Leonie solemnly. “For instance, the moment I meet a woman, I know if she has charm for men or not. It—forgive my frankness—it *radiates* from you. It's a power beyond good looks, equipped as you already are with these. It's something indefinable, and yet, as Barrie says so aptly, if a woman has this charm, she has every feminine weapon rolled in one, and needs nothing else. I am sure”——here the clever one lowered her voice confidentially——“I am sure that your life has been full of men. Dear lady, you simply couldn't help it. It isn't in your power to drive them off. It never will be. You are one of those people—fortunate or unfortunate—who are fated to attract the opposite sex, to have suitors, one after another——” She broke off.

“I sound exactly like a cheap fortune-teller! I ought to have a red scarf round my head and big, gilt earrings,” she told herself. “She'll never fall for this old stuff!”

“Oh, do go on,” breathed Lady Warrington. It was meat and drink to her—nectar and ambrosia. “I—oh, don't think me vain—but I do have a queer sort

of fascination for some people.”

Leonie nodded sagely.

“I know it. And you’ll never grow old, either.” This was a master-stroke. “You’ll always have that young, vital air you have just now. Your type can never age.”

“The poor, deluded dear is just about ready to fall on my neck and kiss me,” ran her amused but triumphant thoughts.

“My—my family do keep their youthful looks. They’re noted for it,” stammered the delighted hearer.

“Ah! it’s nothing to do with that. It’s *you*, yourself. It’s your avidity for life, your young enthusiasms, and, above all, the curious power some women have—you’re one of them—of attracting love and homage, wherever they go. This universal admiration does keep a woman girlish.”

“I’ve just come back from a visit to the United States, and over there the men were simply *wonderful* to me,” cooly announced the charmer. “They lunched me and dined me, and motored me everywhere, and said such—such sweet and gracious things——”

“They would!” thought Leonie grimly. “From all I’ve heard, it takes an American man to do the heroic stunt and make a plain woman feel that just to be a woman is a triumph. I’ll take my hat off to them, every time. More, one day I’ll go there myself and try them out.”

Her companion produced a card-case and offered her a bit of pasteboard.

“Lady Warrington,” read Leonie aloud, in tones made up of just the right proportion of astonishment, delight, and awe. “This *is* a pleasant surprise for me. I’ve heard of you so frequently from dear personal friends of mine.” And here the bold young creature named the wealthiest of her customers, and those most socially prominent, whose names would at least be familiar to her *vis-à-vis*.

Not knowing in what circumstances Miss Leonie had met them, Lady Warrington was agreeably flattered once again.

“I’m sorry I haven’t a card of my own with me,” apologized the former. (It wouldn’t do to produce a business card—not yet.) “But I am Leonie Day. One of the Hampshire Days, you know,” she added, as an afterthought.

Lady Warrington gave a little squeal and held her hand out cordially.

“My late husband was a great friend of dear, handsome Sir Marmaduke

Day, who was killed some years ago in a hunting accident,” she gurgled.

“Ah, yes! A cousin of mine. Sad affair,” remarked the little hat-shop lady nonchalantly. Then, with a quick twist of conversation, so that quicksands might be dodged:

“We were talking of your hats. I was to see them, wasn’t I?”

Lady Warrington rose immediately.

Together they went up to her room, which was strewn with boxes of all shapes and sizes.

Leonie’s trained fingers twisted the smart models into more becoming angles for her new acquaintance. Alas! she couldn’t bring about a similar miracle with the colours, which were much too glaring to frame the sallow countenance of the wearer.

“I chose the blue to match the colour of my eyes. And a touch of pink—as in that rose—brings out the rose tints in my cheeks. Don’t you think so?”

Frankly, Leonie did not.

She achieved wonders, all the same, first dressing Lady Warrington’s untidy locks in more becoming style, and then affixing each hat at its correct angle.

“You are a genius,” breathed the older woman. “You have transformed me. Maids never stay with me; I’m so untidy and erratic. But I really need one. My friend, Mr. Warwick Treman, did say he’d heard of a capable Swiss woman who understood hairdressing and so on, but I’ve heard no more about her.”

“Mr. Treman is also a friend of mine,” said Leonie, glad they had one mutual acquaintance. “Perhaps I could find a suitable girl for you——”

A page tapped at the door, a letter in his hand.

“For mam’selle. I saw mam’selle come to madame’s room.” He handed it to Leonie and withdrew.

She tore the flap open and gave a little gasp of pleasure.

“A dear friend of mine, a sculptor, is in Paris. He invites me to his exhibition tomorrow afternoon, and says that I may bring a friend.” Then, anxious to humour Lady Warrington and to cement the new acquaintance: “I should be so pleased if you’d come with me. He’s a dear, and so attractive. Every one likes Miles Holden——”

“Miles Holden? That’s the handsome young man they made such a fuss of

in America.” Lady Warrington’s blue eyes sparkled in anticipation. “My dear, the papers were full of his praises and his photographs! Of course I’ll come. I’d love to meet him!”

CHAPTER VII

A Smart Young Woman

There are two sorts of women in the world. Those who scheme and plot and plan for their own advancement; and the simpler and more admirable souls who love to give, and give to love.

Leonie Day was in the former class. She had very little feeling in her composition. But such feeling as she had was directed toward Miles Holden.

It was not disinterested. Intuitively she knew that Miles would rise in his profession, and—if she became his wife—that she would necessarily rise with him. His prestige would be hers.

Had he been poor and struggling, no doubt she would have heroically suppressed her passion for him as foolish and impossible.

Of such stuff was Miss Leonie made.

It had been a stroke of luck encountering Lady Warrington and making such a definite impression on that influential lady.

“Although,” the wise Leonie told herself, with a contemptuous little curl at the corner of her cleverly made-up mouth, “she’d forget me tomorrow if some one else more amusing or more useful came along. I know her kind.”

It was lucky, then, that the lady’s special cronies didn’t happen to be in Paris, and that Leonie could cement the friendship.

This she proceeded to do with energy and cleverness. She played on the other’s foibles with a practised hand. Having remodelled her coiffure and her hats, she treated Lady Warrington as though the latter were a beauty and a Cleopatra, which homage naturally delighted the foolish soul.

She went carefully through her wardrobe too, sometimes condemning outright, sometimes modifying, but actuated always by an excellent, trained taste.

“Any one with your subtle type of looks must be frightfully careful in their clothes,” she would admonish gently. “For instance, *that* is absolutely *verboten*”—here she flung on one side a crude Chinese blue silk frock—“and that taupe cloak is too muddy for your skin, and never, never wear pale rose. You can have it dyed a rich wine red, if you like——” And so on, to a meek and obedient listener.

They went together to Miles Holden's exhibition. Under Leonie's capable administration, the older woman, beautifully gowned and smartly coiffured, looked very nearly handsome.

"Paris does make one feel a sort of queen!" she confided artlessly to her new-made friend as they skimmed by taxi-cab along the boulevards.

A grim smile hovered for a second round the other's lips. She had known actual privation in this lovely city. . . .

"Of course it does," she reassured the speaker. "Paris is the right setting for a beautiful woman."

Lady Warrington glowed pleasurably. This sincere, clever, honest little creature must be rewarded in some way. Besides, her very presence gave the other confidence.

"Will you come and visit me in Hampshire? I have a party on the tenth. Mr. Treman, whom you already know. Richard Prendergast, the playwright. Sir Humphrey Dawes, who's in a Government department of some sort, and does so love a frolic. Marcella Field, a very lovely girl, a retired professor's daughter. And some other friends of mine. Do come."

"It's frightfully kind of you——" Leonie hesitated suitably, though inwardly triumphant.

"I won't take any denial," urged the other, thinking this smart young person was a find. "You're so bright and amusing that you'll make things go with a swing. And I really *need* you to advise me about my clothes!"

"She thinks she's discovered a non-salaried entertainer, lady's maid, and beauty specialist combined!" quoth Leonie to herself ironically. "But I'll profit by her error."

"I'll try to fit the visit in. One does get so full up." There was just the teeniest touch of well-bred languor in her manner. Then, seeing the other's face fall, she added quickly:

"I should simply love to come. I daresay I can manage it. It's awfully sweet of you to think of me."

They reached the galleries where Miles Holden's sculpture was on view. Leonie's heart was a well-regulated organ. There were no uncomfortable palpitations, although perhaps it did accelerate its pace a little.

"Hello, old thing! You're looking frightfully fit!" was her outwardly cool greeting. "Lady Warrington, may I present my friend, Mr. Holden?"

“Ah, Mr. Holden, I’ve so *longed* to meet you!” gurgled the charmer. “I read *all* the simply *marvellous* notices of your work in New York! This is *such* a pleasure——”

Miles smiled rather formally. Here was no new type. But always it embarrassed him.

“I simply *loved* America,” she proceeded. “Such a young, vital country, so *inspiring*! And the men are too *wonderful* to women, aren’t they?”

Leonie, from the rear, gave him a surreptitious wink.

She hoped, all the same, that Miles would be particularly pleasant to the gushing lady. The introductions she could give him would be mighty useful.

At a tiny table specially designed for two, in one of the cosy little restaurants for which Paris is so justly famous, sat Leonie Day—a massaged, manicured, marcelled young woman—the battery of whose bright black eyes was turned in full force on a slender, bronzed young man beside her.

“It’s simply priceless seeing you again,” quoth she, trying to bring her rather high-pitched tones down to the deeper note he admired in women’s voices. He had once quoted Shakespeare on that subject. Something about “her voice was ever soft, gentle and low.” Miles was a bit faddy, but his fancies must be catered to. Sculptors were temperamental folk.

“And it’s equally delightful meeting you,” said the young man rather absent-mindedly, picking up the menu card and scanning it. “It’s quite a bit of luck that we both happened to be in Paris at the same time.”

In actual wording this was promising, but the tone was so frankly platonic that Leonie felt daunted for a moment. The friendlier Miles was, the further off did marriage seem.

“If he would only quarrel with me, I could put in good work in the reconciliation line! Or if I could make him lose his head and kiss me, then I could do the *jeune fille* stunt of newly awakened passion, and swoon into his arms like a Victorian maid! It would be all up with him, then, for he’s so quixotic that he’d feel he *must* propose——”

Thus mused the artless girl.

Never had it dawned on her that the field was not entirely hers for the manipulating.

Miles, naturally had been *fêted*. But thank heaven!—he still remained

unspoilt.

“I’ll have sole with champignon sauce, please. Frogs’ legs to follow. And I think”—her eye ran down the wine list—“I think we might celebrate your American successes in a bottle of sparkling muscatel. What do you say?”

Good wine loosened tongues and freed the emotions quite a little. Number 371 was very potent, as she knew. Miles was rather abstemious for an artist. His reaction would be all the quicker.

“Anything you choose,” he replied nonchalantly. Then to a waiter:

“A bottle of 371, please. And salted almonds for mam’selle.”

“You remember all my little weaknesses,” cooed Miss Leonie, edging a little nearer to him on the curving sofa and gazing soulfully at him with her made-up eyes. They were naturally rather small and beady, but art, she fondly thought, had remedied nature’s error.

He returned her gaze with such a frank, free smile that she was almost disconcerted.

“A penny for your thoughts?” she queried. (That often led to something.)

He smiled again, his teeth a strong flash of white. Leonie was conscious of a sense of gratitude that he always appeared well-groomed. No flowing ties and baggy velvet jacket. No unkempt locks and grubby hands. No pose. No jargon of the studios. He was simple and direct and unaffected. And just to look at him, one could see he was addicted to cold baths, fresh air, and exercise, and moderate living.

“I was thinking that you remind me so much of a bright, inquisitive little bird that used to twitter on the branch of a tree outside my studio window,” said Miles pleasantly.

“But how thrilling! I ought rather to say ‘how *trilling!*’” giggled his pleased companion. “A sky-lark? ‘Hail to thee, blithe spirit!’ That’s a poem, isn’t it?”—conscious of the delightful possibilities in this simile.

She was dashed, however, when Miles said frankly:

“It was a robin you reminded me of. Not the song, but something about the turn of the head and the bright eyes.”

“Huh? Perky—and beady!” She jerked her head to one side, irritated at the anticlimax. Was this the best that he could do?

“There! Just like that!” he pointed out triumphantly. “Often, when I saw the little fellow, I’d say to myself: ‘There’s Leonie Day.’”

“Well, I’m flattered that you thought of me at all. It’s a crumb of comfort even to a robin!” she retorted. “That reminds me that I’m not averse to crumbs when they drop from your particular table. And you haven’t told me yet how nice I look, or if you like my frock, or anything consoling of that sort! I’ll be a docile little robin, and I’ll swallow pretty speeches greedily, I promise you!”

His denseness needed a crude stimulant, she told herself.

Miles was embarrassed. What was she driving at? Why did she practice coquetry on him?

“You always look all right,” was his lame rejoinder. He was relieved when a waiter bustled forward to lay *hors-d’œuvres* upon the table, thus creating a diversion.

Leonie could have slapped the obtuse creature. That any one so good looking as he was could be so ignorant of how to please a woman, was incredible! Once they were married, she would make him toe the line!

She suppressed her wrath, however, and nibbled daintily at egg mayonnaise and lettuce. She wasn’t going to swell the ranks of foolish maids who nipped romances in the bud by yielding to the snubbing impulse. That was the one sure way to lose a man.

But how annoying that he didn’t think she was as pretty as a lover ought to think! My goodness! there would be some reason had he seen her in the fallow hours of early morning in her kimono and without her war-paint on. Leonie had lost two lovers by an unexpected *rencontre* of that sort. But Miles, thank heaven! had only viewed the little lady at her very best.

It was unflattering to see how far away his thoughts were. After the simile of the robin, she wasn’t going to offer him another penny, but she wondered, all the same.

Did she but know it, those truant thoughts of his had winged across the Channel to a very different type of girl. He was cursing the business energy of his manager who had arranged the Paris exhibition to follow on the heels of the New York triumph, and who had wired him to come on at once. Why, he hadn’t even had the time to telegraph Marcella, but had had to leave that to a servant, thrusting her address into the man’s hands just as the train was leaving.

It was the deuce and all, too, that now, without the memorandum of it, he wasn’t positive of her address. Had the long, ardent letter he had penned her on the boat-train and on the Channel crossing ever reached her? There was barely

time for a reply . . . and yet, she might have wired.

She had hurt him at the dock, too, by her acquiescence in the arrangements of the domineering, rather insolent fellow who had come to meet her, and who had taken complete possession of the girl as though it were his right.

Was it his right?

What about the radiogram that had so confused her? Treman was the name. There was a wealthy City fellow of the name of Treman. . . .

Leonie's tones, metallic, with an edge to them, cut into his brooding thoughts.

"Since you decline to 'drink to me only with thine eyes,' and yet refuse to see the wine that's been standing in the pail of ice at your elbow for the last five minutes, I suppose I shall have to open the bottle myself," she said complainingly.

He started, and a streak of red crept into his bronzed cheeks.

"I'm awfully sorry," he apologized. "Here, waiter, uncork this." Then, as he poured the golden liquid into her glass: "Forgive me. I was dreaming."

"'Sipping of Jove's nectar,' as the song says? Eh?" she teased, shaking a reproving finger at him.

"I don't understand."

How dense he was! She enjoyed what she was pleased to call a nimbleness of wit. *His* needed sharpening.

"I meant that you must be in love—*stupid!*" She drew out the last word caressingly. It gave her a sense of intimacy with this handsome man.

Under his tan he flushed more deeply.

"He *is* in love—with *me!*" The thought brought confidence.

And, indeed, sipping their wine together, they did become quite gay and festive. Miles wanted to make amends for his inattention. Leonie, thinking she had already made a conquest, wanted to prove the utter wisdom of his choice.

She sparkled. She was sympathetic. She drew him out to talk of his American visit. She boasted of her own success, and hinted very plainly—though the dense young man completely failed to understand her drift—that a clever wife with a lucrative talent and a knack of making influential friends is no drawback to a rising sculptor.

"That reminds me, has Lady Warrington said anything to you yet about the

ornamental fountain for her grounds in Hampshire? She can afford to pay well, and, naturally, it would lead to other commissions.” The girl’s shrewd eyes watched every fleeting expression on his face.

It lit up now with the light of creation.

“Yes; she was good enough to praise my work. She has asked me to go down to her country place and discuss designs. I must thank *you* for the introduction.”

She flung him a veiled glance.

“Oh, one good turn deserves another! You started me in my own little business venture, so why shouldn’t I give you a leg up wherever possible? As a matter of fact”—with an air of almost ludicrous importance—“I know lots of people who’d be mighty useful to you.”

Miles Holden winced. He thought Leonie a cheerful, friendly sort of a girl, but he did not fancy himself as her protégé, nor see her in the rôle of patroness. He was a sensitive young man, and hated to put himself in the position of accepting favours.

Still, of course, it was merely her manner.

“Lady Warrington says she has a large studio in the grounds, which I can have all to myself, to work in,” he remarked, trying to sound more easy than he felt. “She has asked me to go down as soon as this exhibition is over, and start work, and I’ve accepted, providing I can hit upon a suitable design.”

He would have preferred a town commission, to be near Marcella; but, of course, he could run up constantly and see her. And it was mightily important—from the financial end—that he make money quickly, and in big sums, so that he could offer her a home as well as a name—and fame.

“I’m awfully glad about it, Miles,” ejaculated Leonie, startling him with the appositeness of her words.

She was glad to have him in her debt. She was glad that Lady Warrington had taken up her crafty hint of a love-understanding between herself and the rising sculptor.

But, most of all, she was glad of the opportunity the Hampshire visit would afford her to bring matters to a climax and the merry peal of wedding bells.

CHAPTER VIII

Longing

At the window of her father's old-fashioned house that overlooked a rather gloomy square sat pretty Marcella Field, gazing in depressed fashion at the dripping branches of the trees in the gardens opposite.

Since the arrival of the curtly worded telegram, she had not heard from Miles. That was six days ago. Six weary days in which she had alternated between hope and despair.

But now, she told herself, suspense was over and his faithlessness a proven fact.

His silence, coupled with Warwick Treman's hints, had convinced her that the young man—like so many of the untrammelled spirits dedicated to Art—was nothing but a philanderer where women were concerned.

And the unknown Leonie Day! There was bitterness in that thought.

"I cheapened myself," said Marcella drearily, with a flush of shame that no one but the flowers in her window-box could see. "It's true what Warwick says, that board-ship affairs mean nothing but just passing the time. And I was fool enough and vain enough to believe all he told me!" The pronoun in the last sentence did not refer to Warwick.

Warwick had been extraordinarily kind and tactful in the last six days. He had done everything to distract her mind. Unobtrusively, he had been at hand to carry out her slightest wish.

She didn't love him. No! He knew it. But a heart was often caught at the rebound, and now, when Marcella was downcast and disappointed, was the time to win her.

He regretted the threat of scandal he had held over her. It had been rather caddish and ill-judged. Of course, the girl was in his power, but he wouldn't use that trump card, unless forced.

Thoughtfulness and tact and generosity were quite potent weapons. And wasn't it a stroke of luck that the Holden chap should have vanished off the scene the way he had, leaving a clear field, however temporarily, to his rival.

Yes, fate had played into his hand.

All men are vain, and Warwick Treman had an extra share of personal vanity. He thought himself an enormous catch for any woman.

Being rich and powerful, and endowed with a personable face and figure, women of course had flattered him. If he could only remember to take things easily, and not frighten her by forcing the issue prematurely, Marcella would be his, he firmly believed.

And that old fool of a father of hers needed money to pursue his archæological researches. He had a backer there.

Marcella, meantime, decided that nothing was to be gained by sitting moping at her window.

“I’d best go down and tackle the bills,” she sensibly assured herself, hateful and depressing though the task might be.

She went to her own particular little den on the ground floor, and sat at her desk with the wretched slips before her. They had accumulated sadly in her absence.

“Whew! And practically nothing in the bank!” She puckered her smooth, white forehead into a frown. “It’s far worse than I dreamt——”

She must sell her jewels. They would fetch something—even though the market wasn’t good at present—to help to tide her father and herself over this crisis. Afterward, she would go to work.

The thought of sheer, hard work was comforting to her aching heart. Work was the panacea for all ills. It taught one to forget unhappy love affairs—if the wiseacres were to be believed.

Here Marcella fell into a day-dream. Impossible to believe Miles Holden was the callous creature he appeared to be! There must be some excuse, some adequate explanation. . . .

This Leonie Day! But, loving Marcella, how could he be attracted to another?

Ruefully she admitted that lots of men seemed built that way. A married man, for instance, in New York, had showered roses and candy on Marcella, and when the latter had remonstrated, saying that his wife might resent such actions, he had laughed gaily and assured her that, although his heart might not be the home of many mansions, still it held lots of room for two women at the same time.

“The artistic temperament,” said Marcella, slowly and deliberately turning

the knife in the wound, “the artistic temperament can’t be judged by ordinary standards and reflexes. Miles Holden only showed me one side on the boat. To be the artist that he is must mean he has a dozen different sides, and—and _____”

A lump in her throat prevented further articulation. Two great tears welled up in her eyes.

“I must forget him! I can’t go on and on, hoping and waiting, and trying to trust—and becoming more and more miserable,” she thought, jerking the dreary row of bills and Please Remits into a long line.

The telephone rang. Her heart leapt at the sound. Good gracious! *could* it be . . . ?

It wasn’t.

“That you, Marcella? This is Warwick speaking. Would you dine with me tonight? I’ve had an awfully busy day, and I won’t be through till seven o’clock, but I could call for you in the car soon after, if it’s agreeable to you.”

The girl hesitated. She didn’t want a *tête-à-tête* with him. But she was young enough to find a restaurant amusing. Tonight her father was to read a paper at some meeting, and she would be alone in the big, gloomy house, facing a solitary evening of profitless brooding on the subject of the man who didn’t write.

“Thank you. I suppose I could come——” she said uncertainly, and without the least enthusiasm.

“That will be delightful. Be ready at seven-thirty. Thank you so much, Marcella. You’re a brick.”

He must not expect too much at once, he told himself, with a little smile which showed his confidence.

CHAPTER IX

Hearts Adrift

In a garishly furnished flat in the theatrical quarter of the city, a woman in a gorgeous pink kimono, with a mop of yellow hair framing a white and frightened face, stood facing a slim, dark, foreign-looking man who glared at her in sullen anger.

“I can’t, José. I tell you I can’t. It’s not a bit of good to ask me.”

Without the make-up on her face, she had a haggard air. Her hands were shaking.

“And I tell you that you can—and will, Deirdre! Who’s the boss here, I’d like to know? And who are you to go against me?”

“I’ll do anything in reason, José. As God’s my witness——”

“Oh, cut out the dramatics! They don’t work with me. I know your kind too well.”

She put out a pleading hand and caught his arm.

“I love you, José. You do believe I’m on the straight?”

He shook her hand off angrily.

“Yes, that’s your trouble. *Conscience!* Faugh!” He gave a short, harsh laugh. “It’s too late in the day to start that sort of thing. Why, you white-livered coward, if I’d known you’d let me down, I’d never have—have——”

“Married me?” she supplemented, trembling.

He flung his dark head back, with a crow like an infuriated rooster.

“Married you! Ha! ha! That’s a good one. I wonder you have the nerve ——”

A wave of dull red crept to the chalky whiteness of her face.

“We did stand up before the clergyman. Don’t you remember putting the ring on my finger and promising——”

“Yes, and I know what I found out afterwards. Enough to have you gaoled, my lady. *I* was the one that was deceived. Now, when I only ask you to get your rightful”—here he hesitated for a moment, groping for a word—“your

rightful hush-money, you come the innocent angel over me and flatly refuse to do as I tell you.”

He moved close to her and caught her roughly by the arm, twisting it until she screamed.

“You shan’t defy me! I’ll show you I’m your master!”

“Oh, let me go! You’re hurting me! Ugh! Ah!”

“Shut up! I don’t want the police in.” He released his hold so unexpectedly that she staggered back. “I only want you to understand that if you think I’m going to support you here in luxury, you’re mightily mistaken. There are lots of younger and better looking women that ’ud knock spots off you, my lady; so be warned in time.”

Deirdre’s mental suffering eclipsed the pain of her injured arm.

“You wouldn’t turn me out, José? I—I’m mad about you. Sometimes I’ve tried to hate you, to break away from the—the kind of spell you cast on me—but I can’t. I can only go on and on, caring for you, and having you trample on my heart.”

The man sneered openly.

“Aw, cut out the melodrama! You’re no damn good to me at all. Look at the board-ship swag you lost by flatly refusing to enter that girl’s cabin—and trying to queer my pitch, so I muffed the whole thing, and was very nearly caught.”

“She was kind to me. I couldn’t—couldn’t——” stammered Deirdre.

“I believe you squealed on us, too,” went on the angry man. “Come on, own up; you told her to watch out and lock her door.”

“I didn’t,” lied the trembling woman, knowing only too well he would half-kill her if she told the truth. Then, with a desperate effort to placate him: “I did my very best in the card-room, José. You said at the time how well I’d done.”

He nodded grudgingly.

“You’re a wonder, when you really try. But lately it seems as though you’d got religion. You’ll be wanting to go into a convent next.”

“And leave you? I—I couldn’t!” He could beat her and ill-treat her, as, indeed, he very often did, but, like a faithful dog, she would crawl back to him. Some women are like that. José was a double-dyed rogue, but he had hypnotized Deirdre. And he realized his power.

He changed his tack now.

“Jake and Andy and I have fixed up a little job for you. Nice, ladylike, refined.” He chuckled nastily. “You know the Beau Regard Hotel in Biarritz? The Countess of Blankshire is stopping there, and Jake has engaged the room next to hers on your behalf—he can’t take it for himself because the Countess is so terrified of burglars that she pays the manager only to put ladies on that floor—and I want you to go on over, and get friendly with her, Deirdre. You can do it perfectly, so don’t start jawing. Wear the quiet brown transformation, and pose as a titled French widow. You’ll pull it off all right.”

He patted her reassuringly on her bruised arm, and she gave a little cry of pain.

“If I don’t pull it off, I’ll get five years’ quod,” she murmured. “The police ’ud rake up everything. Sometimes, José, I think Scotland Yard’s watching me, and just waiting, waiting——”

“Nonsense, girl, don’t lose your nerve! D’you remember the last time you were of the French nobility, you bored the hole in the wall into the English madame’s dressing-room, and chloroformed the maid who was asleep in a chair, for fear she’d wake? You cleared the whole place out!” And he chortled appreciatively. Her doglike passion for him merely bored him, but he turned it to good account. He fully realized how able was this woman’s skill in sleight of hand.

Deirdre drew him down on a divan that was gay with multi-coloured cushions, and slipped an arm about his neck.

“Listen, José. I have a plan.” She rubbed her cheek against his olive-tinted one. Her voice was low and very much in earnest. “I’ve been round the managers and agents, and they’re on the lookout for a clever dancing couple, like you and I used to be, and we could easy land a job on the halls, at, say, thirty quid a week.” Then hurriedly, seeing his face harden:

“I’d sleep easier at nights, José, if you and I were running straight. Time and again I wake up all of a-tremble, thinking the ’tecs are here.”

“Aha! So that’s why you take the sleeping-powders? Fine excuse, my dear!” he sneered.

She flushed sensitively.

“I—I’d give ’em up, José, honest I would, if I had an easy conscience. And—and I love you, and it ’ud kill me if the police were to put you away—or maybe catch me first and lock me away from you. I—we’re swell dancers,

José—we could draw down big money. No one can get near our class in the tango——”

“Shut up, you fool!” the man said irritably, pushing her away and rising. “I’m after bigger fish than your beastly jobs. If you don’t do as I tell you, don’t be surprised one fine morning to find me gone—for good—or maybe I should say for evil!” And he chuckled grimly.

Deirdre buried her face in the garish cushions with a heart too sad for tears.

“How beautiful you look tonight, Marcella!”

Warwick Treman leaned across the table in the crowded grill-room of the restaurant Marcella had selected, and gazed appreciatively at his lady-love.

She had been rather silent and *distracte* throughout dinner, but the constant banging of the orchestra had prevented talk. Marcella had chosen this place partly for that very reason, had he only known it.

She tried to smile at him—a wan attempt.

“Flatterer!” she retorted.

Some one else had used those very words to her hardly more than a week ago. How happy she had been. And how wonderful if the man opposite could have been transformed into that fascinating, handsome some one else.

What a painful thing love was! One suffered far beyond its compensating pleasures.

She must drag Miles Holden from her mind and heart.

Warwick was talking eagerly. Something about a car. She nodded at intervals, as if taking in the gist of everything he said, although her thoughts turned painfully and persistently to the man who had wrought such havoc to her peace of mind.

What was Miles doing at this moment? Where was he?

“We’ll go for a trial spin tomorrow, shall we?” Warwick was saying. “It has no differential, but I’m sure you’ll love it.”

Marcella stared.

“The little car I’m giving you,” said he, explaining.

“Oh no. I couldn’t. I mean—it’s much too soon——” she stammered.

She scanned the big room quickly, hoping to light on a new topic to

distract his mind. Her gaze rested on a yellow-haired woman who, seated alone at a distant table, had her elbows stuck out before her, and her two hands propping up her chin, in an attitude of hopeless dejection. There was something familiar in the woman's pose.

"It's some one I met on board ship. Deirdre was her name. Poor soul, how miserable she looks!" Marcella cried in quick pity. "I'd like to run over and talk to her for a moment. I'm sorry for her."

Warwick Treman's gaze followed Marcella's.

"The blonde woman at the table over there?"

"Yes. Awfully down on her luck, poor creature!"

He paid the bill and rose.

"I'll get my hat and stick from the coat-room and meet you outside," he said hastily, in a queer, strained voice, staring at the yellow-haired woman with a growing conviction. Was it . . . *Could* it be . . . Good God!

"All right. I shan't be more than a moment," Marcella promised.

She did not see that Warwick Treman's face had turned a sickly green, and that beads of perspiration had mantled on his forehead.

Deirdre stared blankly at Marcella as though looking through and beyond the girl.

"Don't you remember me?" inquired the latter, rather regretting her impulsive action in renewing the slight and not too pleasant acquaintance with this woman. But somehow she had felt sorry for her. And, miserable herself, she could understand the suffering of others.

"Yes. Yes, of course." The blank look gave place to a puzzled one. "Quite lately, wasn't it? We met somewhere——"

"On board ship," said Marcella, a little surprised. Could the woman really have forgotten?

Deirdre shrank away from her. Fear shone in her amber-coloured eyes. Her hands shook. She clasped them tightly in her lap and stared up at Marcella as though she were a terrifying ghost out of the past.

"Do—do you want anything?" she gasped. "What is it? Tell me."

Marcella slipped into a vacant chair. People would notice the creature's excitement, so she must act normally and easily.

"Of course I don't want anything," she said in a soothing voice. "Unless to

help you in any way I can——”

The supplementary phrase was uttered on an impulse. Intuitively she sensed that the trembling woman was in trouble of some sort.

“No one can help,” Deirdre said in a dull, monotonous tone, her hands gripping one another tightly. Then, as though she had to say it:

“Death ’ud be the only thing could help me. I’m trying to make up my mind which way the going would be easiest—and quickest.”

Her listener recoiled.

Suicide?

“Don’t talk like that. Nothing’s so bad that it can’t be better.”

How trite and silly those empty phrases sounded!

But Deirdre wasn’t even listening. She was staring straight ahead again with the blank stare that had so alarmed Marcella.

“Would—would it help to tell about it?” went on the latter coaxingly. Her own trouble had grown smaller in face of another’s woe.

“No. You wouldn’t understand. No one would. They’d think I was lucky—to have got rid of him. They’d say he was a bad lot. He was, too—but I’d give my soul to have him back again.”

Marcella saw daylight. A love affair?

“I understand, Deirdre. That kind of pain is the worst to bear. You mean that your husband’s dead?”

She didn’t know if Deirdre had a husband, but the grief on the woman’s small, pale face showed the strength of her affection.

“No, not dead.” She looked up suddenly at the other. “He’s chucked me, that’s all. Cleared out this afternoon, and says he’s through with me.” Her voice broke.

“Why?” Marcella put out a sympathetic hand and touched the woman’s arm. Deirdre winced, and jerked her arm away.

“Don’t. That’s where he struck me. He—he always was a beast to me—leastways, nearly always. He—he only wanted me as long as I was useful to him.” This was followed by a choking, stifled sob.

“Then you *are* lucky to be free of him!” exclaimed Marcella. “Why, if a man dared to strike me, I—I’d turn the police on him. I’d walk straight out of

the house, and dare him to follow me, to speak to me——”

“Oh no, you wouldn’t. Not if you loved the way I love my—my husband.” She lifted her head with a queer defiance that went ill with her misery. “Girls like you, sheltered and well-born and refined, don’t understand the kind of love that’ll bear anything, just so long as your man stays with you.”

“I *do* understand,” Marcella told herself, her thoughts upon the absent Miles. He might be faithless, cruel, false, but she simply couldn’t tear his image from her heart.

Aloud she said gently:

“I don’t know if you’ve read Kipling, but what he wrote about the Colonel’s lady and Judy O’Grady being sisters under their skins, you know, is awfully true. I can feel for you, Deirdre. Don’t you think you’re exaggerating things, and that this husband of yours will come back, after all? Men often do and say things in a temper, and then repent.”

Deirdre gave a dreary laugh.

“You don’t know José. Sometimes I don’t think he has a human heart.”

Marcella hesitated. She mustn’t stay long, Warwick Treman was waiting in the vestibule, but she did want to understand the whole cause of this woman’s trouble and to help her.

“Why did he go away and leave you?”

“Because I wanted to run straight.”

Ah! thought Marcella, here was missionary work all ready to her hand. God had sent this poor creature to her, to distract her own mind from her troubles, so that she might find happiness in extending succour to another in distress.

“And you’ll go on running straight in spite of what he’s done. The best side of him is bound to respect you. And you’ll soon begin to take a brighter view of things.”

Deirdre gave a wan smile. This innocent child was almost funny, though her heart seemed in the right place.

“The brighter side? Would *you* feel bright if you hadn’t a single pal in the world, or a job, or money, and your best boy left you? Would you? Why, I don’t know where my next meal’s coming from—and what’s more, I don’t care!”

“But there’s surely *something* you could do, Deirdre? You’d be happier

working. I—I want to find a job myself.”

“*You?*” Deirdre was incredulous. “With your lovely face and clothes and jewels? And the young fellow on the ship that was crazy over you?”

The girl winced. Deirdre had touched inadvertently on a very sore place here.

“Never mind about me. Talk about yourself. You must get work, Deirdre. Now what can you do?”

Marcella tried to sound brisk and bracing, and Deirdre’s sad face lightened just a little.

“I dance quite decently. José and I did a tango turn in Belgium one summer that was a perfect riot. Cabaret work, you know. Maybe I could get on the halls over here if I could find a partner.”

Marcella rose, slipping a card into the woman’s hand.

“I’ll see if I can find anything for you. Come and see me about eleven tomorrow morning, and we’ll talk the matter over. And—and in the meantime, promise to do nothing rash.” She smiled kindly, reassuringly. “You’re not quite friendless, you know, because you have a friend in me.”

CHAPTER X

A Ghost from the Past

In the vestibule of the restaurant was Warwick Treman. He assumed an air of patient martyrdom when he perceived Marcella approaching.

“Your odd-looking friend has detained you,” he said quizzically, raising his brows.

“Oh, I am sorry. Poor soul, she was in trouble. Her husband has deserted her.”

Over Warwick Treman’s face there flitted a very strange expression, had Marcella only seen it.

“Who is she? Where did you say you picked her up?”

“She’s a poor woman I was kind to on the boat. I don’t know her last name, the Christian name’s Deirdre.”

“H’m. As theatrical as she looks. I don’t quite care that you should claim acquaintance with her in a public place.”

The girl resented his possessive air. He spoke as though they were already married.

“Humanity comes before appearances. As a matter of fact, I’ve asked her to come and see me tomorrow morning. I want to find a job for her.”

A flush, perhaps of annoyance, perhaps of some more complex emotion, showed in Treman’s cheeks.

“Let her go to an employment bureau. I won’t have you imposed upon by every passing adventuress. You’re a credulous little fool, Marcella. The woman’ll only want to borrow.”

Marcella, too, had flushed. She was a girl of spirit.

“I don’t like your tone at all. You men are all so hard, and—and arrogant. If I choose to help this poor woman, it isn’t anybody else’s business, is it?”

They were walking along the street, with Treman’s hand under Marcella’s elbow piloting her along. The man was shaken by the ghost he’d just seen, risen from a past he hoped was long since buried. And what irony of fate that it was Marcella, of all girls, who had met this woman!

The whole thing must be quashed at once, or untold trouble might eventuate.

“I have the right to ask you to consider my wishes,” he said slowly and impressively. “This—creature—can be nothing to you. Indeed, to be even seen with her would be damaging. She looks as though she doped.”

“Oh, surely not!” But a memory came to her of the strange interview on board ship, the cigarette episode, and the woman’s sudden change from sadness to a queer gaiety.

“Be sensible, Marcella.” He saw his advantage, and grasped it. “You’re as ignorant of that class as the babe unborn. She’ll prey on you. She’ll get you into trouble. Drop her.”

“I can’t do that. I want you to help me. You know some of the theatrical folk, don’t you? You could give her introductions to the managers.”

“Oh, I couldn’t do that sort of thing with a woman I’ve never met.”

“Then meet her first. She’s coming round tomorrow morning. That reminds me,” said Marcella slowly, “rather an odd thing happened on board ship. She was in my cabin, and picked up a photograph of you, and stared at it for quite a while, and then said she thought she knew you.”

“Tush!” exclaimed the man, as though irritated. “That’s an old trick. Proves the sort she is. Let the maid say you’re out tomorrow when she calls.”

“But,” persisted Marcella, “you do travel about the world so much that it’s perfectly possible you’ve met Deirdre. She said something about Winnipeg, years and years ago.”

“I’ve never been in Winnipeg. Come, don’t be foolish. Let’s talk of a more interesting topic—yourself.” He gave her arm a little squeeze. “How long are you going to keep me on tenterhooks? You know the way I feel about you, darling. I’m not a man to gush and use pretty speeches, but I’m in dead earnest—and you know it.”

She did know it. There was something queerly comforting in Warwick’s devotion at the present juncture. For Miles had hurt her pride as well as her heart. To be desired and loved, even when she couldn’t return the feeling, was soothing to that wounded pride.

Maybe she could grow to love Warwick. And how wonderful to be able to help her father and give him all the comforts that he needed! Dear, impractical, up-in-the-clouds dad!

He was longing to set off for Egypt on an archæological expedition, but his Society was unable to finance him properly. Today Warwick had hinted that, once Marcella was his bride, he would launch a fund whereby the dearest dreams of the old man could be gratified.

“It would be helping the nation at the same time, too,” he had added. “But, apart from that, I want to make a definite settlement on your father, so that money matters need never trouble him again.”

The offer had warmed Marcella’s heart towards the man. He was generous and kind and thoughtful. She couldn’t help comparing his thoughtfulness with Miles Holden’s casual behaviour. And then this rumour of a Leonie Day in Paris. . . .

“I want you to take this money,” Marcella said to the yellow-haired woman seated opposite her in the girl’s particular little den. “It isn’t much, Deirdre, because I don’t mind telling you that father and I are frightfully hard up, and I’ve had to sell my jewels. But it’s enough to keep you for a week or two until you find work. And here are a couple of letters to friends of mine in the theatrical business.”

Deirdre caught one white hand and raised it to her trembling lips.

“You’re an angel. I—I’ll never forget it—what you’ve done for me. It’s been like—like a cup of cold water to some one in hell. It’s given me fresh courage. . . .”

Marcella smiled encouragingly, patting the woman’s shoulder.

“There, there! You’ll do splendidly, I’m sure. And if you get low in spirits again, just come and see me, won’t you? Talking things over often makes them easier.”

The woman rose to go. Her amber-coloured eyes were full of tears.

“I won’t forget. I’ll pay you back this money——”

“Never mind. Start clear. And keep your heart up.” Marcella showed her to the front door, bidding her good-bye.

Neither of the two noticed a tall man in the shadow of the trees on one side of the square, with a soft felt hat pulled down over his eyes and his coat-collar turned up.

As Deirdre hurried off he followed her, keeping at a little distance.

She walked faster. He accelerated his pace.

She looked round nervously. Was the man a 'tec? Her ears were trained through hard experience to the sound of every footfall.

Warwick Treman saw her turn, and slackened. A taxi came along. He hailed it, telling the man to drive straight on. They passed her, going in the same direction, but it wasn't until he was far along the road that Warwick Treman stopped the cab and got out, retracing his steps. The street was busier here. There were lots of hurrying men of his height and figure.

“She won't recognize me if I keep my hat well down. And, anyway, I must have changed tremendously.”

Still, she'd seen that fairly recent photograph and spotted a fugitive likeness. It gave this quest a spice of danger that was curiously exhilarating.

If she did recognize him, there was no real harm that she could do. Whatever she knew or didn't know about him, she had no definite proof.

And he had one big, damning fact against her that would counterbalance everything and anything that she might say. His lips formed a cruel little smile.

But it would be just as well to keep an eye upon her from a safe coign of vantage. They must never meet. Maybe she wasn't the same woman . . . he could see her coming in the distance now . . . another moment or two and he would know if it were she.

Under the strangely tinted hair and heavy make-up he recognized the pointed little face . . . yes? . . . no? . . . it couldn't be! And then he saw the small jagged scar across the chin that she had got by falling on a frozen stone the day he'd quarrelled with her . . . heavens! Twelve years ago, or more . . . he'd recognize the little scar anywhere. How they had quarrelled!

She had had brown hair then, instead of this awful peroxide blonde. But she was the same woman right enough, here in the same town with him.

Forewarned was forearmed, however. Just let her try to get in touch with him, and see what happened! Blackmail was a game that two could play.

CHAPTER XI

The Plots of Warwick Treman

“I’m going in. I’ll take the letters.”

Warwick Treman, standing on the doorstep of Marcella’s home, addressed the postman on his rounds.

It was an old-fashioned house, without a letter-box. The man was in a hurry, and the maid in this place was usually very slow in answering his knock.

Of course it was breaking regulations, but why not give the letters to this gentleman, who was here so often, and who was the young lady’s beau? It would save time, and he was late, anyway.

So the postman handed over half a dozen envelopes and hurried off.

Warwick Treman hastily scanned the postmarks. Two for Marcella in the same strong handwriting and with the Paris stamp.

Involuntarily, without hesitation or weighing his action, he slipped those two envelopes in his pocket, a second before the maid appeared.

Yes, Miss Marcella was at home—would he come in?

He would—and did.

Marcella was lying on the sofa in her own little den, and her eyes looked as though she had been weeping.

He was tactful enough to let that fact go unremarked.

“I came in the car to take you for a spin. Or would you prefer to stay right here? It shall be just as you wish.”

She smiled faintly.

“You are very kind, Warwick.”

“Not half as kind as I’d like to be.”

He sat down beside her and took her hand in his. There was something so like a faithful dog in his expression that her heart softened towards him.

“How long must I wait, Marcella? I didn’t use to think I’d be so patient, but now that I really know what love means I’m willing to hang on and on, just

to be near you, within touch and sight of you. . . .”

He was astonished at his own humility. But, indeed he did want this girl with a sort of hunger that was really disconcerting to his peace of mind.

“I’m not worth it, Warwick.” Her eyes filled with tears. She returned the pressure of his hand on hers, however, with a little squeeze to show her gratitude.

Treman thought that she was yielding.

“If you’d only let me, I could make you awfully happy.” He gazed at her, still with that wistful, doggy air.

“It wouldn’t be fair of me to give myself to you when I wasn’t really giving anything. Do you understand?”

He shook his head.

“The gift of yourself would be the greatest any man could have.”

“Oh no, it wouldn’t—not if I couldn’t give *love*.”

He moved nearer to her.

“You are wrong, Marcella. Women don’t love the way men do. Men are the choosers. Women wait. Love comes to a woman after marriage. It takes time, you see. A man meets a girl and makes up his mind almost instantly, the way I did. But it’s only after a girl has been wakened up by marriage, and lived with a man, and found out how staunch he is, and how he does everything to make her happy and contented, that she really cares.”

Marcella stirred on her elbow, staring thoughtfully into the fire. Kind and thoughtful as Warwick had been recently, would he ever be able to efface the image of Miles Holden from her mind?

But it was all over with Miles. He hadn’t written. She had waited for his letter for two dreary weeks. That interminable silence. . . .

She had even pocketed her pride and twice rung up his studio, only to be told each time that he was still in Paris. She wouldn’t give her name, and hoped that Miles would never hear of it.

Yes, to forget him absolutely was the only way to happiness.

And how frightfully kind and sympathetic Warwick had become! That stupid threat of bringing the Swiss woman as a maid to Lady Warrington had been merely the result of sudden shock—the shock of hearing she intended to marry some one else. He had apologized for it a dozen times, and called

himself a cad and blackguard.

She had forgiven him and almost forgotten the incident.

Life with Warwick Treman would hold no glorious passion and few thrills. But it would be safe and sheltered.

Warwick was speaking again, softly, persuasively.

“Am I such an ogre that you couldn’t spare me even a tiny portion of your heart?”

She hesitated.

“I’m fond of you. I believe that lately I’ve been growing fonder,” she said. “I suppose girls are like that. Kindness and consideration count.”

Warwick was obviously pleased.

“You’ll find yourself getting fonder all the time. I intend to leave no stone unturned to win you. That doesn’t make you angry, does it?”

“Oh, no.” As a matter of fact, it held balm for her wounded pride.

And she knew lots of girls who were keen about this man. They thought him handsome, fascinating. They would have jumped at him.

Real love would surely come, in time. She must learn to forget Miles Holden. He wasn’t worthy of any woman’s love—philanderer that he was!

“I was talking to your father yesterday at his club. He approves of me as a son-in-law, Marcella.”

She nodded.

“Oh, yes, I know it. But”—with a hint of mischief brightening the sadness of her face—“dear old dad’s so unworldly and up in the clouds that he’s no judge of character. Any one who takes the least interest in his researches and mummies and museums is considered charming.”

Warwick Treman did not answer that.

“I’d be so glad to help him, dear,” he said, instead. “Indeed, I’d make a handsome settlement on him. Then he could pursue his work, full steam ahead, and no worries.”

Marcella looked thoughtful.

“He’s as proud as Lucifer. He wouldn’t let you.”

Treman leaned back in his chair and fumbled for his cigarette-case.

“Oh, it’s quite the usual thing. Besides, he needn’t know. As you say, he’s not a practical man of affairs, and would probably look on the money as manna dropped from heaven. We could make him believe it was a legacy from some one interested in archæology.”

He offered the girl a cigarette. She took one, lighted it abstractedly.

“By the way, I’d almost forgotten, I met the postman on the doorstep with some letters. The old boy was in a hurry, so he gave them to me.” He handed Marcella four envelopes. “Two for your father. Two for you.”

She grasped them eagerly. A wave of red ran up into her smooth cheeks. There was just a chance. . . .

No! The English postmark on them all.

“Thanks, Warwick.” Her voice was flat and toneless. She glanced through the two directed to herself. They were uninteresting.

Back in his St. James’s flat, Treman drew the letters with the Paris postmark from his pocket and laid them, face up, on top of a small table.

“H’m. From the fond lover, without a doubt.” He inserted a finger under the flap of one of them and then paused.

“Better to steam it open. If I’m mistaken as to the writer, the girl might just as well get her mail.”

He filled a small electric kettle from a jug of water; switched the current on, and waited. Then, when steam poured out, he held the flap of the envelope over the warm vapour till the gum gave way, and gently drew the first missive forth.

His lip curled as he read its contents.

“Sentimental idiot! How he raves! . . . What’s this? Wants to know who I am, and says he couldn’t help feeling frightfully jealous over the ‘possessive way’ I led her off. Young fool, to let any woman know he had such a weakness as jealousy! I could teach him a thing or two.”

Treman turned his attention to the other letter, steaming it open in the same way.

“Bulkier than the first. He hasn’t heard from her—no answer.”

He picked up missive number one, glanced at its date, and then examined the envelope.

“Wrong address! Wandered all over the place for a solid week before it reached its destination. No, I’m wrong . . . ten days. No wonder the girl thought he’d forgotten her!” He drew a sharp breath. “It’s a bit of luck that I’ve killed two birds with the same stone, and got both letters.”

He read the second one carefully. Not hearing from his lady-love, the young sculptor’s ardour had not cooled. Yet there were hints that he was hurt, and worried, and that his trust in her was shaken.

Warwick Treman smiled over the last phrase. It was a victor’s smile of triumph.

The sentence ran:

“I shan’t write again until you write to me. But when I return to London in three days from now, I’ll telephone, because there’s a faint possibility that neither of my letters has reached you. So expect a phone call at eleven o’clock on Thursday morning. All my love.

“MILES HOLDEN.”

Treman flung both letters into the fire and watched the flames lick round the paper.

“Eleven o’clock on Thursday morning, my fine fellow, eh? I’ll see to it that Marcella and I set off for Lady Warrington’s in my car on Thursday morning, and early enough to miss your message,” he said craftily.

“Look here, Marcella! We’re really engaged, aren’t we? Then you must allow me to take some of your troubles off your shoulders!”

Warwick Treman was the speaker. He had come upon his lady-love weeping in sheer perplexity at her little desk, with a sheaf of unpaid bills before her.

“It’s dreadful!” She dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief. “We’ll be summonsed to appear in court if I can’t do anything. And the gas has been cut off, and the butcher’s boy doesn’t come any more for orders, and the grocer threatens to sue us, and I expect the bailiffs will walk in at any moment and take possession. And dad doesn’t understand. He sits in his study poring over his books and writing learned essays, and not in the least realizing the sword that’s hanging over our heads.”

Treman managed to keep back a smile. Helplessness in others was a puzzle

to him. Inwardly he despised Marcella's father as an impractical, self-absorbed dreamer, with no real sense of what he owed his daughter.

But it pleased him that the girl herself should be in such a quandary. It put her in his power. Besides, he was masculine enough to appreciate helplessness in a woman. To a certain extent it flattered him—the strong man.

“Let me take matters in hand, little girl,” he said kindly, sitting down beside her and picking up the bills. He scanned them with a keen, quick eye. “The tradesmen and probably your servants, too, have been systematically robbing you while you were away. Those accounts are exorbitant.”

Marcella sighed. What a useless, feckless creature she had been! Moreover, she had no right to go away and leave her father just for her own selfish enjoyment. Her conscience pricked her sharply.

Why couldn't she have stayed at home and kept an eye on things? Why couldn't she have studied the stock market and the investment columns, and been some financial help to the old man?

It was too late now. . . .

Warwick Treman slipped an arm about her waist. The action was done gently, tenderly, and Marcella felt her bruised heart soften towards him. In comparison with that fickle, cruel “some one else,” how *kind* he was!

“Something must be done at once,” he said slowly. “You have a bank account, Marcella?”

She nodded, ruefully.

“But it's overdrawn. They, too, are dunning me for money.”

He smiled at her helplessness. The protective instinct, dormant even in ruthless males like himself, rose to the surface.

“I intend to make settlements on you and your father, so you can't object to my paying into your account, for a start, a sum of, say, one thousand pounds?”

Marcella drew back startled.

“As a—a gift?”

He nodded.

“And why not? The settlement will be much larger, but you need immediate money. And as we're going to be married——”

The girl felt the web tighten.

“If you’d let me look upon it as a loan?”

A crafty look came to his face. It was just the merest flicker, and she did not see it, luckily.

“I don’t care how you look on it, my dear, as long as it helps you to happiness.”

Quick tears sprang to her eyes.

“You’re an angel of goodness, Warwick. A loan, then, it shall be.”

“But we *are* engaged, Marcella, aren’t we? Last night you promised.”

“Yes.” She bowed her head. She wasn’t going back on her word. And she was sure, quite sure, that in time she would grow to care quite deeply for this kind, generous man. Didn’t love beget love? Wasn’t an engagement with him, the sense of definite obligation, the surest way to blot the memory of the other from her mind and heart?

He wrote the cheque out in her presence.

“Now sign your name on the back, dear, and I’ll hand it in at your bank. You have your own cheque-book? Good! Then write out all the cheques for these accounts and post them off, and there will be plenty of money behind you. Tomorrow morning at ten o’clock I’ll be round in the car to take you down to Mary Warrington’s country place, where troubles will be forgotten, and we’ll rusticate to our hearts’ content.”

He came on time. But it was nearly eleven before they started. Treman was in a fever of impatience to get the girl away before Miles Holden’s phone call should come through.

But at last they did set off.

In the car he produced the engagement ring and slipped it on the third finger of her left hand. It was a magnificent solitaire, and blinked up at Marcella with a glacial eye.

“How gorgeous!” She tried to sound enthusiastic, but her heart was leaden. Warwick was kind and generous and rich, but *where* was romance? Where . . . her dreams?

CHAPTER XII

Cross Purposes

It was early March, and already the woods showed the gold of primroses and the blue mist of young sweet violets.

The drive was long, broken by an interval for lunch. After the meal was over, Treman and Marcella were delayed by carburetor trouble, so that it was five o'clock before they reached the big stone gates of Lady Warrington's country house, sped up the avenue and found their hostess seated amid a crowd of guests in the large, old-fashioned hall dispensing tea.

"How perfectly *lovely* to see you both!" Lady Warrington bounded forward in her usual awkward fashion, jerking the tea-tray so that several cups spilled most of their contents in the saucers. "Marcella, darling, you look frozen! Here, this way, to the fire!"

She pulled the girl over to the great log-fire that was sputtering and crackling cheerily, drew off her gauntlet gloves, and proceeded to rub her hands.

Instantly, of course, she sighted the magnificent diamond on its slender circle of platinum.

Tact and reticence were not her forte. She gave an excited squeal.

"An engagement ring! Marcella! Warwick! Why, how perfectly romantic! I'm positively thrilled!" She held Marcella's hand up to the light. "I'm sure I congratulate you both! I'm *so* delighted! You were just *made* for each other!"

The whole place seemed to sway about Marcella. Her head felt queer and dizzy. She was vaguely conscious of being kissed and hugged by her impetuous hostess, and of a number of people crowding about her to look at the ring.

"And when is the wedding to take place?" archly went on the older woman. "Why not be married down here? I simply adore weddings!"

This was too much.

"We have made no definite plans," said Marcella stonily.

Warwick stood there looking down at her. Marcella could almost hear him purring like a contented pussy cat. He blinked in the firelight with a fatuous

grin upon his face.

“What on earth have I done?” over and over sounded in her confused brain. “Was I *mad* to allow this engagement to occur?”

A heart caught at the rebound? Yes!

And those endless bills! Her father’s drawn, harassed look!

She sank into a chair, while Warwick handed her a cup of tea. She drank mechanically, contriving at the same time to force a strained smile to her lips.

“Newly Engageds are so romantic, aren’t they?” tittered a woman with sticking-out teeth and fishy eyes. “Dear Lady Warrington, we must not intrude too much upon their privacy. We must give them lots of opportunity to be alone.”

Marcella shivered, and then hastened to explain that she was still rather chilly after the journey.

Her hostess had the girl’s chair moved nearer the blazing fire, before replying to the other woman.

“Oh, this is an old love affair, isn’t it, Marcella dear? It started years ago in Switzerland, or somewhere. I don’t remember the exact circumstances, but didn’t you have an accident out ski-ing?”

The girl’s face paled. What could be coming next?

But Warwick hastened to her aid with a beaming smile.

“Yes, and I rescued her. I’ve been in love with her ever since. Among so many suitors, she couldn’t quite make up her mind, but at last I’ve persuaded her to see reason.”

Nobody believed him. For Warwick Treman was a catch. He was quite nice looking, in a rather blowsy style, wore his clothes well, knew all the ropes, was extremely rich and influential, and had always been considerably run after. Any girl he married would be lucky. He had sown his wild oats, and would make a most desirable husband. He was reputed to be generous, and the Fields, of course, were poor.

Sir Humphrey Dawes, a stout, good-humoured young man with a prematurely bald head, helped the engaged girl to some muffins. He had a private income, was in a Government department, had lots of spare time, and regarded life as “rather a rag.” Too bad that this pretty damsel was already some one else’s property! Sir Humphrey loved to flirt, and seldom missed an opportunity.

“You must give us other chaps a look-in sometimes,” he contrived to whisper over the muffin plate. He loved an intrigue.

Marcella smiled wanly.

The woman with the sticking-out teeth and the fishy eyes came over towards her, dropping into the vacant chair on her other side. No chance of any one wanting to flirt with *her*, but over in this corner she might catch some crumbs. And, anyhow, it would be a good policy to cultivate the future Mrs. Warwick Treman.

“This will be quite a jolly house-party, I am sure,” she tittered, grabbing a muffin for herself. She was one of those skinny creatures who cannot fatten. Sveltness, she called it, optimistically.

Marcella politely drew her into conversation. She was a kind-hearted girl, and was sorry for plain, unattractive women who try to be kittenish and coy.

“Dear Lady Warrington is such a splendid hostess, though she *is* so forgetful sometimes,” went on the woman, who was called Tryphena, giggling. “She has the quaintest way of inviting husbands to meet their divorced wives, and *vice versa*, or jilted fiancés, or people who fight perpetually and ought to avoid each other.”

“I have never noticed it,” was Marcella’s cool comment. It was one thing to be sorry for this creature, posing as a kitten, but she wasn’t going to let her be a cat.

“Oh, I love occasions of that sort,” was Sir Humphrey’s contribution. “Livens up things a bit. Did you hear the story of what happened at old Grandma Get-Rich-Quick’s town house the other night? She gave a dinner, and it turned out to be a perfect scream, because——”

Fishy-eyed Tryphena thrust her head forward with such a jerk that Marcella’s tea was spilled, and in the sudden diversion the story wasn’t finished.

“I shall never be able to live through the week down here,” thought the young girl wearily.

Lady Warrington was hanging on the words of a thin, weedy-looking youth with a flowing tie and unkempt locks.

“That’s Dickey Prendergast, the playwright,” tittered Tryphena. “He’s collaborating with our hostess on a play that’s going to startle even the Little Theatre. Mary Warrington will, of course, finance it. What a thing it is to have brains!”

Her tone, however, clearly indicated:

“What a thing it is to be a fool!”

Marcella made the excuse that she was tired after her long motor ride, and the housekeeper showed her to her room. It was a pleasant apartment, full of early spring flowers, with a white bearskin rug in front of a bright wood-fire, for the evening was chilly.

A maid had already unpacked her things, and came in to ask if there was anything she could do.

“I’d like a hot bath,” said Marcella, “and then I’ll rest until it’s time to dress for dinner.”

After her bath she wrapped herself in a fleecy kimono, lay down on the comfortable bed, and pondered on the happenings of the day.

It was astonishing how painful it had been to receive congratulations on her engagement to Warwick Treman. She ought to seem elated, whatever she might feel in private. He was quite popular, and rich, and every one was envying her. Yet she had a foolish impulse to burst out crying right in front of them all.

“I must go through with it.” She assured herself that the strangeness would soon wear off, and she would grow accustomed to hours and hours spent in his company . . . to a lifetime of it. . . .

Ah! *would* she?

What of Miles?

No, she wouldn’t let her thoughts dwell there, but revert rather to her father, who, thanks to Warwick’s generosity, was setting off for Egypt in the near future, and who had now gone for a few days to a distant town to appear at an important archaeological meeting.

Yes, her yielding to Warwick’s importunity had brought happiness to that dear, dreamy father whom she loved.

She fell asleep at last, and dreamed of . . . Miles. He was here, and they were very, very happy, she and he.

The dressing-gong awoke her with a start, and she came back to this prosaic world.

Twenty minutes later she was in the hall with Lady Warrington, Sir Humphrey, Warwick, and several of the other guests.

“I hear taxi-wheels. How *stupid* of me to have forgotten to send the car to the station for our late-comers!” exclaimed the hostess. She turned to Warwick and Marcella. “You two ought to sympathize with them, for they’re another pair of lovers. I met them both in Paris, and was quite fascinated with them. Here they are!”

The butler had flung the front door open, and Marcella could vaguely see, for that part of the hall was dimly lit, a slender young man enter with a woman.

Lady Warrington bounded forward effusively.

“Leonie Day? Of course it is! And Mr.—Mr.—Now isn’t it *dreadful* of me, but I’ve forgotten the name again.” She led them forward.

Leonie Day? Marcella’s heart was hammering in her throat. So this—this was the woman who had lured him to Paris. . . . The women who had ruthlessly smashed Marcella’s castles-in-the-air.

Her throbbing gaze turned to the bronzed young man. Heavens! Yes? . . . No? . . . It couldn’t be.

It was.

Miles Holden stood there, cool and self-possessed, the acknowledged lover of another woman!

“And you must meet our Newly Engageds,” twittered Lady Warrington, drawing Marcella forward with one hand and indicating Warwick Treman with a sweep of the other.

The introduction must have been effected, though Marcella heard not a word of it. The blood ebbed from her face back to her heart and a queer dizziness caught her, so that out of the blur of people she could barely see Miles’ outline.

Then Leonie Day was laughing in a high-pitched voice: “Are you referring to Miles and me as the Newly Engageds, or is—” she glanced coolly at Marcella—“Miss Field a conspirator with some one else?”

“The more the merrier,” began the hostess, when Leonie’s gaze came to anchor on Treman. She ran forward artlessly.

“Good gracious, Warwick! Isn’t this a pleasure? I’d forgotten *you* were to be here.” She held his hand a little longer than was necessary in the circumstances. (A good thing, thought she shrewdly, to make Miles Holden jealous.)

Lady Warrington interrupted with a giggle.

“You’ll be making Marcella jealous if you flirt with her fiancé. Yes, these are our Newly Engageds.”

Leonie’s face looked startled, and her mouth fell open. Although enamoured of the sculptor, she had been vain enough to regard the older, richer man as something in the nature of a second string.

This news, then, was rather disconcerting.

It was annoying, too, to find another pretty girl ensconced in this delightful home. She had counted on a clear field for herself. Not, of course, that Miles would be attracted to this Marcella What’s-Her-Name . . . but men often did hanker after another’s property. Good heavens! how *queer* Miles was looking! Was he ill, or what?

“Miss Field and I have met before.” Could anything in the world be stiffer than his voice? He bowed his head with the barest inclination.

As for the girl, she stood there like a statue, as though bereft of speech or movement.

“And now, you two,” Lady Warrington broke in briskly, “run off and dress. Mr. Holden, Briggs will show you to your room.” (Briggs was the butler.) She caught Leonie by the arm. “And I’ll take you up to your room, my dear. I’ll put dinner back another fifteen minutes.”

The newcomers moved away.

Marcella made a violent effort for self-composure. The shock of seeing Miles . . . down here . . . in company with this woman. It had been overwhelming.

Treman had been right, quite right.

Oh, how humiliated she felt!

“You look pale, Miss Field,” chirruped the woman with sticking-out teeth and fishy eyes. “Hadn’t you better sit down and rest and let me fetch you a glass of sherry?”

Treman came to the rescue. A queer little smile still hovered about his rather cruel lips.

“Miss Field is tired after her American trip and the social whirl of town.” He took her arm and led her to a wide divan. Then, under his breath he contrived to whisper, so that she alone could hear: “Pull yourself together, and don’t let any of them suspect anything. The fellow isn’t worth it.”

She flushed in chagrin and humiliation.

“I’m all right. You’re quite mistaken.” Then, in a louder tone, and striving to be at ease: “Yes, thanks, I’d like a glass of sherry.”

Warwick went to fetch it, and the woman with the prominent teeth fussed over her.

“You don’t look very strong, my dear. I’ve studied nursing, and I know. Your colouring is so delicate that it suggests heart to me. Been troubled that way much?”

Ah! hadn’t she? How on earth could she face Miles and not die of shame?

“Such a handsome fellow, Mr. Holden,” went on her tormentor, all unconscious of her power to hurt. “I’ve always so admired those dark, clean-cut men. And his fiancée is a lovely girl. Don’t you agree?”

“His fiancée? Is he engaged?” Marcella heard her own voice ask. It seemed to come from very far away.

“Oh yes, I think so.” The spinster was romantic. “They looked so happy, and, of course, arriving like that together proved there is *something* between them. I think they make a very stunning pair.”

Another knife-twist in the wound.

The long-haired playwright seated himself on the other side of Tryphena, temporarily diverting her attention. And Marcella seized the opportunity to draw a tiny mirror from her evening-bag, and a stick of lip-salve—which she seldom used, except in times of stern necessity—and dab some colour on her pale lips.

Yes, that made her look more normal.

(Never, never must she let them guess her pain.)

Warwick returned with the sherry, and she drank it quickly.

“There! You look better!” he remarked, watching the pink steal back into her white cheeks.

“I’m all right.” She contrived a smile. “Keep close beside me this evening, Warwick. I—I need you.”

“I intended that you should,” he assured himself, pleased all the same that he was growing necessary to this lovely, elusive girl.

“Anything you say goes. It always has, Marcella,” he said kindly, laying a hand on hers and letting it rest there.

At that moment Miles Holden turned a corner of the wide, shallow staircase that led down to the hall. He saw the little tableau. He saw the man's hand enclose the girl's as though he owned both it and her . . . the same man who had come down to the boat to meet her. The man to whom she was *engaged*.

"Like all her sex," thought he, with painful contraction of the heart that was almost counterbalanced by a jealous rage. "Fickle, light, and ready for the highest bidder! Well, *I'm through!*"

CHAPTER XIII

Misunderstood

Marcella was thankful that the length of the dinner-table divided her from Miles. Seated next to him she could not have maintained her composure.

Warwick Treman, however, was at his best. He made himself extremely charming, and the deference he showed his young fiancée was proof to every one of his devotion to her.

“So Miles will see that one person *does* care for me,” thought the girl, turning again and again with a forced smile to the man who held her promise of marriage.

What misery lay underneath that smile no one at the table guessed.

Leonie Day’s behaviour was perfect. Correctly attired in a smart little dinner-gown of black and silver, she contrived to be bright and animated without seeming in the least degree forward, remembering always that this was her first visit to the home of Lady Warrington, and that it behooved her to make an excellent impression on her hostess, with a view to further invitations of this sort.

After dinner they had coffee in the old-fashioned hall. Treman stuck to Marcella’s elbow, contriving to get the girl into a corner, out of reach of any intimate chat with others. He played the ardent lover to perfection.

As the moments slipped away, Marcella grew more and more miserable. Oh, for one word alone with Miles! Surely just one little word would show him how she felt.

Looking at his open, frank face, it was impossible to think he was capable of cruelty, of underhand behaviour. If he was entangled with this Leonie Day, it was something in his life before he had met her—Marcella—just as Warwick Treman had gained ground, little by little, almost unawares.

People who really loved each other, as she and Miles did, couldn’t be kept apart for long. Something would happen . . . everything would be explained.

But Miles avoided looking at her. He was rather silent. When he did speak, it was to talk to his hostess and this Leonie girl. For the very life of her, Marcella couldn’t keep from glancing at him.

When the radiogram had come from Warwick on the boat, why hadn’t she

had the strength of mind to confess to Miles that wretched story of four years ago? Why hadn't she told him that Warwick was definitely expecting her to marry him one day?

Love held the answer. She had cared for Miles too much to risk the slightest chance of a misunderstanding. Love is so sensitive. A delicate plant, whose tender leaves can be so easily injured. Now, from sheer inanition, it was likely that this plant would die, unless it were already dead.

In desperation, Marcella turned to Warwick, making much of him, and laughing gaily at his smallest sally.

Leonie Day was watching her, under her made-up lashes. Marcella felt she must escape. Something was stifling her.

"Let's have some billiards. I'll play you a hundred up," she said to Warwick, setting down her coffee-cup and rising.

He rose, too, well pleased to be singled out like this.

"You'll excuse us?" to their hostess.

"Why, certainly. I'm sure you two must *hate* having other people round you all the time." This was accompanied by a very knowing look.

The hot blood rushed to Marcella's cheeks, and every nerve in her body tingled with a queer pain. What on earth could Miles be thinking?

Alone with Warwick in the billiard-room she played badly, and was thankful when the game was at last interrupted by his summons to the telephone.

A French window opened to the lawns outside. It was bolted now, and the shade drawn down. But the girl, desiring solitude as all hurt creatures do, unbarred the door and slipped out to the silence of the night.

A crescent moon hung in the sky. The air was cool and fresh.

"Oh, to be alone! To be alone!" Marcella almost moaned, misery at her heart.

Her steps turned down a tiled pathway to a roofed-in arbour at the bottom of the garden. She hardly knew which way she went. Her one need was for solitude.

"I beg your pardon. Who is it?" She had almost bumped into the figure of a man in evening clothes strolling towards the house. She recognized his voice at once . . . Miles Holden.

“It’s I—Marcella Field.” Her heart hammered in her throat.

“I didn’t recognize you,” he said stiffly. “Lady Warrington has been showing me the studio in the grounds where I am to work. You know my visit here is purely on business.”

His tone implied that he wanted her to understand he had had no desire to meet her again, and that both she and her social set were nothing to him.

Then he added:

“It was a surprise seeing you here.”

“And a greater surprise, meeting you!” Marcella managed to blurt out. Did her voice sound queer and unnatural? She hoped not.

He stared at her in the pale moonlight. How could she be so cool and collected, she who had worked such devastating harm? A wave of angry resentment swept over him. How she had fooled him!

“It’s the last thing in the world that I expected. I’d quite made up my mind that we shouldn’t run into each other again.” He was smoking a cigar, and now he flipped the ash off the end of it with an air of nonchalance. Marcella could not see that his hand trembled.

“I also,” she rejoined, striving for lightness, though her heart was nearly breaking. “Ships that pass in the night, you know.”

He gave a short laugh.

“Most women look on board-ship friendships in that light.”

“Men, too,” she parried.

He laughed again. He wouldn’t give her the satisfaction of knowing how he felt about her conduct.

“I dare say.” Then he added, with a brusque indifference: “By the way, I owe you an apology for breaking our dinner engagement so suddenly. Did you get my telegram?”

“Oh yes.” She could match his curtness with her own. “As a matter of fact, I didn’t think you’d remember it. It wasn’t a *definite* engagement, was it?”

She could see the contempt in his eyes.

“I’m afraid I took it—er—seriously. You see, I did not know about your permanent engagement. Mr. Treman is to be congratulated.”

She tried to speak, to tell him that the whole thing was a cruel nightmare.

But not a single word would come. Her dry tongue clove to the roof of her mouth.

Miles made a move as though to leave her. She must say something—anything—maybe this chance would never come again.

“I ought to have told you . . . on the boat. . . .”

“Ah! don’t apologize.” She could see his flashing smile, and could not guess the sensitiveness behind it. “I don’t flatter myself that I had any claim on your confidence. I assure you, you need have no regrets at all.”

Unsteadily she put a hand out towards him.

“Miles! I—I—oh, you hurt me so! I did believe in you—that last night—our promises——”

He made no move to touch her hand.

“You are engaged. Don’t you think that fact is sufficient comment on our board-ship friendship?”

“Only—only since yesterday,” stammered the girl. “It was just a—a sort of understanding.”

“You wear his ring. You have given him your promise. In view of everything, I’m not conceited fool enough to think I ever counted,” said Miles Holden coolly, stepping back from her outstretched hand.

And at that moment came the sound of Warwick Treman calling.

“Hi, Marcella! Are you there? Where are you hiding?”

Her hand dropped to her side with a helpless, trapped movement.

“Your fiancé is waiting for you,” said Miles in a level tone, and turned away.

CHAPTER XIV

When All the World was Young

Miles Holden started work early on the morning following his arrival, and remained shut up all day in the big studio out in the grounds.

“He has had a sudden inspiration,” explained Lady Warrington to her guests. “But I expect the real reason of his excessive industry is that he wants to get the job done quickly and get away from us.”

The remark affected both the younger women of the party. To Marcella, it gave a little stab of pain. To Leonie Day, it caused an irritation. She wanted all those dunderheads to know that the clever sculptor was her own pet property.

“Oh, you don’t know Miles as *I* know him,” she observed loftily. “He’s a hard worker, but no one can play harder, too, than he when his work’s finished.”

This was delivered with a very knowing air, and a quick glance flung towards Marcella.

The first day seemed to drag interminably for the latter. In the morning, she had gone horseback riding with her fiancé. Lady Warrington had a good stable, and her guests had the free run of it.

In the afternoon, Marcella and Treman had had a round of golf, and then the girl had escaped to her own room, ostensibly to write letters, but in reality to shed a few despondent tears.

“But surely I shall have another opportunity to talk to Miles tonight, after dinner,” she assured herself.

Alas! No chance of it. Miss Leonie Day stuck to him like the proverbial leech. She even contrived to lead him off to the music-room and warble charming little French *chansons* for his especial benefit.

“I believe those two will make a match of it,” Lady Warrington informed Marcella, little guessing how her careless words hurt. “Indeed, Miss Day practically told me they had fixed things up in Paris. A most attractive pair, I call them!”

Sir Humphrey Dawes had hung round Marcella till Treman was exasperated.

“You might give the chap a hint, Marcella, that two’s company and three’s none!”

The girl had shown some signs of temper.

“I can’t be rude. Besides, we’ll get sick of each other’s society if we never include any one else.” And she had walked away, leaving an astonished and indignant man behind her.

It was then that she had come upon Miles and the Day girl in the music-room, apparently having a delightful time together. The young sculptor was turning the pages of her songs, and leaning over the piano in an intimate attitude.

Warwick’s former hints came back to add to Marcella’s sorrows. That night she cried herself to sleep.

The next day poured with rain, and Warwick and she went for a long tramp across the drenched moors, returning soaked to the skin, with Warwick not in the best of tempers. Twinges of rheumatism had set into his left shoulder and down his back. Marcella—so he told himself—knew he had once had a bad bout of sciatica, and really she wasn’t very thoughtful, dragging him off to exercise when he’d so much sooner have sat quietly with her in one of the many cozy corners with which their hostess’s house abounded, making love to her unobserved. And now her obstinacy might result in his being laid up for several days.

They played bridge in the afternoon, and at night a crowd of boring young people arrived from neighbouring houses and danced merrily to the raucous music of a gramophone.

Warwick hated dancing. Marcella was too popular. She ought to sit out the greater part of the evening with himself instead of fox-trotting with those brainless cubs.

He gave a grim smile when he saw Leonie Day making headway with Miles Holden. She was playing right into his—Warwick’s—hands. He ought to reward the girl.

The sculptor hadn’t looked near Marcella all the evening. (Pocketing those letters of his had been an excellent scheme!)

The next morning Marcella rose early and went for a gallop on the moors. The rain had ceased, and the landscape looked quite lovely.

Treman’s rheumatism had prevented his riding with her. She was—and here a twinge of conscience struck her—rather glad of it. His manner had been

hectoring of late.

The girl looked young and oddly boyish in her riding clothes. From under her mannish hat, dark curls peeped out. The wind had whipped a glorious colour into her cheeks.

On her way home, passing a little coppice, she dismounted to pluck some early violets, tying the horse's reins securely to the branch of a tree.

Her hands were full of the fragrant flowers when, looking up suddenly from the moss-grown tree-roots, she spied some one walking across the meadows, heading directly for the little wood. It was Miles Holden. She must run away. She must not, *would* not meet him.

But he was on her before she could make up her mind for flight.

His startled air was scarcely flattering when he saw her.

"Out so early? . . . I had no idea. . . . Ah! you have been riding . . ." he said disjointedly, looking on the flushed loveliness before him, apparently taking no pleasure in it.

"I—I'm going back to the house. It must be nearly breakfast-time," stammered Marcella, letting the violets slip through her fingers.

He stooped to pick them up, gathering them carefully into a bunch, and taking his time about it. The unexpected meeting had upset him.

He handed her the flowers, and she thanked him, turning to go.

"May I walk back with you?" The young man spoke diffidently.

Marcella's chin went up. It was a proud, even obstinate young chin.

"Don't let me interrupt your stroll. It's only a mile to the house. I can ride the distance in a few minutes."

He gave her a queer smile.

"You think your company is so—distasteful to me?"

She nodded.

"After the other night, can there be any other conclusion?"

He hesitated. Then he said, gently:

"When a creature is hurt, it has a sort of instinct to reach out and hurt back again. I succumbed to that primeval instinct. I was a beast."

She stared at him.

“You? *Hurt?* How?”

The man gave a short, harsh laugh.

“It’s rather obvious, isn’t it? Why beat about the bush?”

“You mean about my—my engagement?”

Was he trying to excuse his past silence? Was he seeking to vindicate himself a second time by putting her definitely in the wrong?

He came close to her and, with a sort of wondering wistfulness, regarded the fresh young face. Her eyes, wide open and misty, resembled the dew-drenched violets she held.

“Can’t you imagine it would be a blow to any man to—to care—tremendously—for a girl—and believe he had a chance with her—and then come back and discover she had given her promise to another?”

“A blow?” Marcella stared at the speaker, her brain in confusion, and every nerve a-throb with the tension of the moment. “How could it possibly be a blow when the man really didn’t *want* the girl at all in the first instance?”

“So that’s what you think? No, no, Marcella! Your own heart tells you that it isn’t true. Be honest. Wouldn’t it have been kinder, more honest, to have given the man who loved you the blow straight from the shoulder at the beginning, and not have led him up, and up, to the very gates of happiness, and then slammed them shut in his face?”

She trembled uncontrollably with the sudden dawn of hope. He wasn’t playing. . . . He was in deadly earnest. Why, he *did* care, after all!

“But—but I didn’t know. You went away——” she stammered.

“Because business called me off suddenly. I had to go.”

“Business?” She put a hand up to her forehead, brushing back a wandering curl as though it were a cobweb that prevented thought. “Warwick told me—about your friend in Paris. You wanted to see her——”

“Her? I don’t in the least understand. You must be more explicit.”

“Why, you know already. Didn’t you come back together?”

“I came back by myself, and I don’t in the least know to whom you are referring. Speak out, Marcella.”

She hesitated. She was very proud.

“Lady Warrington thinks you are engaged. . . .”

A light broke over his face. And then he gave a sheepish grin, and coloured just a little.

“Good heavens? You don’t mean Leonie Day?”

The girl was silent.

“*Leonie?* Good Lord!” He drew a pace back, raising his brows incredulously. “The last person in the world! How could any one ever think of such an absurdity?”

Marcella bent her pretty head and started plucking the petals of a violet into little pieces.

“You believed such utter nonsense? Who could have put such an idea into your head? Did you say that it was Treman?”

She nodded.

“Then he lied for his own ends,” said Miles stoutly. “I look upon Miss Day as a charming girl, a good pal, but never in any other light. I did happen to see her once or twice in Paris, but there was nothing odd in that. One may have friends?”

Marcella flushed.

“Of course.” That demon imp of jealousy made her voice sound hard and cold, when she wanted so to be all sweetness! “Don’t think I was criticizing your actions. You have a right to like any one you choose.”

She was pitifully conscious of the ungracious tone of the remark. It stung him, for he flung back quickly:

“You ignored my letters. I begged you to wire me. Not a word arrived. And, though I’d told you I would ring you up at a certain hour, you couldn’t wait the necessary five minutes, but had to set off without even leaving a message——”

“Stop! I don’t understand. Did you say—*letters?*” Waves of excitement stained her cheeks to a yet deeper rose. “*Letters?* You wrote me?”

“But of course I did, Marcella. What on earth do you take me for? Did you think I was lying to you when I told you all you’d grown to mean to me those few days on board ship—those wonderful few days that, sleeping or waking, are printed on my memory for ever.”

She could not but believe his earnestness.

“The letters never reached me. I waited, drearily, hoping so hard to hear

from you.” Her voice broke on a half sob, and her eyes grew misty.

“Marcella! Then it wasn’t that you wouldn’t answer? It wasn’t that you’d forgotten?” He caught her two hands in his own, crushing the violets hard.

Her soft lips quivered, and her proud little head drooped.

“I couldn’t—forget. After the wire came—so curt and—and disappointing—I waited one week—two weeks—for a word—a sign——”

“Darling!” Totally forgetting for the moment that she had given her word to another man, and that he—Miles Holden—had no right to clasp her in his arms and hold her tight, he caught the girl to him, close, so close. . . . “My own! Marcella! I was an idiot not to have had your proper address with me. . . . The second time I was positive I’d got it right. . . . But you do believe me when I say I wrote twice—voluminous epistles?”

Her heart hammered in her throat so loudly that the beloved voice seemed faint and far away. Then, very low, she stammered out:

“I do believe you, Miles. I must believe you. I—I’ve lain awake at nights trying to persuade myself that something like this did happen.”

“My girl! My darling! It—it’s magnificent—to know that you weren’t playing with me after all. I swore I’d never trust another woman. I tried to hate you, dear heart—and I couldn’t. I could only go on loving you, and suffering.” He tilted her head up so that he could look deep into her eyes. “Tell me, Marcella, that you do really love me. Tell me you love no one else——” He gave a sudden start. “Jupiter! I’d forgotten the Treman chap. He believes you’re going to marry him!”

The recoil frightened her. Not for a second time could she dare run the risk of losing him.

“It’s only you I—I care for—Miles! The other thing was—was forced on me——”

“How? Forced? I don’t understand.” She could feel him stiffen.

“We’d had a sort of an understanding. Oh, my heart was never in it, just—well—circumstances! It had dragged on for years. One of those understood things. I—I quite liked him, Miles. I was—flattered.”

“He’s rich, you mean,” said the young man brusquely. His hands dropped to his sides. “He’s rich. And I’m comparatively a poor man.”

Marcella held her hands out to him with an imploring gesture.

“I was so miserable when you didn’t write. And Warwick was always at

hand, so kind and comforting. And there was a sort of half promise in the past. And so—and so——”

“You gave in, and agreed to make him happy? Was that it, sweetheart?” The vague suspicion in Miles’ mind was laid to rest by the look of love in Marcella’s dewy eyes. Yes, she *did* love him, darling that she was! “But now we’ll have to tell him it was all a mistake, and that some one else has held a mortgage on that little heart of yours, a some one who intends to foreclose ruthlessly. Isn’t that so, Sweetness?”

She did not answer, but buried her face on his tweed-clad shoulder in an ecstasy of joy and love that yet held a queer thread of fear in it. . . . A fear of the future . . . fear of Warwick Treman’s countermove.

CHAPTER XV

An Impetuous Lover

“You do love me, darling? You are certain?”

Love’s exultation and love’s fear hung in the questions, and Miles’ voice was tense.

Marcella’s face was hidden on his shoulder. The wild rush of happiness one feels so keenly after pain had almost overwhelmed her.

Did she love him?

Yes!

How weak the monosyllable sounded to express the turbulence of her emotions.

From the first moment of their meeting on the Atlantic liner she had loved him, deep down in her heart. Out of the teeming millions of the universe he was her man, her mate.

And he had recognized her. He had found her. He had felt the same wild rush of love.

Love! Surely the greatest thing in life. Those drab folks that filled the streets and trains and motor-buses everywhere, even the simple country people, what did they know of this immense and completely over-mastering feeling, this vital flame that turned one’s veins to molten fire?

It was consuming her, and little darts of it were curling round her heart, thrilling her through and through with bliss approaching agony.

“Miles! I’m afraid. . . .”

“Of what, my darling?” He bent her head back just a little, so that he could gaze deep into the dewy eyes.

“This happiness is so . . . so amazing . . . that it cannot last.”

“Marcella!” Lovingly he drew out each syllable of that dear name. “Real love goes on for ever, even after death. Floods cannot drown it, nor many waters quench its flame.”

“And . . . and you feel that . . . for me?” Her soft lips quivered.

“Sweetness, no words of mine could ever tell you all I feel. The English language isn’t rich enough, and the dictionary doesn’t contain superlatives enough.”

The girl in his arms gave a trembling little laugh.

“Marcella! *Mine!* I love you!”

Real love is inarticulate. So it was hard for both of them to pour out all they wished to say. The enchantment of a sweet spring morning in the country was about them, filling the air with the shy perfume of violets, and young, green, growing things. The sap was rising in the trees, and the leaves showed tender tints.

“It was so hard to know what happened, when I didn’t hear from you.” Miles’ eyes showed all the genuine feeling of his heart.

“I, too. I was unhappy, thinking you’d forgotten,” breathed Marcella.

“And all the time we *loved* each other!” Miles’ arms tightened round her, holding the girl as though he’d never, never let her go.

She was so close to him she had to whisper:

“Love can be awfully *painful*, can’t it?”

“But the pain is worth the . . . aftermath.”

She looked long and deep into the handsome eyes that to her were the dearest in the world.

“Love is a flame, isn’t it?” she breathed. “It comes on you unawares, and burns you up, and——”

“And sets your heart on fire,” he supplemented, smiling. “It’s a great conflagration, darling.”

All the fond, foolish things that lovers from time immemorial have told each other, those two modern lovers whispered in the sunlit little coppice that was so alive with the promise of spring.

Furry little heads peeped out to watch them from the undergrowth. Flying little feet went scampering through last year’s leaves that had collected in the hollows. And drooping violets seemed to forget their shyness, and raised lovely, dew-washed faces, as though smiling at the lovers.

Overhead, in the delicate tracery of the branches, birds were twittering. All the world was young on this enchanted morning.

“I’m not a poet, sweetness, but all the sonnets in the world are being sung

just now. Cannot you hear them?" Miles raised his head from hers, as though to listen to the music of the spheres.

"I can hear the sap rising in the trees," whispered Marcella. "You'll tell me that's poetic licence, but I'll tell you that it's true." She gave a low, happy laugh, fastening some violets in the lapel of his coat. This impetuous lover had already crushed them, and the air was full of perfume. Ever afterwards did Miles associate the scent of violets with Marcella.

"And now that I have got you, I'm not going to let you go," said he. "You are mine for keeps, and I shall be the most persistent suitor in the world. I'm warning you."

She smiled up into his eyes. Her severe little riding-hat had fallen off, and the soft spring breezes loosened some of the tendrils of her hair, so that they curled in bewitching fashion round the oval of her pretty face, and sprayed like the fronds of a fern across her white, young forehead.

There was something subtle in Marcella's beauty. An unfathomable depth about the eyes, perhaps; or a wistfulness about the smile that made appeal in yet more potent measure than any actual perfection of mere feature.

And always there was that reticence, that holding back a little, which is a woman's greatest charm, and one of the surest bonds with which to hold a lover.

Miles sensed it, though he could not put the feeling into adequate words.

"There's a something about you, darling, that perpetually eludes me."

The girl in his arms gave a low, musical laugh. It was intoxicating bliss to be so desired and desirable to the right man. Later, explanations would have to be made to Warwick Treman and hard facts bravely faced.

But now . . . *now* was the enchanted present. She would live in every pulsing moment of it.

"I've always heard that the right way to hold a lover is to keep him guessing," she replied demurely, greatly daring.

He drew back for a moment, as though puzzling over something. Then he smiled.

"It frightened me for a stupid second, just to hear you talk like that. It sounded . . . sophisticated. Oh, you know . . . as if you *planned* things instead of being your own spontaneous, adorable little self."

His thoughts went subconsciously to girls like Leonie Day, and all the

women of the social set in two continents who had fluttered round to gush about his work and make a fuss over him, and whose sincerity he vaguely doubted. Leonie Day was all right, of course, and an attractive, pleasant girl, but she did say oddly exaggerated things at times as though for a deliberate effect.

Marcella *couldn't* have a trace of that?

She seemed to hesitate. And then she said, deliberately:

“Whatever I am, or am not, I am honest, Miles. You do believe that, don't you?”

“I'd believe anything in the world you told me. I'd believe black was white,” he laughed.

Marcella, too, laughed at the fatuous answer.

“I suppose all lovers say absurd, exaggerated things—and then regret them afterwards.” Her pretty face sobered suddenly. “I am hoping hard that the day of regrets will never come.”

What did she mean by that? he wondered.

Was she fickle? Did she realize, deep down in her heart, that there was a streak of unreliability in herself?

Love . . . Pain . . . and Doubt. Super-sensitive, like all who are endowed with the artistic temperament, he suffered more acutely than the average man.

Had the beauty of the spring morning merely bewitched Marcella, so that she was drugged with loveliness, and in love with love, and himself merely a side issue?

A cloud had come to the girl's face.

“What's troubling you?” he asked very low. “You'll tell me everything, won't you, Marcella? . . . so that never again will there be secrets between us? You won't hide anything from me?”

He loved openness and hated subterfuge.

“Don't you think my—my engagement—is a rather serious matter?” She pushed a little tuft of moss with the toe of her riding-boot, and avoided looking at his eyes.

“Is that all?” He drew a relieved sigh. “Of course, explaining the whole situation to Treman won't be exactly pleasant, darling. I know you wouldn't want to hurt a living soul. But it's kinder to tell him the truth straight away,

and let him get over it. Don't you agree?"

She went on poking the tuft of moss and broken twigs as though the process demanded all the concentration in her power.

"Answer me, sweetheart, please!"

Her head drooped lower.

"I'm not good enough for you." The words came in a whisper, so that he barely caught them. "Not . . . good . . . enough. . . ."

He smiled at that.

"You foolish little girl."

"It's true. Your goodness . . . makes me ashamed. Before I met you, I—I'd practically decided that I'd marry . . . some one else."

"You mean I wasn't the first man you'd cared for, Marcella?"

She looked up desperately.

"Yes, yes! Oh yes!"

The very emphasis she gave the words seemed proof to him that in her mind was definite doubt of her own steadfastness.

"You mean you had decided to marry Mr. Treman without being in love with him?" he asked hoarsely. "You had led him to think you would become his wife?"

"I—I suppose so." Under her heel she ground a tiny clump of violets that were smiling up with trusting little faces.

"And then, meeting me, you threw him over?"

The stern tones of the loved voice frightened Marcella, making her confused.

"Don't be angry, Miles. I didn't mean to . . ."

"Didn't mean to what? Don't play with me a second time, Marcella."

She did not answer, for a great lump was in her throat.

Miles spoke again, slowly, imperatively.

"You hid something from me on the boat. You never gave me one hint about another—suitor. Why was that? Do you call it fair play?"

She put her two hands to her face as though in shame or pain.

“I—I fell in love—with you,” she whispered brokenly.

“But I had a right to know about your previous attachment. You were practically engaged, and hid it from me. Was that honest? Can real love stand deceit? *I can’t, Marcella.*”

“Real love is sometimes frightened that—the other person—the beloved one—may draw back.”

“If he finds out the truth? Is that it?” He caught her roughly by the arm. “You pretended to love this other man. You even, after meeting me, allowed yourself to become publicly engaged to him, so that you were labelled as his fiancée. What *hold* has he on you, Marcella?”

She stared at him through frightened, tear-wet eyes.

“Hold?”

“Yes, certainly. If you don’t love him—and you can’t love two persons, can you?—there was a definite reason behind your action. Was it—money?”

She was dumb. For the very life of her she could not force her dry tongue to utter a single syllable.

“Treman has money. Was it because of that? You needed it?”

Her thoughts winged to the cheque that he had given her. If Miles but knew, never, never would he forgive. She could never make him understand the misery she had endured when no word came from Paris. She could never make him believe financial straits were so dire that she had allowed herself to be over-persuaded into accepting . . . *no* . . . she had definitely refused to look upon it as a gift, but merely a temporary loan . . . a *loan*.

Treman’s original threat of exposing that girlish indiscretion of so long ago . . . how it had frightened her! Then, cleverly, he had soothed those fears away. He had become the tactful friend, ready and willing for any service he could render her.

And now—by what process she could not decipher—Miles had learned she was indebted deeply to the other man, that, indeed, there was a something hanging over her.

“If you loved me, wouldn’t you trust me?” she stammered. “Didn’t you”—here she tried to force a laugh, but lamentably failed—“didn’t you tell me only a few minutes ago that you’d believe black was white if *I* said so?”

No speech, perhaps, could have been more unfortunate or ill-judged. For into the young man’s mind there naturally sprang the thought that she was

purposely deceiving him.

Through the coppice that was so gay with violets and with spring-time, swept a sudden chilly wind. It made Marcella shiver.

“It’s getting on towards breakfast-time. We ought to go,” she said uncertainly, hoping that he would reassure her, and remove the odd fear that had crept into her heart . . . a fear that, generous as he was, there were things, once discovered, he couldn’t possibly get over . . . hurt sensitiveness and destroyed trust might prove the death of love.

They walked side by side along the muddy roads, Marcella with the reins over her arm and racking her brains for an inspiration that would put the situation right.

“You seem suddenly so—different,” she contrived to say at last. “What’s happened?”

Miles smiled in a strained fashion.

“Nothing. I was only thinking how short a time, in reality, we’d known each other.”

The chill foreboding grew.

“You mean that everything has been too sudden? Is that it?” Her heart was beating so hard it was almost stifling her.

“No. But other questions were revolving in my mind. Forgive me if I seem a little *distract*.” He smiled faintly.

At last they came in view of the house. It was early yet and Marcella thought that their arrival would be unnoticed.

But some one was in the breakfast-room, after all, and, hearing the sound of a horse’s hoofs, went to the window.

“So *that’s* started already, has it?” said Warwick Treman under his breath and with a wry twist at the lips.

He moved to one side, so that he was partially hidden by a curtain, in case Marcella should glance up. A groom came forward to lead her horse away, and she and young Holden turned their steps towards the open hall door.

Treman helped himself to bacon and eggs from a hot dish on the sideboard.

“So that’s it, is it?” he was saying inwardly, still with the queer little smile a-flicker. “I’ve a trump card yet to play, Holden, my lad, and today I certainly will play it, to the ruin of your love affair!”

CHAPTER XVI

Innuendo

Warwick Treman sat next to Marcella at the breakfast-table, and made himself conspicuous in assiduous attentions to the girl.

“He knows I’ve been out with Miles. He wants everyone to realize, in spite of that, I’m his particular property,” she thought, feeling as the mouse did in the trap, and yet firmly convinced there must be some way out.

She tried to catch Miles’ eye.

Leonie Day, however, kept him busy. Usually that young woman breakfasted in bed. Her looks in the early morning weren’t at their best, unless at least an hour’s time and trouble had been expended on them.

But she had learned it was an error to seclude herself from the others at the breakfast-table, for in that way she missed seeing Miles.

And Marcella Field was really too attractive to be allowed a clear field with any of the men, though she was supposed to be Warwick’s best-beloved.

That had rankled, rather. Leonie was vain enough to believe that, at one time, rich Warwick Treman had been interested in herself.

And matters weren’t progressing any too fast with Miles.

“There’s something in the wind,” thought Leonie astutely. “I’ll make an opportunity to have a talk with the Field girl, and see what’s doing.”

It wasn’t till late afternoon, however, that the occasion came. Marcella had disappeared to the privacy of her own room, after a belated tea, to rest. And Leonie, nothing if not bold, followed her there.

“My dear, I know it’s frightful cheek of me, but I’ve been longing to have a gossip with you, and it’s only possible by tracking you to your lair. May I come in?” She thrust her well-coiffed head round the door.

Marcella, seated by the fire, with an open book in her hand which she could not concentrate upon, rose, rather astonished.

“Yes. Of course.” She placed a wicker chair for her guest, and moved a box of cigarettes so that she might help herself. “Won’t you sit down?”

Leonie did so with a sigh.

“To tell the truth, I’m rather bored with this country visit. What say you?”

Bored? Was that the fitting word? Marcella had known deep misery and thrilling happiness and torturing perplexities and doubts here in this house.

But boredom—no!

Leonie curled herself luxuriously into the wicker chair, and lit a cigarette, staring at the other girl through narrowed lids.

How best to pump her? Flattery, judiciously employed? The stimulant of jealousy? Or just plain speaking?

She was attractive looking, was this girl. Pretty? Yes . . . as a wild rose is pretty, glowing and blowing naturally. A totally different type from Leonie Day.

But, then, one never knew what men did like.

“Lady Warrington’s a dear, of course, but her guests are rather ill-assorted, don’t you think?” prattled the visitor. “Of course”—this very archly—“you’ve been so occupied with your fiancé that you’ve had no time at all for any one else.”

A bow at a venture. Had the shot told?

Colour rose to Marcella’s cheeks. The blush of the newly engaged, perhaps? Or was it conscience pricks? Was there any truth in the idea that young Holden and this girl had had an affair somewhere, sometime?

She—Leonie—must get to the bottom of it all.

“He’s a great catch, and you’re awfully lucky,” she announced with a beaming smile, sinking more deeply into the wicker chair, and crossing one impeccably-shod foot over the other, with great display of silk hosiery and well-shaped leg. “How long have you known him?”

“Known whom?” asked Marcella blankly.

“Stupid!” thought Leonie. “Stupid—as I suspected. A man like Warwick is too clever to want a brainy woman. Marcella will be a . . . what’s the word? . . . a soporific for him after the day’s work is done.”

Aloud, with assumed sweetness, she said knowingly:

“Your fiancé, dear.” And added: “I thought you and I might have a little confidential chat about men and their ways . . . and our affairs, and everything. You’re the only kindred spirit in this house, so you must excuse me for running in to bother you.”

“It’s no bother at all,” rejoined Marcella, pleasantly. She was ashamed that once she had felt antagonistic towards this girl. How petty that had been! How utterly unfounded! Now she must make amends.

“When do you expect to be married?” The sudden question startled her.

“Married? Oh, I—I haven’t thought about that yet.”

“But Mr. Treman surely has? You’ve known him for some time, haven’t you? And men in love are not models of patience.” Leonie flicked some ash from the end of her cigarette into the fire, and went on, thoughtfully: “You’ll have a great time as his wife. Wonderful position, and all that. I could imagine his being awfully generous. Buy you a flotilla of cars, and everything you fancy. You are lucky.”

The girl with the dark, dreamy eyes gave a wistful little smile.

“Somehow I don’t think about those things,” she said.

Leonie stared at her. Was she a fool?

“Most girls would,” she perkily observed, swinging one silken leg as though the motion soothed her nerves. “Money’s the great thing in married life. I’ve watched lots of couples, and I know.”

Marcella gazed into the fire. She had known financial difficulties, and had learned the value of this vaunted money. But how ridiculous to think that it could bring real happiness to the heart, and still its cravings for romantic love, companionship, the hundred and one intangible things that are purely of the spirit.

She turned at last to smile at the seemingly candid visitor.

“You don’t put much count on sentiment, do you?”

Miss Leonie shrugged her silken shoulders. She was beginning to find out a thing or two about this other girl. Romantic, wasn’t she? And not a bit impressed by the great position that lay ahead of her as Warwick Treman’s wife.

“One always comes off worse if one is sentimental. It gives the man the upper hand. My personal belief is that the man should do the adoration part and the girl accept the homage. That’s the proper balance.”

“But doesn’t love mean giving?” asked Marcella blankly. An idea was developing within her that this other girl was talking, not sincerely, but with some end in view. She wanted to discover the exact relationship between herself and Warwick Treman, or, perhaps, between herself and Miles.

“You talk like an Early Victorian maiden,” smiled Miss Leonie, leaning forward to pat Marcella’s hand. “Let the man do the loving and the giving, and you grab all you can from him, and he’ll appreciate you more and more. I’ve tried both ways, my dear, and so I know.”

Ensued a tiny pause, while Leonie blew rings of smoke into the air and watched them circle.

“Poverty is damnable,” said she. “Believe me, I’ve had chances of marrying without money and I’ve passed them up. Some one we both know, for instance——” She broke off as though in evident confusion at having said too much.

“She *can’t* mean Miles,” thought the other girl who loved him. “He said she was merely a friend . . . and he loves *me*.”

Leonie moved restlessly in her chair. She spoke again.

“You met young Holden on the boat coming over from New York, didn’t you? I suppose he told you about me?”

Marcella looked at her, wondering.

“Since coming here, he told me you and he were friends,” she said quietly.

“Friends?” Leonie gave a strained, almost harsh laugh. “I suppose, manlike, he’d call it that. But we’ve been rather more than friends. I don’t mind confiding in you, Marcella, for I like you, and I know my confidence is safe. Miles Holden and I were once awfully much in love with each other—every one knows it—artists, you know, need sympathy, and I gave it him. He asked me to marry him more than once, and I very nearly did. I was his model then, and people sort of expected it. But I was afraid of poverty. He set me up in business and then the love rather simmered down on my side, but it’s never really died on his. You’re sentimental, and I suppose you’ll agree that the real thing never does die. Anyhow, in Paris, he explained to me that he’d never really been able to forget . . . that, though he might have felt a temporary attraction to some other woman, it always ended in a queer sort of longing for his former sweetheart . . . that was me. . . .”

Marcella had grown very pale, but otherwise gave no sign of feeling.

“Lady Warrington saw how he felt in Paris, so she had me here to meet him,” Leonie continued. “And do you know, my dear”—there was a strange look in Leonie’s eyes—“do you know that, in spite of my seeming scepticism as to the basis of a happy marriage, I’m relenting rather?”

“I don’t understand,” rejoined the other very low.

Leonie shrugged her shoulders, but her eyes were wistful.

“I’ve begun to think I could be awfully happy—as Miles’ wife,” she said.

CHAPTER XVII

Treman Plays His Trump Card

In the big studio in the grounds Miles Holden worked.

His work was excellent. But he was in a mood that wasn't easily satisfied. Disturbing thoughts went flitting through his mind like bats.

The girl Marcella. Did she really care for money? Loving himself . . . yes, he believed it, she had told him so . . . loving himself, she had accepted Warwick Treman.

Why?

She did not love the man. So, then, the motive must be—money? The position of a rich man's wife had definitely appealed to her.

To doubt her love for himself was an easy step from that. . . .

If only he had known her longer!

Did he, indeed, know her at all? Her mind? Its workings? Her past life? Her credo?

At half-past six he finished for the day, locked up the studio, and proceeded towards the house. A French window of the library was ajar, so he went in that way. The room was empty, save for Warwick Treman, who was sitting at a small desk with some papers in front of him and an open cheque-book.

"Hello, Holden! How does the masterpiece evolve?" He swung round to address the newcomer. His lips curved in the least hint of a supercilious smile.

For Warwick Treman had no time for art. He did not understand it, and he regarded sculptors, artists, writers, actors, as odd, temperamental, sissy sort of folk.

"Everything's going along all right," said Miles rather shortly, perfectly aware of the other's attitude. Besides, this man was still Marcella's affianced husband, and he felt awkward in his presence. He must have a long, straight talk with him; but now was not the time. They must be free from interruption, and, before the interview took place, he—Miles—must come to a clearer understanding with Marcella.

"Have a cigarette?" Treman offered him his case.

“No, thanks. I’m cutting down on smoking,” shortly.

The older man laughed.

“Nerves a bit overdone? You artistic Johnnies go the pace too hard.” He flung the young sculptor a knowing look, which Miles resented.

“I don’t quite get your meaning,” he rejoined with outward nonchalance, and making a move towards the inner door.

Treman laughed again, an irritating laugh.

“I presume you were painting Paris all the colours of the rainbow, and the leading shade was red. You’re a painter by profession, aren’t you? Ha! Ha!”

“I am a sculptor,” said Miles with deadly quietness. “Paris in some minds may stand for dissipation, but to me it stands for art.”

“Oh, don’t get huffy, old fellow. I was merely joking.” Treman did not want, at this stage of affairs, to antagonize the man. “You artistic chaps are far too touchy, I’m a dull business fellow, and liable to tread heavily where angels’ wings don’t brush. Excuse my ignorance.”

He rose, grinning good naturedly.

“When Marcella and I are married, I’m going to open a Paris branch of business, and have a—what’s the word?—a *pied à terre* over there. You must look us up often. Marcella shall initiate me into the arts and graces, and you can tutor her.”

His lazy carelessness and smile did not rob the words of their veiled insolence.

Miles was silent. Treman gathered up his papers and went off to dress for dinner.

“You’ve dropped something,” Miles called after the retreating figure, stooping to pick up an oblong piece of paper that had fallen from its fellows to the floor.

Without in the least meaning to do so, he glanced mechanically at it, and a name in big, bold letters caught his eye and riveted it—a name in Treman’s handwriting.

What, in heaven’s name *could* the paper mean?

It was tinted mauve and white, that scrap of paper, with a blue stamp in one corner, and a date of but a week ago. There was a number in the left top corner, and below, in sprawling letters:

“Pay . . . Marcella Field
One thousand pounds

(Signed) Warwick Treman.”

White to the very lips, Miles turned the paper over, to see, on the back thereof, Marcella’s signature. The money had been paid through Treman’s bank, and the cheque stamped and finished.

“My God!” Miles whispered, thunderstruck. “She’s accepted this—from him—while loving me! One thousand pounds! Marcella . . . bought and paid for!”

The incriminating cheque fell from his fingers to the floor.

“Marcella! A thousand pounds!” his brain reiterated dully. He turned towards the door, and almost collided with Warwick Treman.

“You called me, didn’t you?” enquired the latter suavely, missing nothing of the younger man’s pallor and peculiar aspect.

Miles did not answer, but brushed past him blindly.

“So the wind blows from that quarter, does it?” thought Treman, with a queer little smile. Alone in the library he picked up the fallen scrap of paper, and the smile widened. “He’s read this though, right enough, and the fat’s in the fire. Serve him right! Teach him to come nosing into other people’s business!”

He slipped the cheque into the pocket of his coat, and went upstairs to change, whistling cheerfully to himself.

On the upper landing he encountered Leonie Day, who was looking very charming in a fluffy, ruffled gown that gave her sharp little face an oddly demure aspect.

“I hardly recognized you, Leonie,” remarked Treman, pausing for a moment to regard the little lady in the pointed bodice and billowing skirt. “You don’t look a day more than seventeen in that frock, and as helpless and sweet as a little kitten!”

She laughed gaily, and dropped a mock curtsy.

“I’ve decided that the *jeune fille* rôle becomes me. My chic black gowns are too sophisticated. I particularly want to look young and sweet and simple—oh, so very, very simple!—tonight.” And she raised her eyes to his with immense coquetry.

For a moment he thought she was trying to set her cap at him. Then he remembered her professed liking for Miles Holden.

“Reveal the plot, young woman!” He struck a dramatic attitude. Yes, he liked Leonie, and she amused him. Her pertness, her self-sufficiency, her little air of worldliness, diverted him extremely.

And he admired her grit.

“You want to look particularly babyish for the captivation of a man?” he rallied her. “Confess!”

“And why not?” counter-thrust Miss Leonie saucily. “Doesn’t a poor girl have to live?”

Treman’s eyes narrowed a little. He was thinking rapidly.

Did not their plans dovetail? If Leonie captured this romantic sculptor chap, it would definitely remove the latter from Marcella’s path. On the other hand, there could be no doubt at all that the fellow admired Marcella, and would steal her if he could.

The finding of the cheque had shaken him considerably. Treman had cleverly allowed just enough time for the chap to see it . . . and his white face and odd demeanour had given the show away.

Now was the time for Leonie to make hay. Distrust . . . suspicion . . . a heart caught at the rebound! He would give her just a hint.

He cleared his throat.

“A pretty girl like you can twist men round her little finger.”

“Huh! Can I? I am not so sure.” She raised her brows.

“If you play your cards right.” Treman took a step back and surveyed her shrewdly. “You’re attractive, Leonie! And sometimes I think you’ve the devil’s own cheek.”

She was not annoyed at this plain speaking. She took it as a compliment and laughed merrily.

“I’ve been educated in a hard school. Nice, sheltered girls don’t realize the struggle that I’ve had.”

“But *I* do, Leonie.” He suddenly put out a hand and touched hers, as though in sympathy. “I’ve been a good friend, haven’t I? And I’m willing to be a still better friend if you’ll permit me.”

She flung him a sharp look, stepping back a little. She had small belief in

the good intentions of any man.

What could he want with her?

He saw the look, and understood it.

“I’ve always liked and admired you, Leonie, and I wish you well. I’d like to see you happily married in a home of your own. That’s what every woman wants.”

“Is it, indeed?” Her tone was non-committal. What lay behind these time-worn sentiments?

“Sit down a moment while I talk to you.” He drew her into a small alcove that was a window-seat, and where they could enjoy a semi-privacy.

“Yes? What is it? What’s on your mind?” She spoke pertly, but she was curious to understand the situation.

“I’ll call a spade a spade. You don’t mind, do you?”

“Of course not. I prefer bluntness, as you know.”

What on earth *could* be coming?

“You’re doing pretty well in business, eh? Things going nicely?”

She pursed her lips rather dubiously.

“H’m! Fairish to middling. Money’s tight just now.”

Surely *that* would bring forth something!

He nodded thoughtfully.

“You like money, don’t you, Leonie?” He scrutinized her keenly, but she did not flinch.

“If you think I’m a Becky Sharp, you’re wrong,” she answered coolly. “But money is as necessary to me as it is to most women who have no one in the world behind them. I’ll admit it.”

“Naturally. Of course.” He paused, then added: “That’s why I’d like to see you comfortably settled.”

Her brows went up again. Her rather thin though well-shaped lips curved in an enigmatic smile.

“Why the sudden keen interest in my welfare? What’s the idea, Warwick?”

He hesitated. Would it be best to come right out in the open, or to hedge a bit? He liked Leonie, but it might not do to trust her very far. Her kind did not

always stick at blackmail, if it suited them.

“You’re interested in the Holden chap, aren’t you?” The question was rapped out with the suddenness of a pistol shot, so that the girl started and moved back.

“Miles Holden?” Were Leonie capable of blushing, she would have done so now. “Why—why do you say such a thing?”

Treman grinned.

“I’m not entirely blind. You’ve spoken of him often.”

She was silent. Her heart, which she had often likened to a piece of granite, was beating rather fast.

“He’s all right.” She cast her eyes down, staring at the tips of her well-shod feet.

“Come, Leonie, don’t beat about the bush. I’m your old friend, and I want to give you a piece of advice. I think the fellow likes you very much, and that it would be an easy matter for a pretty, clever girl like you to bring the affair to a head. So why delay?”

She looked up at the speaker in wonderment.

“You really think Miles cares for me?” Her usually high-pitched voice was softer and sweeter.

“Yes. The chap may not know it as yet, but it’s up to you to prove it to him. Force the issue, as it were. Quite simple.”

“I see. You consider that most men are clay in the hands of a pretty woman?”

He nodded.

“Provided some one else hasn’t got there first.”

Leonie locked her hands together. She was incapable of really loving any one, but in so far as any man could touch her, Miles had succeeded. She desired to marry him.

“What can I do?” she asked in sudden humility. “It—it isn’t as easy as you think. He *likes* me well enough. But I don’t know if he’s ever even thought of marriage.”

This was astounding frankness on her side.

Warwick grinned.

“He’ll think of it all right, if you’ll play your cards cleverly. I’d like to give you a handsome wedding gift, my dear. A sort of dowry.” He looked directly at her.

“A dowry?” Leonie blinked at him, amazed. “A dowry?”

“Exactly. Something rather handsome. And I’d also be willing”—his eyes narrowed—“to give you a certain sum down the day you become engaged to him.” Seeing her amazement, he hastened to add, as though explaining: “A girl wants all sorts of pretty frocks and accessories when she gets engaged.”

Leonie was astute enough to see which way the wind was blowing. The knowledge angered her, and at the same time spurred her on to fall in with this man’s plans.

“Miles is attracted to Marcella Field,” thought she. “And Treman’s jealous. Once Miles became engaged to me, he’d be more or less removed from the Field girl’s orbit. I’m to be paid for doing what most in the world I want to do!”

She hid the queer medley of emotions that swept over her, and contrived to say, in a level voice:

“You’re rather a dear, Warwick! I appreciate your kindness.”

He touched her hand.

“And you’ll go right ahead and—and be happy? Eh?”

She could have laughed at that. Did he really think her quite so dense that she didn’t see through his blundering manœuvres?

But outwardly she was all sweetness and gratitude.

“Lady Warrington’s fond of you,” proceeded Treman. “Confide in her. She’ll help you all she can. And remember that Heaven helps those who help themselves! Force the issue. Bring about a situation where an engagement must be announced.”

His thoughts went back to his own caddish conduct of four years ago. He had successfully worked a situation from which Marcella Field had been unable to withdraw.

Circumstances recently had arisen which made it imperative that marriage with Marcella should be hurried. Leonie Day, in distracting the attentions of the interloper could greatly assist Treman’s plans.

“I’ll do my very best,” Leonie said, with resolution, thinking of Miles, plus Warwick’s handsome dowry. “Believe me, I shall do the utmost in my power.”

No more was said. But the pair understood each other perfectly.

CHAPTER XVIII

Love in the Dust

Before the long pier-glass in her room, Marcella Field surveyed herself, preparatory to going down to dinner.

She wanted to look very pretty and attractive. She did look pretty. Didn't her mirror reassure her?

A mist-blue frock, filmy and fragile, curved lovingly about her slender figure. Trails of translucent water-lilies clung about the skirt. It was the most expensive and becoming frock in Marcella's trunks, and tonight she had donned it for Miles' special benefit.

Leonie's fleeting visit had depressed her. Those unmasked confidences . . . that talk of Miles' former ardour. The ridiculous untruths about his ever proposing to Leonie Day!

"She can't know that he cares for me," thought Marcella innocently. "She's just one of those silly girls who think it's clever to invent stories of the offers of marriage they receive. I've met her kind before."

All the same, it was hard to shake the impression off.

"I must talk things over very fully and frankly with Miles," decided Marcella, pirouetting in front of the long glass, and patting a spray of lilies into place. "He'll love this gown. And—he loves *me* and no one else!"

She went down to dinner with a lighter heart. In the hall she found Leonie Day with Miles—an extremely charming Leonie in a frock as pretty as her own.

The two were talking confidentially, and did not see Marcella.

"Good-evening," she said brightly.

Miles did not raise his head. Leonie Day looked up, gave a careless nod, and resumed her absorbing conversation.

Marcella felt as though a bucket of cold water had been flung upon her. She was almost relieved when Warwick Treman appeared, so that she no longer felt *de trop*.

"Young couple over there going ahead like a house on fire, aren't they?" he chuckled. "I'll bet a fiver they make a match of it."

She did not answer, but a sick feeling swept over her. Had Miles failed to see her? No.

What, then?

The rest of the guests drifted down, and soon the party were gathered together round the dinner-table.

Leonie Day was the gayest of the gay. With flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, she seemed to captivate not merely one man, but all of them. Saucy repartee slipped from her pert tongue. Every one laughed at her sallies. Miles was especially attentive to her. Not once did he allow his glance to rest upon the other girl.

Marcella wondered miserably what had happened. What had she done to deserve this treatment?

Leonie's words came back, and back, like little stabbing knives. Was there really any truth in them? Had she and Miles been all in all to each other at one time? Had he gone back to the old love, regarding Marcella merely as an interlude to be forgotten?

Such happiness this morning, and tonight such pain!

Her heart ached intolerably as she stole glance after glance at the gay pair, opposite. How often Leonie's laugh rang out! And Miles—Miles was publicly flirting with her.

After dinner every one played bridge, except Miles and Leonie, who still seemed to have a great deal to say to one another.

At ten o'clock Marcella rose, pleading a headache, and slipped off upstairs. At the curve of the upper landing she encountered Miles.

He was not going to stop, till Marcella whispered brokenly: "Can I speak to you a minute? There is just one thing I want to say."

He drew back, unsmiling. A queer look was on the dark, handsome face.

"I don't think," he said evenly and very coolly, "that you and I can have anything to say to each other—now—or at any other time."

Marcella stared incredulously at her quondam lover. She was very white.

"You and I—nothing to say to each other——" she repeated, parrotlike. "What can have happened?"

This was a nightmare—an incredible nightmare from which surely she would soon awake.

“Nothing has happened, except that my eyes are opened,” said Miles very low. “I’ve been a fool, that’s all.”

She put out a trembling hand. The girl was shaking from head to foot and a pulse in her throat was throbbing madly.

“Miles! What is it? You must tell me. Haven’t I—a—a *right* to know?” The words came brokenly.

“A right? What right? You are engaged—deeply involved—with some one else.”

“But,” she stammered, “only this morning we told each other, you and I, about caring. Weren’t you in earnest? I believed you. . . .”

His lip curled at that.

“And I—I trusted you. Fool that I was!”

Never again could he believe a word this girl could say.

“Some one has been talking. Some one has been making mischief. Tell me!”

The quick fear in her eyes was proof to him of his past ignorance. What more was she hiding from him?

What greater depths of perfidy would be revealed?

His heart hardened. She was play-acting, of course. That beseeching look in her pretty eyes . . . the pathetic little break in her sweet voice . . . the imploring gestures . . . they were all so many assets for the hoodwinking of men and the gaining of her own ends.

“You will be relieved to hear that no one has been talking. But certain things have come to my knowledge that make it quite impossible for me to continue this pretence——”

“*Pretence?* How?” She spoke in little staccato jerks, her eyes wide with apprehension.

He looked at her intently.

“Why seem so—ignorant, Marcella?” Then, bitterly: “This morning I believed utterly everything you said. I thought you were one of the good women of the world, some one a man could absolutely rely on. *Now——*” He shrugged his shoulders.

“I have a right to know your meaning,” she said sharply.

“No, I think not,” came the rejoinder. “Your rights over me are done. But, in passing, I would like to say a word. Men are not the tools of women—pretty women. They are not to be used and then flung aside. If you forget that fact, you are courting disaster. Your fiancé cares for you. Why desire an intrigue with me while pretending to care for him, and at the same time working him to get all you can from him?”

The contempt in his tone stung her.

“That isn’t true.” She held her head up proudly. “I dare you to say that it is true.”

Miles took a step nearer and said, very quietly, with a deadly coolness:

“You mean to say you have never taken anything from any man?”

A flood of light swept over the girl’s brain. *The loan!* Some one—Leonie Day, perhaps—had heard about it, and had misled Miles into believing it was a *gift* from Warwick Treman.

Leonie was jealous of her and had done this thing. There was no proof, for Warwick wasn’t the sort of man to give a secret away. The loan was a business proposition between herself and Warwick . . . it was no gift . . . she was “taking” nothing from him . . . she would repay the sum.

“Do you mean to insinuate that I am the type of girl who takes money from a man?” she said coolly, almost insolently, firm in her own conviction, “because—if so—I give you the lie direct!”

He caught her roughly by the arm and swung her round so that the light from a near-by lamp shone full upon her face.

“You swear it?” he asked hoarsely, praying in his inmost heart that at this eleventh hour she would tell him the whole truth. Perhaps matters could be patched up between them—he still loved her—loved her damnably, wretchedly, and to his own misery.

If she confessed that the lure of money had tempted her into taking financial assistance from one man while at the same time loving another, but that she had repented, and returned the gift, then—maybe—he could forgive her, try to see her point of view.

But she *must* be open with him. How he hated subterfuge!

“I swear that I have never accepted money from any man,” said Marcella, true to her own interpretation of the loan.

He gave a broken cry, half smothered.

“That ends the matter.”

“You—you *must* believe me,” breathed Marcella. “I swear it’s true. I——”

He drew away from her with an air of absolute finality.

“Don’t perjure yourself.”

Terror clutched Marcella’s heart.

“Miles! I didn’t mean—if it’s something some one has told you, or—or you’ve found out for yourself——”

Her sudden breakdown was proof, in his hurt consciousness, of her immeasurable deceit.

“You need say no more, Marcella. In going, I just want to tell you there could be no happiness at all for you and me. I value the truth too much. And I value principle—and right feeling—and directness. Be happy with your fiancé—and try to play the game with him—that’s all.”

So saying, he turned and left her standing there, dumb with misery, and with a heart like lead.

CHAPTER XIX

Leonie the Schemer

On the last day but one of Lady Warrington's house-party, Warwick Treman and Miss Leonie Day engaged in a rather intimate, albeit canny, conversation.

Both on their guard, they yet contrived to understand each other.

"You and young Holden have been getting on together like a house on fire," volunteered Treman with a knowing smile. "He's spent all his leisure time with you, hasn't he?"

Leonie tossed a pert head.

"Oh, we're old friends. I amuse him. He's a moody fellow, rather. But I know how to handle him."

"You're darned clever, Leonie. You'd make a good wife for any man."

Miss Leonie looked arch.

"Maybe. But my heart rules my head, sometimes." Then suddenly she asked: "D'you know that Miles is going straight back to the United States, and may be there for an indefinite time?"

The other nodded. Who could know better, since he himself had engineered that move?

"He's got a frightfully important commission for the decorations of a public building. Really a splendid chance. And, following it, he's been offered a huge sum to do a fountain in some millionaire's country place. Fine, isn't it?" said the girl enthusiastically.

She flung a keen glance at her companion. Leonie was shrewd and perfectly realized how ardently Treman wished to remove Miles Holden from Marcella's orbit.

"Yes. Excellent!" said Treman non-committally. He had drawn the attention of the millionaire to Miles' record as a sculptor, and, in the matter of the public building, had used his influence with the selecting committee, who had already heard of Holden's achievements in America and were ready to give the young man a further opportunity.

Leonie suspected Treman's hand in this, but was not sure. And, of course,

Miles was really very clever and deserved success on his own merits without Treman's backing.

"Would you like to see New York?" Her companion rapped the query out so suddenly that Leonie jumped.

"Like it? I'd *adore* it! It's been my dream for years. But"—with a sigh—"why ask? You know I can't afford the trip."

The man's eyes narrowed. He was thinking rapidly.

"You're very fond of Holden, aren't you? Come on, confess to your old friend."

"Well—yes—rather."

"Then hadn't you better keep an eye on him? There are lots of pretty women in America—devilish attractive."

"I'm not well off," she said in a gentle, regretful little voice. "And I hear that New York is so expensive."

Treman hesitated. He didn't want to throw his money away for nothing.

"You could open a branch of your business out there, couldn't you?"

"It would take a lot of capital." Her heart beat in anticipation of the offer that was coming.

"Oh, you're a shrewd business woman. I wouldn't mind backing you. We'll think it over. And, in any case, the passage out could be arranged. Sixty pounds or so would cover it."

"That's a lot of money for a six days' voyage," commented Leonie innocently.

He turned and looked at her.

"Why don't you pull it off with Holden? I've told you already that you're darned attractive. Tonight's your last night here. Make hay, won't you?"

She pretended to pout.

"As though it rested with me——"

"It does. Any pretty, clever woman can get round a man, especially if he's already interested in her."

Leonie rose as though to end the conversation. She smiled down at Treman, but there was calculation in that smile of hers.

“You won’t forget your promise about the trousseau? You’ll be a sort of fairy-godfather, eh? Is that it?”

He inclined his head.

“Go to it and win, my dear,” he said encouragingly.

“I can’t think where Leonie Day and young Holden have got to,” said Lady Warrington rather peevishly to her guests.

Marcella Field and her fiancé heard the observation. They had been sitting silently beside the fire, Marcella desperately unhappy and Treman uncommunicative.

Tryphena, the silly spinster, giggled something about “Love’s young dream.”

“I wish they’d get engaged and be done with it,” continued the hostess with some asperity. “Leonie was bright and amusing and helpful in Paris. Now she’s different.”

She was getting tired of the young woman with the flattering tongue. Marcella Field, for instance, was a much sincerer type. Lady Warrington sensed vaguely that Marcella wasn’t happy, but did not connect Miss Leonie with the reason.

She was not observant.

“It’s half-past ten.” She yawned and rose. “It’s been a dull visit for you all. I’m rather bored with the English countryside in early spring. Weather’s too bad. I’ve more than half a mind to run over to the States and be pepped up a bit, as they say over there. Will you come with me, Marcella? I’m game to go if you are.”

The latter shook her head, and Lady Warrington laughed teasingly.

“Couldn’t leave your precious Warwick, I suppose? You lovers!” She moved towards a door at the back of the hall. “I can’t lock Leonie and her beau out, so I’ll go and look for them. Come on, Marcella, take a stroll with me. There’s a young moon up.”

Marcella would have instantly declined, but Warwick Treman caught her by the arm playfully, saying they must go out together over the lawns and turn a penny for luck, and wish a wish.

She found herself between her hostess and her fiancé, walking in the clear

moonlight towards the studio in the grounds.

“I think Leonie’s in love with Mr. Holden. In Paris she practically told me they were engaged, and really he was very attentive. Too bad if he doesn’t mean anything by it,” said Lady Warrington.

Marcella’s heart contracted in pain.

There was a light burning in the studio. Miles had worked late to complete his study. Leonie was doubtless with him.

“Let’s surprise ’em,” suggested the skittish hostess as they stopped before the door. “We won’t knock. We’ll go right in.”

Suiting the action to the words, she swung the big door open, revealing a tableau that startled even herself, and made her regret her own officiousness. For they beheld Miss Leonie Day with her two arms round the young sculptor’s neck and her head resting on his shoulder.

Leonie sprang away at once with the air of a startled fawn. She had played her last card to bring this difficult young man to the point, and now—with the advent of spectators—Fate had helped her. The witnesses had no means of knowing that Miles himself was as startled as they were.

“I didn’t know,” she faltered with suitable confusion. “Miles and I—we forgot the time—and everything—I suppose it’s frightfully late? Oh, *please* don’t be angry. I—we thought——”

“You thought you were unobserved,” supplemented Lady Warrington archly, coming to the rescue. She adored romance of any kind, and now forgot her previous irritation with Miss Leonie, who really did look sweetly shy and caught. “I always knew you two were crazy about each other. Why not confess it?”

She looked from the girl to Miles, and Leonie also turned to him as though in confirmation.

“You tell them,” she said gently, sweetly, trustingly.

Miles hesitated only for the fraction of a second. Her dilemma was his fault, he told himself, and he must stand by her at every cost.

“I want to tell you,” he said slowly, resolutely—and though his face was very white, the others did not notice that—“I want to tell you that Leonie and I are going to be married.”

CHAPTER XX

Aboard Ship

In her luxuriously appointed first-class state-room stood Miss Leonie Day, a bouquet of Malmaison roses in one hand, and an exquisite spray of orchids in the other.

“I’m popular, I am!” said she, whimsically, regarding first one gift, then the other. “Which shall I wear tonight? And with what gown?”

The floor shook beneath her feet, so that she lurched a little, and put out a steadying elbow against the big writing-desk that was set against the wall.

“And neither the orchids nor the roses have come from my fiancé,” she remarked again. “Maybe they’ll wake Miles up a bit and make him jealous.”

She decided on the orchids. They were more expensive looking, and would be the very thing for the Lanvin model.

And the donor—nearly sixty—was so rich!

Leonie pressed a button in the wall marked “Steward—Ring Once,” and when the man appeared gave him the roses.

“Put them at my end of the Captain’s table, please, and see that they are arranged nicely.”

“Very good, madame. Anything further I can do for you?”

“Ask my stewardess to come along in fifteen minutes and fasten my frock. That will be all.”

The man withdrew.

Leonie commenced on the absorbing task of making up her face. She was a past-mistress at this art, but tonight the Atlantic was bad tempered, so that the hand that wielded the small brush upon her lashes shook a little, and some of the mascara got into her eyes.

Below her breath she said a tiny swear-word, though her mood was amiable. Warwick Treman had really done the thing in style for her, aboard this gigantic vessel. She was travelling *de luxe*, and her ready wit, good humour, and smart clothes had given her the facile popularity she craved.

A tap came at the door, and Lady Warrington appeared. She wore a red

kimono and a worried look.

“I can’t get my hair fixed,” she lamented. “Do be a good child, Leonie, and help me. You’re so clever.”

The clever one grinned good naturedly, and soon had her friend and chaperon in a chair before the looking-glass.

“It’s quite easy.” She fluffed the straggling locks into a becoming frame, dexterously slipping pins in here and there. “A French knot at the back. So! You have quite a *grande dame* air.”

“You don’t think it makes me too old?” Lady Warrington twisted round to get the side effect.

“Nonsense! You don’t look a day over thirty-five,” lied the glib Leonie. “I’d back you against any younger woman, myself included.”

It was precisely speeches of this sort, calculated to find the weak spots in her chaperon’s character, that made the bond between the two.

Lady Warrington, at bottom, preferred Marcella Field to Leonie. But the latter flattered her until the very cockles of her heart were warmed.

And she was so skilled in the accessories of dress, and coiffure, and all the things that go to make a woman pretty, and the good, rather silly Lady Warrington relied on Leonie’s advice and help.

As for the latter, Leonie expected to use the rich woman to the limit. Lady Warrington intended to rent a summer home on Long Island and fill it with a stream of amusing visitors. Miles and she could have their wedding there.

As for going into business in New York, there was time enough for that. Lady Warrington had offered to be a sleeping partner, and Miss Leonie was considering the offer.

But marriage first, with Miles, was, of course her immediate objective.

Miles hadn’t been too loverlike aboard this boat. Leonie had even wondered if he weren’t actually annoyed with her for coming.

That had rather disconcerted her, but the attention she had received from the male element among the passengers—and they had now been three days outward bound—had reassured her as to her own potent charm.

The two women went in to dinner, Leonie resplendent in the Lanvin model with the orchids in the corsage. She walked through the glass doors into the great dining-saloon and up to the Captain’s table in the very centre, with an air of fashion and of conquest.

Miles arrived soon after and sank into the seat beside her with a rather weary aspect.

“Such lovely roses!” he remarked, trying to make an effort, and lifting a long-stemmed flower from its fellows, to inhale its perfume.

“Mine!” said Leonie succinctly. “And do look at my orchids! They came from the ice-chambers of the ship this afternoon, with compliments of Mr. Sturtevant.”

Miles did not seem impressed. He smiled and raised his brows.

“That old codger! He must be nearly seventy.”

Leonie was nettled.

“He’s a very charming man, and a millionaire.”

It was irritating that Miles should be so much more interested in swallowing his oysters than in a recital of his fiancée’s conquests.

She turned to her neighbour on the right, leaving Miles to Lady Warrington, and engaged in very airy persiflage for the next half-hour.

“You drink too much champagne. I wouldn’t take it, if I were you.” Miles touched her arm, speaking low so that nobody could hear.

Leonie tossed her head. Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes sparkling behind her made-up lashes.

“Don’t be a kill-joy. We’re headed for the land of Prohibition, so we might as well enjoy ourselves while we can.”

He said no more, but excused himself immediately after dinner, and went off to the smoking-room to play cards.

“He’s not such an immaculate angel himself,” said Leonie to Lady Warrington, as they took the elevator up to the lounge, where the latest thing in New York bands was playing. “He has his game of poker every night, and he’s lost quite a bit, I believe.”

“You can cure him of that, once you’re married,” rejoined Lady Warrington good naturedly.

But Leonie had begun to wonder. Her influence with Miles was not a potent one. He was invariably polite. Yet there was something lacking, somewhere.

She sat in a low chair beside the dance-floor in the big lounge, with

satellites about her, and sipped a green liqueur.

Presently she danced, first with a rich Englishman, then with an even richer American, and thirdly with the Mr. Sturtevant who was the donor of the orchids.

One or two impecunious boys she snubbed. Leonie did not intend to waste her time on anything ineligible.

“This is a perfectly gorgeous boat, isn’t it? One would never dream one was afloat,” observed the young woman to her elderly admirer.

Her glance quested round the great saloon with its high, curtained windows and myriad little tables and sofas set about the dance-floor. Deft, well-trained stewards moved noiselessly on the thick carpets, bringing coffee, wines, and cigarettes.

“A young lady as charming as yourself should always be in a gorgeous setting. That is only right,” said Mr. Sturtevant, with a killing ogle.

Yes, Leonie enjoyed herself. It was too bad that Miles wasn’t here to see her triumph.

“I don’t know about the gorgeous setting, in the future.” She contrived a rather plaintive air. “As you know, I’m engaged to a sculptor, and fame and money don’t always go together, do they?”

She supped with Mr. Sturtevant and his party in the Ritz-Carlton restaurant after midnight. It was expensive, and the haunt of millionaires, film-stars, actors, impresarios, and the like. Here one consumed out-of-season delicacies, and the more expensive a dish or a wine was, the more popular it became.

An orchestra discoursed sweet music from behind the palms. Great banks of flowers and hanging plants and tall, pink-shaded lamps might have led one to believe one was in some great metropolitan hotel, except for an occasional faint vibration in the floor.

“Ah, here comes my handsome cavalier,” announced Miss Leonie, as a very slim, dark young man entered the restaurant and languidly made his way to her table. “I must ask the orchestra to play the tango, and he and I will give a demonstration.”

The slender, foreign young man was very attentive to Miss Leonie. He contrived to get her to himself after a time, and the pair strolled out on the decks and leaned over the side, watching the phosphorescence on the water.

“I shall hope to see something of you in New York,” he said, in his soft,

rather crooning voice. “I have so many friends, so rich. And I could entertain you well.”

He was in the tobacco business, and enormously wealthy, Leonie understood. He belonged to all the exclusive clubs, and kept a string of ponies. And he had a rancho in the Argentine.

He talked eloquently of plans for her diversion. She was immensely flattered.

“I can’t think why you are so kind,” she murmured.

His hand closed over hers on the rail of the ship.

“Because I find you fascinating—and beautiful. I would do much for you.” Then he added, as though it were an afterthought: “Will you do one little thing for me, Miss Leonie?”

She raised coquettish eyes to his.

“You have been so wonderful,” she murmured. “Try me and see.”

“It is nothing much. A difficulty of landing. The Customs people are so troublesome, and I have with me aigrettes and bird of paradise and osprey—packed in a small box. They are forbidden to be brought into the United States. But you—you are so fascinating—the Customs men would not make such strict examination in your case.”

Leonie drew back. She had heard about those laws, and the penalties for their contravention.

“But why did you bring them with you?”

He thought that she was jealous.

“An elderly lady—an old family friend—who has been kind to me for years—desired them. Any little return that I could do for her——”

Leonie’s face cleared.

“I could carry the little box under my cloak, I suppose? And if they did catch me with it, they’d only take the stuff away? Isn’t that so, Mr. Da Costa?”

He nodded, giving her arm a little pressure.

“Please call me José. I want to be your friend—more than a friend.”

Intrigue delighted Leonie. And handsome José certainly was in love with her. They stayed out on the deck, talking for a long time.

She was quite disconcerted when a step sounded near them and Miles

appeared, looking grim.

“Do you know what time it is?” he asked gruffly, taking Leonie by the arm. “You ought to have been in your bed hours ago.”

He made short shrift with José.

“You needn’t have been so rude to my friend,” said Leonie, trying to be haughty the moment they were out of earshot.

“Friend? Why, the fellow’s nothing but a common crook! He’s a card-sharper, for one thing.”

“You’re angry just because he’s a better player than you are.” Leonie’s lip curled. “He was decent enough to ask me yesterday to tell you to leave cards alone. Does that look as though he were a rogue?”

“You know nothing about him,” came the curt reply.

“And I don’t want you to associate with the fellow. Any one with sense would see his character written on his face.”

Leonie was roused. Miles could neglect her all the voyage, and then resent the attentions of other men.

“Just because he’s more attractive than you——” she began hotly. But he cut her short.

“I’ve expressed my wishes. It’s time you were in your state-room.” He went down the lift with her to deck C, and escorted her along the passages to her own door. “Good-night.”

CHAPTER XXI

New York

The reporters and camera-men came aboard at Sandy Hook, and Miles was interviewed and filmed and photographed.

Leonie was in her cabin, “titivating,” and to her own chagrin missed this priceless chance for free publicity.

“You ought to have warned me beforehand,” she wailed to her fiancé, little guessing he had purposely avoided giving her a hint anent the welcome celebrities receive on reaching the United States.

The towering sky-scrapers, jutting like crags against the skyline, fascinated her.

“You’ll be very careful with that little box of mine,” said José just before she crossed the gangway to the dock. “Keep it under your cloak—so. It looks like a vanity bag, so you’ll get through all right. I’ll be on the lookout for you later on, out by the taxicabs.”

As he stepped off the gangway, Leonie saw a fair-haired young woman dart forward from the pen or barrier behind which friends must wait, and fling her arms about him rapturously.

She heard her quondam admirer say:

“Go back, Deirdre,” and at the same time slip something into her hand.

A wave of sudden anger took her. José had *flirted* with her—Leonie—and *all the time he had a wife!*

She walked directly up to him and held the little box out.

“You can attend to this yourself. You can do your own smuggling,” she said sharply.

“Be quiet, for God’s sake! Are you mad?” Then, as a man in uniform, who had overheard Leonie’s remark and seen her action, stepped forward, José made a move as though to hurl the little box into the water. But the Customs official was too quick, and circumvented that.

“Give it here.” He opened it, revealing a number of packages containing a whitish powder. “Dope! I guessed as much. No, don’t try to get away. We’ve a list of ‘wanted’ dope-runners, and I shouldn’t be surprised if you are one of

them. You'll have to come, too, miss." He turned to the astounded Leonie. "You'll have to give your story."

José glared like a young tiger at the trembling girl.

"They'll send me to quod for this!" he hissed in her ear. "But don't think *you*'ll get off scot-free! Though I've to go to the ends of the earth to do it, I'll pay you out—I will—even if I have to swing for it!"

The circumstances attendant on Leonie's arrival in New York were not propitious.

Through her ignorance and folly, she had tried to defeat the Customs and had landed herself in an intolerable position. For the dope-runner, José, furious that she had given the show away, boldly cited her as his accomplice, and she found herself being interviewed, not by a bevy of admiring film-men and reporters, as had been her previous hope, but by hard-hearted police who suspected every syllable she uttered.

Indeed, if it hadn't been for Mr. Sturtevant, who was a man of high position, boundless wealth, and great influence, Miss Leonie would have spent the night in gaol.

As it was, she was sharply rebuked, her name and address taken—indeed, she wasn't certain that kind Mr. Sturtevant hadn't paid bail for her.

"We shall want to see you later on this matter," a gruff inspector had informed her. "Don't attempt to leave New York or it might go very hard with you."

Mr. Sturtevant had given the necessary assurances, and Leonie was free to rejoin Miles, who knew nothing of the occurrence.

He looked grave when she told him.

"Whatever induced you to have anything to say to the Da Costa fellow? Didn't I tell you he was no good?"

Leonie tossed her head.

"Oh, you're one of the people who can't resist the temptation of saying, 'I told you so.'"

He gave her a long, searching glance. The disillusioning process had set in and he began to see this girl as she really was—head-strong, hard, and selfish.

"The laws here are very stringent." He refrained from telling her how

damaging it would be to him, professionally and socially, to have his future wife pointed at as a dope conspirator.

Lady Warrington was fussing round the baggage like a clucking hen. She had declared nothing, and was correspondingly annoyed when she was charged on bottles of French perfume, cigarettes, new gloves.

“But one is allowed to bring a certain amount of dutiable stuff into the country free of duty,” she protested to an official.

“You have exceeded the amount, madam,” came the imperturbable reply.

Miles felt irritated with both the women. Had neither of them any sense at all?

He was thankful when he had packed them both, with their luggage, into a ramshackle taxi-cab and they sped away to their hotel. He was going to put up at his own quiet club, for which the Lord be praised!

Leonie soon forgot the fracas at the dock in her delight over the novelty of this huge, towering, roaring city.

“Heavens! How *quaint* it is!” she ejaculated, peering through the rattling window of the vehicle out at the cobbled, crowded streets. “So utterly unlike London. Everything moves faster, doesn’t it? Ow! Ouch!” as the driver dodged two oncoming vehicles with amazing, if reckless, skill. “That was a narrow squeak!”

“Oh, you’ll get accustomed to the traffic and the pace,” rejoined her companion soothingly. “Everything keeps to the right over here instead of to the left as with us at home, so it’s rather confusing just at first.”

A sudden roaring noise came from directly overhead, and Leonie stared up at a skeleton framework—an extraordinarily queer contraption—on which snorted and rattled a railway train.

“Won’t it fall down on us?” she cried, amazed as the carriages apparently whirled off into space. “What is it?”

“Only the Elevated, popularly known as the L,” explained Lady Warrington. “You must travel by it in the early mornings, when people are going to their work, or when the offices come out at night. A sardine has more room in its little tin than a human in the Elevated at those hours. But it’s an amusing experience.”

Leonie wasn’t listening. She was staring at the passers-by with enthralled eyes.

“Where are the *poor* people? Aren’t there any in New York? And no one looks *old*. Do they die young, or what? And how well dressed everybody is. Are they all rich?”

Glorious sunshine lit the crowded streets and tall buildings. The air was extraordinarily clear and stimulating. It gave one energy and vim.

Great street cars—some of them with open sides, for the day was warm and pleasant—dashed by, filled with prosperous, happy-looking men and women. Here and there were negroes, dressed as smartly as anybody else.

The traffic was enormous. At every street-crossing—and, indeed, to Leonie’s British eyes, the city seemed laid out on a chess-board pattern—was a big policeman, whose slightest wish was law.

“The traffic cops,” said Lady Warrington, delighting in the slang.

“Such handsome fellows, aren’t they? Magnificent physique.”

“They are mostly of Irish extraction. Be careful to keep on their good side. They have lots of power. And you know, much as I love New York, one can be arrested here on all sorts of little charges that we wouldn’t bother about at home.”

They turned from Broadway into Fifth Avenue, and Leonie exclaimed at the sheer beauty of the street.

It was noon, and the smart society women were thronging the pavements.

“Gorgeous creatures!” breathed Miss Leonie, feeling that she must put her best foot foremost here. “They have more chic and daring than the French, I do believe. How on earth do they contrive to get that highly finished, almost varnished look?”

“By paying attention to the very smallest detail and taking endless pains,” said Lady Warrington. “The styles here are more extreme than in Paris. It takes an American to wear them.”

The traffic was tremendously congested. Leonie had never seen so many motor-cars in any one street in her life. And the shop windows mightily intrigued her. In London, the art of window-dressing does not reach the high point of achievement that it does across the Atlantic.

At last the taxi drew up at their hotel, and Leonie and her companion found themselves in a lounge—known as a lobby in the States—that was long enough and crammed enough with people to be called a street.

The girl felt dazed by such a moving panorama of human beings. A tiny

frog in a metaphorical ocean.

Lady Warrington went over to a long counter bearing electrically lighted signs—MAIL, CASHIER, INFORMATION, TELEGRAMS.

She returned accompanied by a very smart young man in a quiet uniform, who might have been a Harvard graduate, so refined was he.

“Known as a bell-hop,” she whispered in answer to Leonie’s query as the three got into an enormous lift.

There were twelve of these lifts, or elevators, bearing the signs—EXPRESS, LOCAL, and SERVICE. The newcomers were in an Express, which shot up twelve floors silently and swiftly. They then changed to a Local, and were deposited on the sixteenth floor.

“I never knew there were such marvellous places in the world,” breathed Leonie when the bell-hop of ultra-gentlemanly mien had gone, and they were alone in their two-rooms-and-bath suite.

She gazed about her at the luxurious comfort of her room. Nothing was forgotten. A writing-desk, with every kind of paper, ink, and pens, postcards and telegraph forms, had two electric lamps at either end of it.

“They are prodigal of electricity in the New York hotels,” pointed out Lady Warrington with a smile. “Look. In this one room alone there are eight different lights, three in the bathroom, and two in your clothes-cupboard.”

The bathroom was a marvel, with boiling water at a moment’s notice, and endless nickel taps and gadgets.

“What on earth’s this?” queried Leonie, gazing at a beauty apparatus coyly embedded in the white tiled wall. It consisted of eight little glass doors, a few inches square, with a slot below for the insertion of a coin. Behind the little doors were talcum powders, tooth-pastes, unguents, face-powders, brushes and the like.

“Pop in a quarter and out flies one’s purchase,” laughed the other. “The hotel management forget nothing for one’s comfort.”

They went back into Leonie’s big bedroom, and Lady Warrington picked up the telephone which stood on a small reading-table by the bedside, and murmured:

“Chicken salad, coffee and ice-cream.”

In a miraculously short time a waiter appeared, carrying a small table wrapped in linen. He removed its folds, revealing the feast spread for the

newcomers.

“Such efficiency,” murmured the English girl, astounded. Everything was complete, down to the coffee sizzling above a little alcohol lamp.

“Just ask for anything by telephone,” observed Lady Warrington, “and it comes all right. Do you want a suit pressed, or a chaperon, a stenographer, or a shopping guide? Do you want hairpins, or a manicurist, or a beauty treatment? They’re all ready for you at a moment’s notice.”

Leonie was examining what appeared to be a thermometer above the bed-head with a little wheel attached.

“You screw the pointer round to whatever temperature you desire the room to be,” explained her friend, amused. “Clever device, isn’t it?”

They had their meal and then Leonie wished to go downstairs to post a letter.

“You don’t have to. There’s a mail-chute just outside the door.”

Through its glass frontage, Leonie could see other letters shooting down from higher floors of the hotel like falling snowflakes.

Miles Holden called during the course of the afternoon, and they sat at a little tea-table which overlooked a long, palm-decorated corridor that was a rendezvous for men and maids.

“Pretty girls, aren’t they?” observed the sculptor, who had a keen eye for beauty. “Much more self-possessed than ours at home, and with very grown-up manners.”

Leonie stared.

“Well, *aren’t* they grown-up? Look at this one in the long draped skirts and pert *chapeau*. She must be twenty-five or six.”

“Sweet seventeen,” whispered Lady Warrington. “There’s a craze on just now for flappers.”

“But she isn’t a flapper. She doesn’t flap!” protested Leonie, observing the carefully marcelled coiffure, the correct angle of the little hat, the undulating walk, the slinky clothes, and the worldly-wise air of little Miss America. “Why, when I was seventeen, before my people lost their money, I was at a boarding-school and walking out every day in a ‘crocodile’ with a prim school-ma’am at the rear, my hair in a pig-tail, and even my thoughts sternly supervised. I couldn’t call my soul my own.”

She gazed again at the pretty, rather made-up little face of this

Transatlantic seventeen-year-old.

“What’s she done to her eyebrows?”

“*Plucked,*” said Lady Warrington in a sepulchral whisper. “You’d better have it done, too. It gives the face an awfully well-groomed sort of look. Only it hurts like—like blazes.”

“And so the flapper is the rage over here?” went on Leonie, anxious for all the information she could glean. Little Miss America’s companion seemed much older than herself, with a clever, keen, worth-while face. “But he must find her rather insipid, surely? Girls of seventeen may be satisfying to look at, but their minds are undeveloped.”

“They’re pretty precocious over here,” smiled Miles. “They are more wide awake than our girls at home in England, and get hold of all sorts of scraps of knowledge. Maybe they don’t digest much, but while the process of assimilation is going on they’re mighty amusing.”

Leonie flung him a keen look. She had a jealous nature. Would it be hard to hold him here?

She overheard various scraps of conversation from the other tables which led her to believe that the American girl, however young, was mentally bright as a new coin and endowed with great vivacity.

“The whole of this town seems extraordinarily alive,” she volunteered at last. “Already I feel electricity in the very air of it.”

“Americans are extremely hospitable,” said Miles. “You will be rushed to death, but you’ll get so acclimatized that you’ll be able to get through twice as much in the social way as you could at home.”

Leonie learned the truth of this.

Miles himself was much engaged. He had business appointments all that evening, greatly to his fiancée’s chagrin. Business ought never to usurp the place of attentions to her own fair self.

Mr. Sturtevant called and took Lady Warrington and herself to the Follies that night. It was a gorgeous spectacle.

During the interval they went out to the lobby, and she immediately lit a cigarette. An attendant approached her asking her to desist. If she desired to smoke, there was a room below stairs for that purpose.

“How ridiculous!” said Miss Leonie, displeased.

They went below, to find the small room packed with smokers and the air

heavy.

“I shan’t smoke at all if I can’t do it where and when I want to.” She shrugged her shoulders. “Talk about sardines in a can! And every one so *amiable* about it.”

After the show they went on to a very famous cabaret, where Leonie’s good humour was restored.

“It’s like an Arabian Nights’ story,” she exclaimed as they sat in a sort of little bower beside a trickling waterfall, under exquisitely shaded lights that made even the plain pretty, and the pretty beautiful.

Bold-headed Romeos cavorted gaily with bewitching maidens. Lovers swooned across the tiny tables towards each other. An intriguing melody crooned from the highest-priced orchestra in the world.

“Is that the saxophone?” she asked, as from one of the instruments came a long-drawn, whining note, plaintive and fascinating.

“It’s the muffled trombone. A plantation darcy calling for his sweetheart. Doesn’t it sound almost human?” And Mr. Sturtevant leaned towards the fair Leonie with a killing ogle, which that damsel returned in full measure, for her escort was both rich and likeable.

He pointed out various Napoleons of finance to her, names well known on Wall Street.

“I didn’t think they’d find time to relax like this,” commented the English girl. “They don’t look as though they had a care in the world.”

Mr. Sturtevant smiled, well pleased.

“Oh, we’re a many-sided people. And we like to please the ladies.”

Leonie beamed on him.

“Women are spoilt over here, aren’t they?”

“Not more than they deserve to be,” he gallantly replied, tilting up a glass whose innocuous contents were optimistically labelled as a “champagne cocktail” but whose price cruelly corresponded to the real thing. “I drink to your health and happiness, and the enjoyment we all plan to give you on this visit to our United States.”

CHAPTER XXII

“The Great White Way”

Late one afternoon Miles Holden walked down Broadway. It was a street that fascinated him. For it was Life Incarnate.

In some moods he resented it, despised, or even hated it. Its ruthlessness, its tinsel show, its faces satiated with pleasures that were empty, its fickleness, its tawdry gaiety.

In other moods he loved the stimulus of it, its quick welcome to success, its generosity.

And always it drew him like a magnet.

Jostling crowds went by him as he walked down past the Roaring Forties, past the old flower-women whining their wares, past endless little shops whose windows were filled with amazingly low-priced copies of the newest Paris models, wherewith to tempt the little actorines that throng the neighbourhood.

His pace slowed to a saunter, for time was heavy on his hands. There were two hours to kill before he should call for Leonie Day and take her out to some amusement.

He didn't *want* to go with Leonie!

Always his thoughts turned with nagging insistence to the other girl at home . . . Marcella . . . whom he had sworn he would forget for ever.

He still loved her, despite all attempts to hate her and cast her from his life.

Marcella! Image of all that was desirable, but at heart so mercenary and so deceiving!

He had been fooled. His eyes were open now, wide open. Marcella had fallen to the highest bidder, with all the worldly wisdom and calculation of her sex.

But—try as he would—he could not tear her image from his mind or heart. With feet of clay, his idol had toppled from the pedestal; yet there were times when it seemed to him that she was nearer, dearer, than she had ever been before.

Marriage with Leonie Day was like a great cloud on the horizon. He cursed himself for the entanglement, being too innately fine and chivalrous to see

Miss Leonie's own scheming hand in the affair.

There must be some way out that was honourable and fair.

He must be absolutely honest with the girl and tell her that he did not love her as a man should love his future wife. Perhaps she did not really care for him as much as she imagined. On board ship she had been pleased to accept the attentions of other men. A gleam of hope shone there.

A small crowd stood on the pavement about a music-shop. A large megaphone or trumpet was set neatly through the centre of the window-pane, magnifying the shrill notes of a woman who, seated at a piano in the interior of the place, was lustily bawling the very latest song-hit.

Miles halted for a moment in the doorway.

"God, what a life!" he thought, glancing with pity and interest at the peroxide blonde whose livelihood was earned in such a curious way.

At the conclusion of the song she rose and flung an alluring smile through the window at the pavement crowd.

They gaped at her in semi-boredom. No one made a move to buy a copy of the piece that she had sung.

"I'll take half a dozen copies," said Miles, with quick generosity, stepping forward on an impulse. If she couldn't sell the music, then she would lose her job, he knew. The owner of the shop would hire a younger, more attractive woman, in the true Broadway manner.

"Thanks. I'm a bit up against it." She rolled the sheets together. Then, with a glance at him, a sudden gleam of recognition came to her tired blue eyes, and she said quickly:

"Guess we've met before. Wasn't it on board ship, going over to England?"

"I don't remember," replied Miles courteously, taking the package from her hand and paying for it.

The yellow-haired woman stared at him.

"You were sweet on one of the kindest young ladies I have ever known. A real angel of goodness! Say, how is she? Miss Field was her name. She was mighty good to me."

Miles coloured up under his tan.

"She is very well, thanks," he said stiffly.

“Don’t be annoyed that a woman like me should mention her name,” went on the music-shop singer. “I know I’m not her kind. But that’s not to say I can’t appreciate a beautiful young lady when I see one. I don’t just mean her face; I mean her character.”

Miles was silent. The woman’s words filled him with intolerable pain.

“I suppose you’ll be getting married,” she went on wistfully. “Well, I wish you luck, I’m sure.” Then she added, with the frankness of her class: “My own luck’s out just now, for my boy’s in prison, and afterwards we’ll both have to leave the country. But I’ll stick to him all right.”

Miles went off wondering. Marcella had done this creature a kindness. . . . Hadn’t the latter been associated with a band of crooks? He ought to have asked the woman’s name. But the gaping crowd outside had embarrassed him.

It didn’t really matter. Yet it was queer that here on Broadway he should hear praise of Marcella.

The day darkened, and the myriad twinkling lights of the Great White Way popped up in whirling, scintillating, dazzling beauty. They blazed against a dark blue sky—tremendous moving pictures in liquid blue and rose and green and gold.

The famous chewing-gum advertisement winked at him with a million saucy eyes. Soaring in space were exquisitely coloured meteors proclaiming the excellence of somebody’s boot-polish, somebody’s cold-water dye, somebody’s motor-car. Great cliffs of dazzlement they were . . . monster fireworks flashing ever and anon into new pictures. One was a regiment of soldiers who sprang to attention, saluted, whirled round, and disappeared.

“Was there ever such a place?” Miles asked himself, with an amused smile, though a load still weighed on his heart. He must go in search of food somewhere, and started to retrace his steps in the direction of Columbus Circle.

The hard white lights of all the little stores had sprung out now, giving a queer pallor to the sea of faces that swept by. Such differing types of faces . . . Semitic, Scandinavian, Latin, Greek!

What a great Melting-Pot this country was! And sooner or later they all seemed to flock on Broadway.

Miles walked onwards past the line of sightseeing buses that were hung with lighted Chinese lanterns and labelled invitingly: “Come for a Trip to China-town.”

Gay little theatrical cafés were filling with their evening clientele.

Miles' destination was a small French restaurant in a basement, with a bolted door which the *maître d'hôtel* opened at a given signal of the push-button, fearful of the police.

He was known here, and welcomed. A bottle of *vin ordinaire*—in days before Prohibition looked on as the poor man's drink, but now, *faute de mieux*, precious as nectar—was placed before him with the table d'hôte meal, and madame herself, stout and bustling, mixed for him in a teacup a queer, rather deadly concoction, which she optimistically called a dry Martini.

"Changed times, m'sieu!" she wheezed. "It has ruined us, zis Prohibition. To others, more venturesome and daring, it has brought ze fortune. My Lucien is too timid! If he would but make ze police his friends, we should be rich, rich!" She sighed gustily.

It was not Lucien alone who was timid. Many of the diners sat nervously on the very edge of their chairs, as though expecting a raid at any moment.

"This beastly stuff isn't worth their pains and fears," thought Miles, sipping his synthetic cocktail with the distaste of a connoisseur.

His meal ended, he emerged into the street again and headed for Leonie's palatial hotel. Dancing attendance on the girl had grown extremely irksome. She was exacting, petulant, and frequently forgot the rôle of flatterer and sympathizer, at which she had invariably been past-mistress.

"My own fault!" the disillusioned young man told himself, with a wry twist at the corner of his well-cut mouth. "I never loved her, and I was a fool and worse to get into this infernal muddle."

The theatre foyers were filling now, and gorgeous motor-cars disgorging gorgeous women. This was a woman's paradise . . . New York. See that one in her silks and furs and jewels, the paradise plumes afloat in her marcelled hair! Her clothes alone must have cost a fortune!

Leonie Day had the clothes craze already, and the appetite grew with eating, so that she would never rest until she excelled all the other women, no matter what it cost her husband.

Marcella (yes, even despite her acceptance of a thousand pounds from Warwick Treman) was quite different. The thought came to him that she'd been driven in some hard way, to take that money. Perhaps her father . . .

His heart softened towards her. He had heard the term gold-digger in this town, but somehow he could not apply it to Marcella. How the blonde-haired woman's hard look had melted when she spoke Marcella's name, in the garish

little music-shop on Broadway!

He reached Leonie's hotel and telephoned her room, then stood idly waiting for her in the lobby that was so like a crowded street.

She kept him waiting fifteen minutes, under the delusion that the longer a man hangs about for a woman the more adoring he will be.

"I've been having a royal time," she burred, emerging from an elevator and floating towards him in a diaphanous green gown. Her hair was done in the very latest style, which did not suit her, and her whole air was artificial. "I dined in the grill with Mr. Sturtevant, and he *would* order the most expensive dishes for me. Did you ever hear of *milk-fed chicken under glass*? It nestled under one of those glass bells one sees on graves with 'At Rest' and a few faded flowers inside." She giggled. "Not in my case, of course——"

Miles pretended to listen politely, but already, with at least three hours of this girl's company ahead of him, he was intensely bored. They had been ten days in New York, and the excitement and little attentions she had received had brought out all the foolishness in Leonie.

"Would you care to go to a cinema?" he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders as though it were a matter of indifference to her spoiled young self.

"Very well. I've seen seven shows, and a cinema would be a change."

They climbed into a white taxi-cab driven by a reckless youth, who deposited them before an enormous building where they had to stand in a long queue and take their turn for tickets.

"But heavens! it was worth the wait," gasped Leonie, when they found themselves at last inside the great auditorium that was crammed to the very roof. "We have nothing—nothing to equal this in London. Look at that *regiment* of musicians on the stage! Look at the decorations and the forest of flowers!"

She craned her neck up towards the sea of faces rising, tier on tier, into oblivion.

An attendant found two seats for them—arm-chairs in which they sank down into the deepest, softest comfort.

And then the orchestra broke out into a trembling melody that was a thing of perfect beauty. To Leonie it meant nothing, but it filled the music-loving man beside her with a breath-taking ache of longing, with a rapture that was

bitter-sweet.

When at last the rhapsody shuddered into silence, Leonie turned to him.

“They pay an enormous price for that orchestra, I believe,” she remarked. “Seems rather spendthrift—what?”

“I don’t agree with you,” replied Miles briefly, irritated by the anticlimax. Had the girl no soul? “Anything that is perfect of its kind has a high value.”

“Oh, you exaggerate. It was only the overture to an American picture show. I don’t call it anything out of the common.”

Miles was silent. Gradually he was finding out that the speaker and himself had not one thing in common. How bleak the future looked! In fact, how utterly impossible.

A comedy was shown upon the screen, and then an “educational” film. Following that, a review of recent happenings around the town and country, known as “News of the Week.”

A fashion display interested Leonie, but thereafter her attention wandered to some girls in front, who were particularly smartly dressed.

“I believe I could copy that cloak——” she was saying to herself, when suddenly she was arrested by a stifled “Ah!” from Miles, and, following his gaze, which was riveted on the screen, she had a glimpse of something which astounded and disquieted her.

Large as life and lovely as the day, her hand possessively upon her father’s arm, and smiling straight at the audience, the image of Marcella Field, filmed on the deck of an incoming liner, sprang from the screen, the wording reading:

“HORATIO FIELD, EMINENT ARCHÆOLOGIST, ARRIVES
IN NEW YORK ON LECTURE TOUR, ACCOMPANIED BY HIS
DAUGHTER.”

The sudden vision—vital, alive, with all the play of fascinating little gesture, wistful smile, and vivid beauty that had so enthralled him in the past—shook Miles’ peace of mind to such a point that it was impossible for him to sit by Leonie in the dim-lit auditorium.

She sensed the shock he had received.

He rose.

“If you’ll excuse me, I’ll go out for a smoke. No, don’t move. The show isn’t nearly over yet. I’ll be back shortly.”

Miss Leonie demurred. She would go out with him. Indeed, they could return to her hotel if he felt tired.

But Miles, forgetting his usual politeness, didn't wait to hear her. He was half-way up the aisle.

Leonie was furious. She was not obtuse, and realized to the full how much the unexpected glimpse of That Other Girl had startled and upset him.

The surge of feeling had been so strong that he couldn't even bear her presence next to him.

Or—and this was equally disturbing—he had gone out to telephone the picture company which had filmed Marcella and her father—to find her whereabouts.

“She has come over to the States in order to take Miles away from me!” breathed Leonie through clenched teeth.

The still, small voice that all of us possess whispered the disturbing tidings that Miles, from the first meeting with That Other Girl, had been *her* property—that never had he belonged to Leonie—that always would he hanker after the soft-voiced, sweet-faced, out-of-reach Marcella.

“I shall never give him up!”

Could she hold him against love? That give-away tremor that had caught him when he saw Marcella on the screen, didn't it tell her all that this Other Girl had meant to him?

CHAPTER XXIII

“The Twentieth Century Ltd.”

Out in the vestibule of the picture palace, Miles was feverishly enquiring as to how one got in touch with film-operators, and where Marcella could be found.

It transpired that nothing could be done until the following morning. The distributing offices were closed.

“You could call up the hotels tonight, sir,” said the sympathetic woman in the box office. “You’re sure to find your party that way.”

To get rid of Leonie and to set himself to this task was his immediate desire.

Leonie, however, had an obstinate attack. As though she sensed what was in the wind, she refused to budge until the show was finished.

Miles sat beside her, restless and chagrined. Once or twice he stole a glance at her. The hard little face was directed towards the screen. Lips firmly set and thin, despite their rouge. There was something gnomelike in the pointed chin, so obstinate. How—*how* had he ever thought he even liked her?

The performance ended, and he breathed relief.

“But I don’t *want* to go right back to the hotel,” said Leonie petulantly. “Let’s go to one of those ice-cream parlours. I am thirsty.”

It was just as though she knew how much he longed to get away from her, he thought irritably.

He steered her into a brightly lit drug-store, and up to a marble counter with white-coated men behind it.

“Imagine being able to get ice-cream in a chemist’s shop at eleven o’clock at night!” tittered the maiden, good humour creeping back. She swung up on a high stool, displaying silk hosiery and a glimpse of lace. “A strawberry nut sundae, please. And a slice of layer-cake.”

Miles had an orangeade. His throat felt dry.

Leonie lingered with maddening deliberation over her little silver goblet, dipping in and out the silver prong.

“This puts our English ices to the blush!” quoth she. “Looks like a La France rose, doesn’t it. And the most *heavenly* taste!” She rolled her eyes upwards. “Think I’ll start an American ice-cream parlour in London. There’s a fortune in it.”

It was after midnight before Miles could get rid of her. Then he rang up all the principal hotels in town, to be informed by the booking-clerk at each that no one of the name of Field was registered there.

It was long after 2 a.m. when he got into bed, and lay staring into the darkness till dawn came. New York never sleeps, and the rumblings of the great city were a fitting accompaniment to his troubled thoughts.

The ringing of the telephone beside his bed aroused him. Leonie’s voice tinkled across the wires.

“Not up yet? It’s ten o’clock!” (So he *wasn’t* on the track of the Marcella creature *yet*, thank goodness!) “Can you meet me at the Knickerbocker Grill for lunch today?”

No, he could not. He was engaged all day, and probably tomorrow, too. He’d telephone. . . .

Cutting short her angry protestations, he hung up. Not a moment must be lost in getting into touch with the Field party. They might be leaving the city. Setting out on this wretched lecture tour immediately.

He dressed in haste, and went by taxi-cab to the moving-picture company which had filmed Marcella and her father. Alas! A disappointment there! They had no notion where the party could be found.

He climbed into the waiting vehicle again, and rattled and bumped downtown to the region of the shipping-offices. After an interminable wait, he was rewarded. The eminent archæologist had left a forwarding address, and, after some persuasion, it was given to the impatient Miles.

The trip up-town to the small, select hotel in the East Forties was fraught with numerous delays owing to the congestion of the traffic. Miles was on tenterhooks. He *must* see Marcella, must apologize to her, must come to a definite understanding. She was the girl he wanted. She was the one and only girl for him. . . .

“Mr. Field and his daughter checked out of the hotel not more than ten minutes ago. They were catching the Twentieth Century Limited for Chicago,” said the clerk in the office nonchalantly.

“You’re positive of that?” snapped Miles. “Have I time to make the train?”

“Uh-huh, if you get a move on. Grand Central. It’s quite near.”

He didn’t wait to pack a suitcase. He flung himself back into the waiting taxi, spurred on by an overwhelming longing. He *must* see her. . . . *Must!*

Arrived at that most magnificent of railway stations, he dropped five dollars in the astonished driver’s hand, and dashed across the polished, golden pavement under the great blue roof so like the sky, that glitters with zodiac shapes, golden on blue.

“Just time to make it, sir.” He hurried through the gates and up the little wooden ladder set against the train that seemed at least a mile in length.

Then, with a violent jolt, the Twentieth Century Limited was off, careering thunderously along the shores of the Hudson, the sun shining on the blue water and on the giant hoardings advertising Beans and Paint and Pickles, and dashing through corn fields that were quaintly picturesque.

A soft-voiced negro porter found an arm-chair for him in a green plush Pullman. Was Marcella here? He gazed around.

Down the aisle, a coloured manicure girl, with little bowl and file and polishers, was attending to the fingers of a smart damsel whom at first glimpse Miles took to be Marcella. Was it . . . ? Could it be . . . ?

But no! He was mistaken.

He reassured himself by saying he’d be certain to see her in the luncheon-car.

And then . . . *then* . . . everything would be set right. She would forgive him for his doubt of her. They’d explain everything to each other. Love would surely find the way!

“I’ll have fried chicken and corn-cakes, please,” said Miss Marcella Field to the white-coated negro waiter in the luncheon-car, “and peach ice-cream to follow. Watermelon for you, daddy?” Then, to a thin-lipped man opposite, who was watching her with adoring and possessive eyes:

“What will *you* have, Warwick? This wonderful American cooking makes me so greedy that I quite forget other people’s wants!”

“Steak minute for me,” came the smiling answer. “I’m sorry I can’t order claret or burgundy for you, Marcella. If I’d only thought of it, I might have brought some with me.”

“Risk too great,” said Marcella’s father, with a shrug.

“Oh, I don’t care particularly for wines,” commented the girl lightly. She turned to the rolling landscape, which fascinated her. The train was passing little darky shacks painted every colour of the rainbow. Orange and pink predominated. The pickaninnies in the doorways and in the dilapidated yards, with their woolly heads tied up with brightly tinted bows, interested her enormously.

“Aren’t these perfect little darlings?”

Warwick Treman smiled at her. Her capacity for enjoyment was part and parcel of her fresh and unspoilt youth, and one of her principal attractions in his eyes.

“This is my first trip on this line,” she chattered on. “I’m keen to see the Middle West. Daddy’s lecture in Chicago is tomorrow night.”

Her face had lost the sad droop it had previously had in England since the break with Miles Holden. Marcella—thought the man opposite—Marcella was forgetting. Soon she would be entirely his for ever.

His glance wandered over her pretty head, down the long aisle of lunchers, looking for some face he knew. Love must not interfere with business, and the luncheon-car of a super-luxurious trans-continental American train was a fertile spot for doing big transactions with Wall Street magnates, Middle Western grain-owners, men whom he had met occasionally and strenuously cultivated.

One or two such might be here.

Suddenly he started and his gaze became fixed and rigid. Heavens! it *couldn’t* be . . . not possibly . . .

Great guns! Shades of ill-luck! It *was*! None other!

“What’s the matter, Warwick? You look as though you’d seen a ghost!” twitted Marcella gaily. She was not really gay at heart, but in the meantime she must make the best of things. And Warwick was extremely kind and thoughtful, and daddy seemed to like him, and he was really doing his level best to make their trip a pleasant one.

The man pulled himself together. Marcella mustn’t look round, and see . . .

“Thought I recognized a chap for the moment, but I made a mistake!” smiled Warwick. “I say, let me put some butter on those corn-cakes——”

But Marcella twisted in her seat to gaze down the aisle, thereby causing her

vis-à-vis an agony of apprehension.

Fate played into his hands, however, for, in spite of her glance seeming to meet that of Holden, in reality she did not see him, though the latter thought she had and of set purpose turned her gaze away from him.

It was as though some one had deliberately slapped his face.

"She has cut me dead. What an infernal idiot I was to come on such a wild-goose chase!" he told himself unhappily. He understood Warwick Treman's action perfectly. The latter believed that all was fair in love and war, and was only behaving according to his lights.

But *Marcella*, of all people! . . . It was incredible and cruel!

One often hears that in matters of the heart there is a definite telepathy.

Be that as it may, some of Miles Holden's restlessness and pain seemed to have communicated itself to *Marcella*.

She was *distracted* all the long afternoon, and in the evening, on returning from the dining-car, was thankful to note that the darky porters had turned the coach into a sleeper, having miraculously pulled down upper berths, worked various sliding arrangements, arranged bed-clothes, and fixed the curtains in their place.

"But how very odd!" she thought, pondering on the strange publicity of this scheme. "Must I sleep all night just a few inches from strange men, with only this curtain between us?"

A large, cigar-scented gentleman, having already removed his boots, his collar and his tie, informed her that he had the upper berth above her own, and that he, too, wished to turn in early. He climbed the ladder ("Just like a rooster entering the coop!" thought *Marcella*) and landed with a thud above her head.

She was amused. She drew their joint green curtains, buttoned her own half down the middle, and proceeded with great difficulty to undress on top of the narrow berth.

An electric light and a tiny strip of mirror were set between the windows. *Marcella* could not sit upright without bumping her head on the upper berth, from which came noisy creakings as the fat man went through a similar process of undressing.

"Damn it! My watch and keys have fallen!" he exclaimed wheezily, as something skimmed floorwards. "Say! Could you pass 'em up to me?"

Marcella undid a couple of the curtains' buttons and peered out. An intimate garment of the upstairs gentleman had also fallen out, and she was glad when a passer-by rescued all three and restored them to their rightful owner.

She switched her light off, but she could not sleep. People were going up and down the passage, brushing against her curtains, talking. Through a chink between the partition at the bed-head she could glimpse them. They were mostly men, and some of them in *deshabille*.

From behind other curtains, here a foot protruded, kicking off a boot or sock; there an arm rescuing fallen property; once a pair of trousers dropped out to the aisle.

Then presently there was quiet, save for rhythmic snores.

The train bumped and rattled onwards, sometimes with great crashes that made Marcella think an accident had happened.

Lying in her berth, she thought incessantly of Miles. Where was he? Did he ever give a thought to her?

There had been a vague rumour of his coming to this country on a second visit. But the rumour had not been confirmed.

If only she had trusted him. Why, *why* had she not made a clean breast of her predicament regarding Warwick Treman, believing that Miles would understand?

It was too late now. The thing had gone too far. She *must* go through with it.

Tears gathered in her eyes and dropped upon the pillow.

Miles was engaged to Leonie Day, and apparently contented with his bargain. Long since he had forgotten all about Marcella. . . .

Had she but known it, in the next coach to her own, a sleepless, equally unhappy Miles was turning the vexed problem of their mutual engagements over and over in his mind with a heart as heavy as her own.

CHAPTER XXIV

Miss Chicago

Chicago!

City of Wind! City of Noise! City of Boundless Activity! City of Vast Achievement!

Never is Chicago calm. It is like a great animal unleashed, untamed, magnificently powerful, magnificently proud. It roars. It grows. It dominates.

And it is beautiful with that *beauté de diable* which is eternal adolescence and perpetual youth.

Marcella's first impression was of Noise.

"Piccadilly Circus—even Broadway—are calm and composed compared to this," she exclaimed, her ears reverberating to the shriek of siren whistles, policeman's whistles, street carts rattling over cobble-stones, motor-cars with open exhaust, and overhead a double line of elevated railways thundering like Jupiter enraged.

In their orange-sided taxi-cab, she and her father gazed at the plunging, rearing panorama that flew by.

"This is the real America," he said, a-kindle. "But I don't call it crude. I call it vitalizing."

"I hope we don't crash into anything," said Marcella timidly. "In New York I certainly was terrified at first over the reckless pace until I found out how well the taxi-brakes worked. Ow! Ouch! That was a narrow squeak!"

They whirled into an avenue that seemed to have the sea along one side and gorgeous shops along the other.

Marcella craned her neck towards the faint blue water.

"I can't see the farther shore."

Her father laughed.

"Not even a telescope would help you. The farther shore is Canada."

"And this gorgeous avenue?" queried the girl, immensely interested.

"Michigan Boulevard. The city's pride. Or, rather, one of its many prides.

Chicago is self-conscious and very sure of itself. Therein lies its colossal strength.”

Marcella filled her lungs with air that had blown, free and exhilarating, across those tossing waters.

“Such spaciousness! Such heaps of room to breathe! I was told this place was *crude*—maybe it is—but already I love it. I hope my room at the hotel overlooks Lake Michigan.”

The orange taxi drew up before a handsome building, and the two got out.

Through revolving glass doors they entered a spacious, carpeted lobby, leading into a gilded restaurant that was gay with flowers, lovely women with the fragile beauty of the orchid, and keen-faced men who cheerfully footed the—to a British mind—enormous bills.

The only bedrooms available for Marcella and her father were twelve dollars a-piece per night.

“Comes to nearly five guineas,” whispered the girl in a shocked tone. “And doesn’t include meals or anything.”

She was mistaken. It included ice-water, served by a resplendent chocolate being in an awe-inspiring uniform.

After lunch in the restaurant, she made her father rest, preparatory to the evening’s lecture. He wasn’t very strong and needed mothering.

Warwick Treman telephoned. Would Marcella come for a drive with him along the lake shore?

Oh no, she was too tired and still dusty after the long journey, so would he please excuse her? She was going to have a bath, and then a short siesta.

He was disappointed, so he said. There was a peremptory note in his voice that amounted almost to command. Marcella dreaded and disliked that note, so take-it-all-for-granted-you-are-mine was it.

What an odd mixture the man was! She shivered when she thought about her promise. Could she *ever* go through with it?

An hour later, when she was lying down in her room, the telephone rang again. A young Chicago girl, whose parents were business friends of Treman’s, had come to invite Marcella and her father to dine that evening before the lecture.

“Come right up,” said Marcella cordially. She enjoyed meeting American femininity.

The girl was very pretty and excessively well-groomed. Her hair was beautifully arranged and shone like a new coin, although a hair-net over it gave an air of stiffness which rather detracted from the girl's radiant youth.

Her clothes were lovely. Much more sophisticated than a damsel of the same age would wear in England.

"She—the American girl—outclasses us because she understands line better than we do. She never makes the mistake of cutting a suit or dress into little bits by the addition of a bow here, a bit of lace there, and an unnecessary frill," thought Marcella, taking in the other's clever toilet with appreciative eyes.

"I do think you American girls dress most frightfully well," she couldn't help saying. "Doesn't it take up heaps of time?"

The Chicago girl smiled.

"Oh, we enjoy the trouble. If we didn't feel just right we wouldn't have a good time. But don't think we dress to please the men. We don't. I'll whisper a secret"—the radiant smile grew wider—"we dress for one another. Girls are the hardest critics of each other's clothes. I belong to two clubs—all girls, and no men present—and, believe me, the strain of out-classing each other keeps us all up to the mark."

Marcella laughed.

"I think you're wonderful. In New York, what staggered me was the smartness of the down-town typists and secretaries and the shop-girls. How they can work all day, for hours and hours, and then emerge looking as though they'd stepped out of a bandbox, with not a hair or hairpin out of place, and that cool, finished look, as though they were on their way to a reception. It's too marvellous!"

Her hearer seemed well pleased with this tribute.

"It's just the same out here. You'll see them. As a matter of fact"—proudly—"I'm a stenographer myself, and no matter how tired I am, I wouldn't dream of going to bed without pressing out my skirt and seeing that everything's just right for the early morning start."

Marcella was surprised to hear that this child of wealthy parents actually held down a job.

"Nearly all the girls in my set do. We've so much energy. Pep, we call it. It's the climate, I suppose." She laughed. "And then we're crazy over freedom.

We like our own money. A dollar of our own is worth five of any man's—whether it's a father's or a husband's."

"I'm sure you're right," commented Marcella. If she'd followed out that line of reasoning herself, she wouldn't be in her present difficult position. "It must be lovely to earn one's own money."

"Of course, I don't pay board at home," said the other girl honestly. "And father gives me presents pretty often." She looked at Marcella's fresh complexion, and changing the subject, said admiringly: "You English girls have a lovely colouring, and you don't use nearly as much make-up as we do. I suppose it's your damp climate that gives you that wild-rose tint?"

Marcella laughed and flushed a little.

"Perhaps. *You've* nothing to complain of, though. What do you think of our men?"

Miss Chicago beamed.

"So smart! I'll tell you something—give you a swap. If we beat you girls in clothes, then your men beat ours in the same way. An Englishman always seems to me to look as though he'd been *poured* into his suits. Everything fits so beautifully. And playing golf and games so much—though over here the men are starting to do that more and more, thank goodness!—gives the Englishman such a lithe sort of figure, doesn't it?" She prattled on: "All the same, you English girls spoil your men shockingly. I believe it starts from the cradle with the mothers. The girls in the family have to give in to the boys. Isn't that so?"

"Maybe—in some families," said Marcella with reluctance.

"Now, over here, we have exactly the opposite idea," resumed Miss Chicago blithely. "It's the girls who are spoilt, and not the boys. *They* are taught to give in to *us*. And as they grow older, and it comes to a question of the money, the boys have to get right out and scramble for a high-school or a college education, working their way through, and that sort of hardens their characters and makes them appreciate the value of an education more. See?"

"I do," nodded Marcella, harking back in her mind to various families at home where the girls did nothing but arrange the flowers, and dust the drawing-room, and grow weary of monotonous days, while the money went to send to college the sons, who oftentimes didn't appreciate that education, but got into debt, and, indeed sometimes were ignominiously "sent down." "But"—defensively—"we have lots of self-made men in England."

“Uh-huh! Sure you have! But the idea isn’t so general as over here. I’m speaking of the policy of rich fathers with regard to their sons, as well as what you’d call the middle classes.”

“Things certainly are different,” granted Marcella thoughtfully. “For instance, you girls all seem to have so much—what shall I say?—*confidence* in yourselves. I don’t mean self-assurance in the horrid sense, but you radiate success, somehow.”

“Success with men?” enquired Miss Chicago archly.

“That among other things.”

The American girl laughed merrily.

“Well, we’ve swallowed the old adage that ‘Nothing succeeds like success.’ Act as though you knew you were the cutest thing under high heaven, and men will soon believe you. Even a homely girl can get away with it if she has the nerve.”

“But there aren’t any homely girls in the United States? At least, I haven’t noticed any,” commented Marcella.

“That’s because the scheme has worked on you, too,” laughed the other. “You’ve been hypnotized by the homely girl’s self-assurance into believing she’s a belle. If you add to that, that our boys are trained from the cradle to be nice to girls—all girls, irrespective of their beauty or lack of it—you get the situation.”

“There’s something more.” The English girl knitted her brows in meditation.

Miss Chicago went on lightly:

“Oh, the naturally plain girls make the very most of themselves, of course. They aren’t fools. They study their defects and dress accordingly. For instance, if a girl has ugly little eyes and she can’t alter their shape and colour, she’ll wear cute little hats with a tiny three-inch veil across the eyes, giving her a haremish, mysterious, subtle look that’s quite fetching. And she spends extra time in grooming, manicuring, matching colours, and the like. And naturally she works harder, and makes herself agreeable on all occasions. She doesn’t try the tricks of the pretty damsel. To be pert, or coy, or difficult, is not for her. That’s not her cue. She is sweet and sympathetic; but always, *always* she has confidence in herself and in her power to charm.”

There was a pause. Then:

“Shall I telephone for tea?” enquired the English girl.

The other shook her head.

“No, thanks. I never touch it, tho’ it’s grown to be quite a fashionable institution since the war. The boys brought the tea habit back from your side of the water, and haven’t got over it yet.”

“Then won’t you have an ice-cream or something? Isn’t that a custom here?”

Miss Chicago laughed.

“Oh yes. But I’m afraid of growing fat. I’m dieting just now.” She flung a glance at her slim young figure in the mirror-backed bathroom door.

“I’ve got to lose seven pounds in the next two weeks, or know the reason.”

The famous *reductio ad absurdum* question seemed an obsession with the women of the United States. Everywhere Marcella went, if her own sex were present, sooner or later the well-worn topic had an airing.

“But you don’t *want* to get any slimmer,” she protested. “You can’t be more than eight stone.”

“Eight *what*?” The other raised enquiring brows.

“Eight stone. You speak in pounds, don’t you?”

“Yes. I weigh one hundred and twenty. Listen! here’s a secret. I’m entering a bathing beauty competition on one of the beaches along the shore, and if I can lose a little weight, I’ll be in the running. Only don’t tell dad. He’d be wild if he knew I was competing.”

“I shan’t breathe a syllable.” Marcella was amused.

“Speaking of the girl question,” she remarked, “you’ve lots of old maids in this country, haven’t you?”

The other wheeled about.

“We don’t call ’em old maids. They’re ‘single women.’ And we don’t look down on ’em, as in your country. They’re usually single from choice, and nearly all have interesting professions, and that’s husband enough for them.”

“I suppose all of them could get married if they wanted to?”

“Certainly. *Any* woman can get married, surely? You don’t question that, do you?”

“Well,” said Marcella slowly, “usually that’s so. But in some countries,

like France and England, there's supposed to be a man-shortage."

"Then the women who want to marry, and can't find a mate at home, ought to emigrate. Look at your tremendous colonies just waiting for children to be born."

That fact was indisputable.

"Speaking of Englishmen," resumed the pretty Chicago girl with considerable animation, "I met the most *fascinating* creature today at luncheon. I got the afternoon off from the office to attend this function. That's why I'm here, and not working, as usual."

"I see," said Marcella, feeling that a comment was expected.

"He was so handsome! Such lovely manners! And I simply loved his accent! How on earth do they do it?"

The English girl laughed outright.

"I rather expected him to be a freak," went on the other confidentially, "because he's a sort of genius. High art and all that kind of thing. But he had the nicest clothes—sort of unobtrusive, yet just right, and such a smart, simple cut—and his hands weren't all clay, or paint, or whatever it is he does, but very clean and well-groomed, with long slim fingers like a surgeon."

"Who was this superman?" enquired Marcella, still more amused.

The answer was a staggering shock to her.

"A handsome fellow called Miles Holden. Intriguing name, isn't it?"

CHAPTER XXV

A Strange Meeting

On the second morning of the Chicago visit, Marcella stole out by herself along the boulevard.

The news of Miles' presence in the town had been curiously disturbing. She longed, yet dreaded, to see him.

As though Warwick Treman sensed the presence of a rival, he had safeguarded the girl's every moment, and even when she stayed up in her own room he had been on duty in the lobby of the big hotel, seated in a chair opposite the elevators, or chatting with the news-stand girl, one eye on the alert for his uncertain young fiancée.

"He *must* know Miles' whereabouts," thought Marcella, perfectly aware of these manœuvres. He was talking to the head telephone operator—a red-haired woman—and the girl contrived to slip out of the door on the far side of the hotel, unobserved, and speed away. "Is he attempting to intercept any phone messages that come for me, I wonder. . . ."

Perhaps Miles *had* tried to get in touch with her. Perhaps he'd followed her to the Windy City. Wasn't there even a possibility that he had been on the same train, and that Warwick had seen him? Hence this bull-dogging and detective work.

She had had a vague, persistent hope that he might be at last night's dinner or afterwards at her father's lecture.

But no! Neither function witnessed his presence.

Marcella hurried along the Boulevard, afraid Treman might try to follow her. The urge to get away from him, to have a "breather" from the stifling confines of this engagement had never been so strong.

She drew long breaths of the keen air that blew across the lake.

"How huge Chicago is!" thought she. "And how almost impossible that Miles and I could accidentally meet each other!"

None the less, the hope lingered.

Crowds went hurrying by, with preoccupied faces that held a singleness of object—a desire to *get somewhere* in the quickest possible time.

“Even on Fifth Avenue they don’t hurry so,” thought Marcella.

The impression of riches, power, and magnificent growth came back, to her again with forcefulness. Last night at the dinner-party, her partner, a University man, had called the city crude. But underlying that criticism she could sense the terrific pride and love he felt for it. Even as a newcomer she could feel Chicago’s potent charm. Young it was and crude it might be, but it had a giant strength, a giant energy, and a giant brain.

She smiled at an advertisement on a news-stand:

BE A CHICAGO BOOSTER TO YOUR FRIENDS IN OTHER
CITIES!

Turning away from the boulevard, she smiled again at a restaurant which bore, in enormous letters, the one word, “EAT.”

At last she reached Washington Park, and paused before the dazzling snowiness of the monument to Time. There were others gazing up at the triumphant piece of sculpture.

“Marcella!”

She turned quickly, her heart pounding in her throat. The one voice in all the world that had brought her so much of happiness . . . and so much of pain!

“Miles! *You* here!”

They sat on a park bench in the warm sunlight, both talking eagerly. There was so much to be said, to be explained.

Miles asked her forgiveness for his doubts of her.

“I’ve regretted it so often. I was a cad.”

“It was quite excusable,” Marcella defended him. “I should have told you more.” She hesitated, knowing that even now she had not told him everything.

He was so sensitive, so upright and so honourable. She had regained his friendship, and she could not risk it in raking up the past.

Time was all she wanted. Just to stave off Warwick Treman and the impending marriage. Let her father’s health and finances but improve . . . let this tour but be a success . . . let Miles’ status as a sculptor become more definitely established, and everything would right itself.

It wasn’t for herself she wanted all these things. She wasn’t selfish.

“If Miles wanted it, and I married him tomorrow, Warwick is so ruthless and so powerful he could break us both,” she thought, afraid. Scandal about a rising sculptor’s wife would be the ruin of her husband, dependent as he was on the whims of the wealthy. If she were cut, then Miles, her husband, would be cut as well, and his career ended.

Add the borrowing of the thousand pounds to the unfortunate Swiss episode, let both these facts be known and stirred broadcast by Warwick Treman’s venom, and disaster would inevitably follow.

Last night, too, she had overheard a hint that Miles’ present important commissions had been brought about by influence. The director of a New York company had made a casual remark to Treman that the latter’s recommendation of the sculptor had carried weight. Neither knew that Marcella had overheard the observation, but the girl had put two and two together.

Treman had not wanted her to return to the United States. When the New York manager had written her father on the subject of the lecture tour, she had insisted she must go with him.

The matter had ended in Treman raking up some pretext to accompany them.

“Are you unhappy in your engagement, Marcella?” the young man beside her asked. He stared straight ahead of him, lips tight pressed together, as though he feared her answer.

“You know I am.” And then: “Are you unhappy in yours?”

A silence. He moved restlessly on the bench.

“To what end do we ask each other these disturbing questions? What can be gained by them?”

She turned to look at him. Her face was very pale, but her dark eyes shone with an unmistakable light.

“I can’t speak for you,” she said very softly, “but as for myself, Miles, from that first enchanted week of our meeting, I have never changed. To me you have always been—just *you*—”

CHAPTER XXVI

The Maniac

Ten days later Marcella sat in the artistic living-room of the Long Island country house Lady Warrington had rented for the summer season.

“I can’t think *why* you choose to live alone in that tiny, isolated bungalow when I’ve all these empty rooms, and you could be here with me,” complained the latter, eyeing Marcella with a look that was half affection, half resentment. “There isn’t space to swing a cat in your cottage. And when your father’s lecturing in out-of-the-way suburbs, as he often is, he can’t catch the last train home. And it isn’t *right* for you to be alone.”

Marcella smiled and rose. Lady Warrington was kind, but too fond of regulating other people’s affairs.

“I’m all right, really. I’m working, as you know. Solitude and writing go well together. If I stayed here I should be lazy.”

“It’s marvellous to think that already you’ve got articles accepted by the magazines.” Lady Warrington felt a twinge of jealousy over the girl’s literary success, which, although small, was steadily improving. She herself hadn’t the perseverance or the talent of Marcella.

“Oh, it’s only the smaller magazines that will look at my stuff,” said the girl, pleased none the less. “It’s always a start.” She glanced out at the pretty landscape. “I believe it’s going to storm. I must run for it.”

“Leonie Day is coming down for the week-end. Your beloved Warwick also will be here. Come in for lunch tomorrow.”

Marcella gave no definite reply, but hastened through the woods to the tiny bungalow she and her father had rented by the month.

It was about a mile from Lady Warrington’s imposing residence, and, as the latter had remarked, quite isolated. But Marcella loved the spot. A wild, rambling garden sloped down to the wood’s edge, and beyond that lay the main road, a quarter of a mile away.

The girl busied herself with little tasks about the bungalow. Her daily maid—a “coloured lady” from the village—had gone home.

Lighting a brass lamp, Marcella set it on the table of her living-room, took a pad of paper and a pencil from a drawer, and settled down to write one of a

series of feminine articles that had been recently commissioned by the editor of a woman's magazine.

It had grown very dark outside and the storm was threatening to break at any moment. There was an eerie tenseness in the air.

Marcella tried to concentrate. Her gaze wandered, however, to the French windows that opened on a wooden verandah, known on this side of the Atlantic as a porch.

"I'll feel more private if I draw the blind," she told herself, annoyed at her own unaccountable nervousness tonight. Rising, she crossed the floor and tugged at the thick yellow shade so violently that the ancient fabric tore away from the roller and fell down in her hand.

A flash of lightning, followed by a crash of thunder, made her jump. The storm broke in fury. For ten minutes intermittent streaks of colour flared across the sky, lighting up the lonely woods about the cottage.

"I wish I'd stayed at Lady Warrington's tonight," regretted Marcella. She seated herself again at the table, beside the lamp, and when the storm died down she tried to write her article.

But the unshaded French windows fascinated her, so that ever and anon she glanced, disquieted, at their gloom. A queer sultriness hung over everything. The air seemed to tingle as though a worse storm was about to break.

Marcella found herself waiting . . . waiting uneasily . . . for she knew not what.

The ting-ting of the telephone cut into the silence.

"That'll be daddy, saying he's coming out on the last train." She sprang towards the instrument.

A queer buzzing greeted her, and then a woman's voice, sharp and frightened.

"Is that Miss Field? Quick. . . for God's sake! . . ."

"Yes, yes. What is it? Who's speaking?" The strange premonition caught again in Marcella's throat, so that it felt dry and constricted.

"The woman you were kind to on the ship. Deirdre. D'you get that?"

"Yes. I thought you were in England."

"I got a job over here. Was speaking to your young man on Broadway one afternoon. Did he tell you?"

Marcella was bewildered.

“No.”

“Listen. There’s not a moment to lose. You’re in danger, awful danger! He’s broke free—and—and—he’s after you! He’s got a knife with him——”

Marcella, trembling, whirled round to stare at the darkened windows giving on the porch. *Had something moved out there?* In the blackness of the night, was some one hiding?

“Who? I don’t understand. Tell me!”

“José. The cops got him when he landed. He was sent up. He swears it was your fault. He swears he’ll do you in for it. D’you hear me?”

There was a buzzing on the line and the sound of jumbled voices.

Then the woman’s voice again, sharp and imploring.

“Don’t tell me you’re *alone!* You *are?* And—and it was through *me* José got your address! I could kill myself! I had a cutting from the paper, about your father and the bungalow, and I jotted the address on the back of an envelope, meaning to write to you, and he burst in tonight, shot full of dope, swearing he’d have vengeance on you for what you’d done to him—at the docks——”

“I don’t understand. There’s some mistake.”

“You’re the sculptor man’s young lady, ain’t you? That’s the one that José’s after. That’s you. He says he told you at the time that he doesn’t care if he has to swing for it, he’ll *get* you . . . and he means it. An hour ago and more he went to find you. There’s not a moment to lose. . . .”

Marcella, frozen with fear, cried into the instrument:

“Get off the line and let me telephone the police! Quick!”

A buzzing sound was the only answer.

“Operator! The police! Hurry!” Frantically she jerked the hook.

Then the woman’s voice again:

“Oh, say, they cut us off. I been an hour trying to get you. I guess the lightning put the line out of order. Say, listen! I’ll ring off, and you call up the police headquarters. Get protection! Quick! You were good to me once, and I’m not the one to forget a kindness. But José—he’ll kill you—he must be nearly at your place by now——”

“Where are you ringing from?” breathed Marcella.

“New York. A call-office.”

“Then will you—” Suddenly there was a click, as though the wire had snapped. And at the same instant Marcella heard a step on the verandah. Out in the darkness, some one . . . some one had tampered with the wires!

Then silence . . . utter silence. . . .

She stood against the wall, blanched and trembling, her limbs frozen so that she could not move.

José! The desperate character associated with the Deirdre woman! A reckless criminal who would stick at nothing!

She had done nothing . . . nothing to antagonize him. There was some horrible error. He had mistaken her for some one else. . . .

“Shot full of dope,” was he? And sworn that he would kill her? And she was alone . . . utterly alone. . . .

Again the stealthy sound on the verandah. Something moving. . . .

The receiver fell from her stiff fingers, jerking back against the wall. Her eyes, wide with terror, were fastened on that oblong pane of glass that gave to the night, and the creeping horror coming nearer . . . nearer. . . .

The lamp on the table flared up suddenly, preparatory to going out. She had forgotten that it needed oil . . . too late now. . . .

God! In that last flare of the lamp before it died she saw, pressed close against the window-pane, a wild and evil face, the mouth grinning and twisted, the eyes glaring menacingly at her.

Marcella screamed, and screamed again. The lamp sputtered and went out. And in the blackness came the crash of broken glass, and a hoarse cry:

“At last! I’ve got you!”

Rigid with a horror that to her dying day she never would forget, Marcella stood rooted to the spot, unable to move.

There was a ghastly silence, more terrible to endure than what had gone before.

Then came a stealthy sound of some one tampering with the lock. Through the broken pane of the French window a hand was evidently being inserted for the key.

The wild warning of Deirdre still hummed in Marcella's ears. "Shot full of dope." . . . "He'll kill you." . . . "Get the police." . . .

Too late. *The wires were cut!* The hand that even now was groping at the door had severed them, suspecting such a move.

These agonized thoughts flashed through Marcella's brain with lightning speed. But even had the wires been left untampered, of what avail at this, the eleventh hour, to cry for help or the police? In another moment the maniac would be on her.

An inarticulate prayer broke from her frozen lips—a prayer for strength. And, as though a swift answer had been sent to her, she found herself able to move, to think coherently and with tremendous speed.

The man was drug-maddened. That meant colossal strength. Drink might have removed his powers, giving her some opportunity to circumvent him physically. But *drugs*—never!

It meant, too, that he would be merciless, capable of inflicting a slow torture or of deliberately hammering her to death. Weren't the daily papers full of cases of this sort?

His hatred was of Miles' fiancée. As in a lightning flash, she realized it must be Leonie Day he wanted—not herself. Towards Leonie he bore the grudge for his exposure to the police, his subsequent imprisonment. And—she saw it all—Deirdre thought that she—Marcella—was engaged to Miles, and inadvertently had let this brute have the address, and he had come for vengeance.

He had watched her from the darkness of the verandah. He had seen her at the telephone. He knew she was a woman, young, alone . . . and terrified . . . even if he'd realized she wasn't Leonie, the lust to kill had been aroused—and he would gratify it.

But no doubt he was too far gone in drugs to differentiate between one girl and another.

Crash! Bang! He couldn't wait to fumble with the key, but was hurling his whole strength against the door.

Marcella, summoning all her forces, darted through the blackness of the living-room out to the kitchen, where a door gave on a sort of cabbage patch.

But here, alas! the exit was locked, and its key hanging somewhere in the darkness on a peg. Wildly she groped to find it . . . to find matches. . . .

A final crash and a triumphant laugh that was weird and blood-curdling came from the front portion of the bungalow. The man *was in the house!*

Rigid with terror, Marcella pressed her slim form against the kitchen wall immediately behind the other door. He had heard her come in here . . . and he would follow.

“My only chance is to slide past him and fly through the broken French windows,” her brain reiterated. She waited.

And all the time she prayed—queer, incoherent prayers for help at this, the last moment.

But the chances were a hundred to one against help coming. That she fully realized. The last train had come and gone. This man had been a passenger.

Nearer and nearer came the footsteps, stealthy as a cat’s. A chuckle sounded, horrible, mirthless, and menacing.

“So she thought she’d hide from me, did she?” a hoarse voice breathed. “She didn’t believe me when I told her that I’d get her, even if I had to swing for it. Well, I’ll soon show her that I’m a man of my word.”

Nearer and nearer! He was in the passage now, immediately outside the kitchen door behind which the girl was crouching. Had there been a light of any sort he must have seen her through the crack.

A pause. The maniac was intently listening. Except for the eerie sighing of the branches outside the cottage, one might have heard a pin drop.

Changing his tactics, as though to force her to give away her whereabouts by sheer alarm, he yelled in a stentorian voice.

“Come out! Come out, I say! It’ll fare worse for you if you don’t!”

Marcella’s heart was hammering in a suffocating fashion. If only she could faint, and so—fainting—die.

What would he do to her? Her imaginative brain could visualize a thousand tortures, each more terrible than the other.

And then, out in the passage, he struck a match, and through the crack in the door the crouching girl could see his eyes—bloodshot, dilated, with that terrible lustre which drugs alone can bring. Mad eyes, lusting for vengeance.

“Ah, ha! I see you!” Shielding the flickering light with a cupped left hand, he started directly at her through the crack. “Come out and be damned to you, I say!”

The girl sprang up as the match went out, darting to the far side of the kitchen table. She would die fighting. She had seen the handle of a knife protruding from his pocket. She would summon every muscle, every nerve, to save herself.

And then ensued a nightmare stalking, cat and mouse. Tiger and lamb would be more apposite.

The creature lit another match. This time Marcella saw that the long knife was actually in his hand, and tried to snatch a dinner-knife from the kitchen drawer, but he was too quick for her, and she was just able to elude his grasp and spring through the passage to the living-room.

“I’ll torture you for this!” he panted, all the fury of the balked madman whipping him to a veritable frenzy. “Ordinary killing’s too good for you, you ——!”

Twice he almost caught her. She could feel his hot breath on her face, and his vicelike grip upon her shoulder ere she wrenched it free.

And once the knife hurtled across the room through the thick darkness, tearing the thin sleeve of her gown.

“God! Help me!” she called, unconscious now that she was giving voice to the wild prayer in her heart. “Help—me!”

The last word ended in a smothered shriek as the man hurled himself upon her, bringing her sharply to the ground.

“Caught!” A volley of oaths followed the ejaculation. His hands were on her throat, with sickening pressure. “Hanging ’ud be too good for such as you! Knifing ’ud be too quick! Guess I’ll try some of the old tortures . . . they take *time* . . . and I can *watch you* . . .”

The roar of a mighty sea was in Marcella’s ears, beating so loudly that she felt her head must burst. God, let her die quickly, and not leave her to the lingering mercies of this brute!

And then the grip relaxed, and the maniac jerked up, listening rigidly, drawing his breath in with a sharp hissing sound.

Immediately outside the verandah was the chug-chug of an engine and the grinding of brakes as a motor-car drew swiftly to a halt. Then came hurrying, heavy footsteps, and a bright light was flashed into the room.

“The police,” yelled the drug-maddened creature, leaping to his feet. “They won’t get me! They——”

But he was not quick enough for them. Before he could reach his knife, they had handcuffs on him, and a third man was raising the terror-stricken girl tenderly.

“Just in the nick of time, miss! We had a phone call from the city giving this address. Came right over in the car.”

There was no answer from Marcella. She had fainted.

CHAPTER XXVII

Blackmail

In the luxurious bedroom of the fashionable New York hotel where she was staying sat Miss Leonie Day, immersed in the fascinating rites of her toilet.

She was going to spend the evening with a brand-new swain, and it behooved the little lady to be at her best. The brand-new swain was rich and handsome, and enjoyed spoiling women. He was just the type of man that Leonie most prized, and seldom met.

And really, Miles had been quite noticeably inattentive. He had dashed off to Chicago on some feeble pretext, and for five whole days there had been no sight of him, nor word from him.

Was that the way one's future husband should behave? Was it the conduct of a man in love? Her common sense answered both queries in the negative.

Of course he was on the track of Marcella Field. Leonie detested her. How unflattering it had been in the picture house to see his agitation when That Other Girl's likeness suddenly appeared upon the screen, complete with tooth-paste smile and potent lure.

If it were in Miss Leonie's power to do her an ill turn, then all the former's little claws, and they were numerous, would be unsheathed.

Even her ally, Warwick Treman, had been cool and distant.

"Hang it all, Leonie," he had exclaimed on his return from the Chicago trip, "if this is the best you can do to keep your fiancé by your side, you'd better go right back to England. I'm a plain business man, and I'm not going to pay you good money for nothing. You must earn it."

Leonie had sulked.

"How could I keep him if he'd a mind to follow her? I'd no notion where he was, I tell you."

He had retorted, ill-humouredly:

"But as I supply you with liberal funds to have the notion, please get busy on the job of fascinating him. I understood you were wild about the fellow, or I wouldn't have started helping on Love's Young Dream. But don't dream too

long, girl. Wake up, I say.”

They had very nearly quarrelled.

“If Miss Field isn’t in love with you, let her alone. You can’t win a girl by hitting her over the head with a sledge-hammer. She’ll have her own preferences and will follow them.” Leonie felt that she had scored.

But Treman, narrowing his eyes to the merest slit, and compressing his thin lips, had responded sharply:

“Defeat’s a word I don’t understand. And in this instance you won’t understand it either, or funds will be cut off.”

He had left her wondering and disturbed.

The telephone rang, and the office clerk’s tones trickled across the wires.

“A young woman to see you, miss. She won’t give any name.”

“Oh, tell her I’m going out. I’ve no time to see her.”

“She says it’s important, miss. Here, she’ll speak to you herself.”

Leonie made an angry face. Her hair was still to be arranged in that new, becoming knot, and her eyes weren’t properly made up yet. Bother the woman!

But as she listened to the strange voice her look changed. Her brows were raised enquiringly, and her lips puckered in a sort of surprised whistle.

“All right, come on up,” she said at last. “I can give you ten minutes while I dress.”

Presently a knock sounded on the door. She opened it, and beheld a yellow-haired woman in cheap, rather gaudy clothes standing uncertainly on the threshold.

“Come in. I haven’t had the pleasure of meeting you before. Who are you?” Leonie asked curtly, hoping that the floor clerk hadn’t noticed this peculiar visitor. She aspired to be a personage in the hotel.

“My name doesn’t matter. I have several surnames, and none of them have ever done me credit,” said the blonde-headed woman slowly, with a strange smile on her painted lips. “You can call me Deirdre, and leave it at that.”

Leonie tossed an indignant head. The presumption of the creature!

“I shan’t call you anything. State your business, please.” She led the way into the room, the woman following.

The latter held a newspaper clipping in her hand. She moved close to Leonie under the electric light.

“See here. That’s you, isn’t it?”

It was a badly reproduced photograph, and, below, it stated that Miss Leonie Day, fiancée of the clever young sculptor, Miles Holden, was on a visit to New York, and staying at the Biltmore.

“Well? What of it?” said Leonie impatiently. “What’s your trouble?”

The woman stared at her with scarcely veiled disapproval.

“Mr. Holden was engaged to be married to that pretty, sweet Miss Field. Have *you* come between them?”

Leonie was annoyed to feel a cold shiver run up her spine. How uncanny the queer creature looked. And after Marcella’s terrible experience recently in the Long Island bungalow one never knew!

“By what right do you ask me?” She tried to put on a bold face.

“Because,” said the woman slowly, every word as clear as crystal, “because she’s the only soul in the world that ever was kind to me, and if she could reach happiness across my dead body, I’d let any one kill me, I would.”

Leonie edged away. Was this strange woman demented? How queer the eyes looked!

“And *you’re* the girl that José wanted when he swore he’d revenge himself for being given away to the police,” went on the stranger.

Leonie backed towards the telephone in alarm.

“You needn’t be frightened. I shan’t harm you. I gave him away to the police myself, rather than have *her* injured, though I know now it was *you* he wanted. But, tell me, why have you taken her sweetheart from her? Why? I want to know.”

Leonie was frightened.

“Because,” she stammered, “Miss Field is going to become the wife of Mr. Warwick Treman——”

The woman fell back with a face as white as chalk, and eyes starting from her head.

“The tall man I saw her with in the London restaurant? Hair growing a little grey on the sides, and a tiny mole on one cheek?”

The other nodded soothingly.

“Yes, that fits him. He’s been in love with her for years. Why, what’s the matter?”

The woman called Deirdre broke into a low chuckle that held no mirth whatever.

“And *he*, of all people, wants to marry pretty Miss Field? The *nerve* of him! Let me whisper something—low, because the walls have ears.”

Leonie listened to a very startling story, spoken in an almost breathless monotone.

“It’s true, so help me God,” concluded the stranger.

With unerring intuition Leonie replied, a slow smile of triumph about her lips:

“Yes, I believe you.”

Fate, in the shape of this queer creature, had delivered Warwick Treman (and his fortune) into her predatory hands.

“And so you intend to blackmail me, do you?”

Warwick Treman had motored Leonie Day to a very celebrated club in Westchester County. The pair were sitting on the flagged terrace of the millionaire’s rendezvous, facing the golf-course, and Leonie, considering herself a smart tactician, had rapped out her astounding discovery without a second’s warning, and with all the brusqueness of a pistol shot.

At his rejoinder she gave a cool little smile, leaned more cosily back in her wicker rocking-chair, and crossed one slim foot over the other.

“Give me a cigarette, please, Warwick. And whatever you do don’t get heated. This weather’s broiling enough to bring on apoplexy.”

The man lifted his monocle by its watered ribbon and screwed it into his right eye, the better to regard her. Doubtless her flippancy covered a degree of nervousness.

What cue to take?

Should he handle the amazing situation with kid gloves? Or with a battle-axe? War to the knife?

He ought to have been prepared for this contingency. Sleeping dogs, unless

some one fed them poisoned meat, were apt to rouse and bark at times.

And yet—bah! he wasn't frightened in the least. As though this hat-shop girl could injure him!

He handed her his cigarette-case, and she helped herself.

“Suppose I tell you that the whole story's a trumped-up pack of lies?” His voice held the tinkle of ice.

Leonie applied a match to the end of her cigarette, and blew out the flame. She did not look at him. Her gaze wandered over the velvet greens and little hillocks and bunkers of the course.

“I'm afraid I shouldn't believe you,” she said slowly, thoughtfully. And then she added: “But I credit you with more intelligence than a flat denial.”

His eyes narrowed. Girls who had been up against it, as had Leonie, had a *gamin* instinct for getting to the root of an affair. Confound all women (with the exception of Marcella)!

“You really care for the Field girl?” pursued Miss Leonie in languid vein, pretending to smother a slight yawn. “You're very much in earnest over her?”

He raised his brows.

“Should I be wasting my time in arguing out this matter if I weren't? If I hadn't determined to make her my wife, do you think for one moment that I'd give a damn for all the slandering stories that could estrange us?”

“No, I suppose not.” Then, looking more closely at him: “You're a strong man, Warwick, and a ruthless one. You'd walk over anybody to grab what you wanted, irrespective of the harm you did.”

His lips curled in a sneer.

“Rather late in the day for *you* to become a moralist!”

She did not flinch.

“As a matter of fact, it's pretty beastly to let another woman down. I never was a particular friend of the Marcella girl's, but I feel I ought to stand by her.”

The man broke into a harsh laugh. What a consummate *poseur* was this pert young female!

And he'd done so much for her. This was his thanks!

But she evidently wasn't to be got round. He must change his tack.

“Look here, Leonie, we've always been good pals. Why not come right out

into the open and state your case? What on earth's gained by beating about the bush? It gets us nowhere."

This was irrefutable.

"You admit, then, that the tale is true?" She put an elbow on the glass-topped wicker table that divided them, and propped her chin thoughtfully upon her hand.

"It isn't a principle of mine to admit anything. But as a woman of intelligence you must see that it might go rather against me with Marcella to have a yarn of this sort brought to her ears at the eleventh hour, when our marriage day approaches."

"Oh, is it as soon as that? D'you know, I thought that Miles, my quondam suitor, was going to take her from you?"

He stared at her. Had she quite got over the infatuation for the sculptor fellow, that she could speak so lightly of another woman taking him away from her? He wondered.

But then, one never knew the workings of the female mind.

"You think Marcella would snatch at any excuse to get out of her engagement with you?" went on Leonie, watching her effect with shrewd, calculating eyes. "That isn't very promising for married life, is it?"

It was against her own interest to point out this undeniable fact, but she couldn't at the moment resist the impulse to bait him, knowing full well his inflexible determination to marry his reluctant bride.

Besides, it was fun to tease and annoy him, realizing that her grip on him was so secure, now that this extraordinary knowledge had come accidentally into her possession.

Like the sword of Damocles, she could hang it over his head until the very nuptial day.

"And the alternative?" Warwick Treman asked coolly, with a sudden reading of her thoughts that made her jump. "Money, of course! How much?"

She named a sum that startled him.

He gave a grating laugh.

"Blackmail's a criminal offence, as doubtless you must know," he counter-thrust. "Whatever I've done or haven't done, I haven't put myself within reach of the law."

“Not yet,” said Leonie composedly, “but you plan to do so.”

There was a silence. Her eyes wandered to the golf-course. She must give him time to think, to make a definite decision. And, above all, she must keep her head and give an impression of complete tranquillity.

“American golfing clothes are rather odd,” she remarked as though to herself. “The men’s, I mean. There seems to be no definite type of tweeds or cut. I suppose they’d think the plus fours *our* men wear ridiculously baggy.”

Some girls in gaily-coloured woolen sweaters went by on the verandah, laughing and talking. They looked so care-free that Leonie—adventress by dint of circumstances, and not from choice, she told herself—envied them. Rich parents were undoubtedly behind them. They hadn’t to root for money in the unpalatable ways that fell to her.

Warwick spoke with a suddenness that made her start.

“If I were fool enough to give you a lump sum now, to keep your mouth shut, I’ve no guarantee that you wouldn’t go on with your blackmail after marriage.”

Leonie thought a moment, then she voiced a thought that had been turning in his own mind.

“There would be no necessity for hush-money, because Marcella would be yours, and no matter what she heard, it would be—just *too late*.”

“That’s a sensible view,” commented the man approvingly. “I don’t mind talking business with you now.”

CHAPTER XXVIII

Dilemma

Marcella and her father were in Philadelphia, staying at the Bellevue-Stratford. Across the street, in the Ritz-Carlton, was the assiduous Warwick Treman.

“If only he would let me alone, I should have a wonderful time in this town,” reflected Marcella, much perturbed. The City of Brotherly Love was delightful, and its citizens extremely hospitable.

But go where she would—and the English archæologist and his pretty daughter were inundated with invitations—Treman dogged her footsteps.

She walked down Chestnut Street one sunny morning, glad to be alone. The narrow street—so utterly unlike an English thoroughfare, and yet pulsating with such life, such bustle—had fascinating shops on either side. Attractive girls in sports clothes, with an out-of-door-ish air about them, and sensible, flat-heeled shoes (which caused Marcella’s eyes to widen) seemed especially in evidence.

“The New York girls dress up more,” reflected the newcomer, thinking of the elaborate suits and gowns one sees upon Fifth Avenue. “These girls look as though they spent their days on the golf-links and the tennis-courts rather than at bridge-clubs or tea-dances. The sunburn even is allowed to show! Yet they are just as pretty——”

She prowled round Independence Square, that haunt of art and literature, and from thence through rambling, quiet streets in the residential section, that had quaint brick or stone houses with flowering window-boxes reminding her of England.

“The Quaker City is the City of *Homes*,” she murmured, quite intrigued.

The undulating pasture-land outside the precincts of the town reminded her of England, too, so verdant and so beautiful it was. And the millionaire homes, set in a world of greenery—although they lacked that sense of *permanence*, of being part and parcel of the soil that centuries alone can bring—were reminiscent of the castles and the feudal homes three thousand miles away.

“Their country hotels are quite palatial,” she thought one night when she had dined with Warwick Treman at an hostelry with the intriguing name of Green Valley Farms, where the food equalled the Ritz of any country in the

world. "Wonder what they'd say to our darling English pubs five or six hundred years old, boasting *one* bathroom, no electric light, ridiculous little lattice windows, and black-raftered ceilings so low that one actually bumps one's head!"

If only Miles were here! If only Warwick would sheer off!

To her intense delight, Miles arrived next morning early, and telephoned her before she was actually out of bed.

"Tomorrow I'm having an exhibition in the town," he explained. "I came a day earlier, knowing you were here. I have a plan in mind."

The plan was that they should go to Atlantic City for the day.

"You ought to see a big American seaside resort. It's quite unique," he said although Marcella perfectly realized that the scheme had not merely been arranged for sightseeing, but to have her to himself for one whole day.

And, as luck would have it, Warwick was engaged for all that morning.

She consented to the plan, first writing a note for her father, who was still asleep, for he had been lecturing late the night before and was worn out.

Marcella donned the white sports skirt and coloured sweater that seemed to be the outdoor uniform for such occasions in this country, and went off blithely to the depot with her escort.

They must live, today, in the enchanted present. The bonds of her unfortunate engagement had somehow tightened. . . . Would she be strong enough to break them?

And what of Miles' attitude to Leonie Day?

She knew now that he never had truly cared for Leonie.

As they sped swiftly through the flat countryside towards the coast, Miles did not talk of his fiancée. He spoke about his work, and then of trivial things.

But the undercurrent of feeling ran high just the same, and Marcella felt like a little girl let out from school and wildly happy.

When they reached their destination, a taxi took them from the station to the Boardwalk, which extends along the Atlantic coast for miles and miles.

Marcella cried out in delight. The endless glittering white piers, the tossing ocean, and the wide beach thronged with bathers in the most astounding costumes mightily intrigued her.

As for the famous Boardwalk itself, never in her life had she seen anything

to equal it, with its hundreds of rolling chairs propelled by negroes, its wondrously attired maidens in the very latest fashion, its splendid shops that gazed directly on the sea, and its air of dash and gaiety.

The health-giving breezes from those tossing waters were as heady as champagne. Marcella drew in long, deep breaths.

“Shall we have a swim before we lunch?” suggested Miles.

They went to a bathing-house and hired their costumes, then plunged into the tumbling surf. It was immensely powerful, caught Marcella up and knocked her over, flinging her into the arms of a Herculean youth with the word Coastguard sewn across his tunic.

“You must hold on to some one,” he explained, and appeared to be quite willing to offer himself for the job.

Marcella was amused. She struggled through the surf and swam with Miles out and beyond it into smoother waters.

“If we never need return again!” she breathed.

Later they dried off on the sands, amidst vast crowds of gay young people, who were tangoing, and playing tennis, or baseball, or lying drowsily in the sunshine in amazing bathing costumes.

“Look at the young man with the ukulele!” exclaimed Marcella. “Isn’t he a Dana Gibson hero! Such a lean, handsome face! And do see the two flappers with him, bobbed hair and all!”

The young ladies in question reclined on each side of their escort. One wore a crimson silk one-piece suit, much abbreviated, with the name *TOPSY* in large white letters on the back thereof. *BILLY*, the other damsel, was in emerald green. Their blonde heads were carefully marcelle waved, and neither had been in the water.

Miles and Marcella lunched together in a wonderful hotel, and afterwards hired a rolling chair for two, with a striped awning to keep the sun off. A large darky pushed them for miles along the Boardwalk.

How they talked, those two! There was so much to be said, and, after all, so little time to say it in.

Marcella told Miles everything. Her own love for him, the unfortunate Swiss episode of long ago, the ruthlessness of Warwick Treman, the man’s absolute determination to win her for his wife.

Miles, in return, opened his whole heart to her. Never would he give

Marcella up. Let Treman do his worst, and hang the consequences!

“As for Leonie,” he finished quietly, “I don’t think she cares for me half so much as she pretends. But in any case I couldn’t marry her, and I shall tell her so.”

A weight was off Marcella’s mind and heart. Never had the world appeared more beautiful. And later, when a young moon rose above the sea and turned the deep blue of its waters into enchanted silver, she and Miles were literally in fairyland.

They took a late train back to Philadelphia, arriving not at all abashed at the hotel. There Miles bade her good-night.

“You’re certain about everything, sweetheart?” he whispered, giving her hand a long, close pressure. “No going back this time?”

The radiance on her face was sufficient answer. He went away contented.

When Marcella gained her room she found her father waiting for her. He looked very tired and very old, she thought, and a pang shot through her heart. How selfish to have gone off for the whole day, neglecting him!

“How did the lecture go?” she asked, kissing him.

“Very well.” His mind, however, seemed on something else. “My dear, I have been very greatly perturbed. Mr. Treman has been here to see me—very angry and upset. It seems he knew of your going off with Mr. Holden for the day, and deeply resented it.”

Now was Marcella’s chance. She took it. Into her father’s ear she poured the full tale of her love for Miles, her dread of Treman.

“I can’t marry him,” she finished. Then she added, staring in perplexity at the ashen face opposite her: “What’s the matter, daddy?”

His very hands were shaking.

“If you don’t marry him, Marcella, we are ruined!” the old man blurted out. “He—he got me—to do something—it seems it was dishonourable—I didn’t realize what I was doing—he has me absolutely in his power. Today—today he told me—that if you let him down he would take full revenge on me—on us——”

He buried his face in his shaking hands and utterly broke down.

“Whatever Warwick Treman dares to say,” breathed Marcella in a fierce whisper, “I am quite, *quite* certain you are incapable of a dishonourable action!”

She bent over her father's bowed head, her two arms about his shoulders. He was so like a child . . . a simple-minded child. A vast protective instinct rose in her to comfort him, to shield him from every adverse wind.

"And now tell me all about it," she went on, forcing herself to be bracing as well as cheering. "Two heads are better than one, and yours, daddy, is always either in the clouds or in the tombs, isn't, it?"

He did not smile.

"I was mistaken in the man, my child. I'm a poor judge of character. And—I can see now when it's too late—I've been a bad and selfish father, following my own work which is my pleasure, rather than thinking of your future, your happiness——"

She placed a gentle hand across his lips.

"There! That will do, dearest. To me you've always been all that is perfect. And now to business. Tell me all about it."

Disjointedly he blurted out the sorry story.

"You remember the valuable vase I brought from Egypt?"

"Yes. Yes, of course. The one you dug out of that ancient tomb and sometimes show in your lectures over here?"

The old man nodded.

"Soon after we landed in New York I was wandering round Greenwich Village when in a window I espied a vase that had such a similarity to my treasure that immediately I went inside the shop to make inquiries concerning it."

"Yes?" said Marcella encouragingly. "Go on, please."

"On a closer examination I found it was a clever fake. Behind the shop was a sort of pottery or studio run by a Russian Jew. He asked me to bring in my Egyptian vase. I did so, and he copied it so accurately that even I could scarcely tell the difference between the real and the imitation. And so, having paid him thirty dollars for his trouble, I took both away with me, putting a tiny mark on the inside of the second vase so that I should the more easily recognize it as the imitation."

Marcella interrupted with a comment.

"I didn't know that ancient vases were a hobby with you?"

Her father shook his head.

“I haven’t studied them enough. But in London, experts in the antique business valued the original at about three thousand pounds. I had it valued just before we sailed. Indeed, I should have sold it then, but Mr. Treman advised me to hold on, saying that I might get a much better price in this country, where money is easier than it is in England.”

“I see,” said Marcella slowly, wondering what was coming next.

Her father went on, speaking with difficulty:

“I kept the two vases in Mr. Treman’s suite in his hotel. Occasionally I would take the original to a lecture. One night a gentleman in the audience who is enormously rich, and who collects, came up on the platform with a friend who is an expert in Egyptian antiques. After some talk they made me an offer of twenty thousand dollars for the vase.”

“That’s a thousand pounds more than you were offered in England,” commented Marcella. A sum like this would surely get them out of all financial troubles!

Her father cleared his throat.

“I ought to have insured the vase, but I didn’t. I took it back to Mr. Treman’s rooms that night, and the following morning went back there to meet the purchaser. When I arrived, Treman was in bed having his breakfast. We went into the sitting-room together, and the first thing I saw was the vase—the original, highly valuable one—lying smashed in fifty pieces on the floor!”

Marcella started in dismay.

“And you hadn’t insured it? Oh, what a calamity!” Her castles in the air dissolved. Financial difficulties would continue. Then, clutching at a straw: “But how d’you know it was the original, if you couldn’t really tell the two apart?”

“Two reasons. One was that the imitation vase was marked by me with a little sign. Secondly, it was carefully packed away in a box in a cupboard, where it still remained.”

“Where did you leave the other vase, the valuable one?”

“Up on the mantelpiece. It seemed so safe——”

“And Warwick slept in the adjoining room all night?”

“Yes. He can’t account for it. His bedroom window was open, and he thinks a cat may have wandered in from the fire-escape and so through to the sitting-room, and got up on the mantelpiece and knocked it over. He didn’t

hesitate to tell me how careless I had been about not packing it away.”

Marcella’s pretty eyes were rueful. Then a light of suspicion dawned in them.

“You don’t by any chance think that Warwick himself smashed the original just to get us more and more in his power?”

He shook his head.

“He seemed too upset and sorry for my loss to have done such a senseless thing. He said that he’d see my client for me and try to strike a bargain with the copy. The latter was worth quite a sum, he assured me, since the original had gone.”

“Indeed?” Another suspicion came to the girl’s active mind. And then, with apparent irrelevance, she asked: “Didn’t you try and piece the original together?”

“I tried, but it was too far gone for that.”

“And you’re sure the other was the imitation?”

“Positively. My mark was there, just where I had made it. The vase was in the cupboard in its wrapping as I had left it.”

“And you went away leaving Warwick to dicker with the client?”

“Yes. I’m no good at haggling. Besides, I was too upset——”

“I see.” Marcella nodded. “Warwick told your client it was only a copy, did he?”

“No. Here’s where the trouble started. The purchaser, being detained, sent a message by telephone asking that the vase be delivered at his home. Treman let it go without a word, beyond telling the client by telephone to deal with me direct. The next thing I knew was that a cheque came to me for twenty thousand dollars.”

“But of course you sent it back again?” gasped Marcella, staring at her father. Always he had been the very soul of honour!

Brokenly he stammered:

“I had paid the cheque into my bank before I realized they didn’t know it was a copy. I thought that Treman had struck a clever bargain for me. And—and afterwards I salved my conscience with the thought that the two vases were so utterly alike. With the original gone for ever, it was quite in order that the copy, being unique in itself, should be so highly priced. We needed the

money, Marcella, you and I——”

“And because of that,” said the girl drearily and with a shudder, “you’ve obtained the money ‘under false pretences’—you’ve gone and put yourself in the power of the law! Heavens! what on earth will happen to us when the truth comes out?”

CHAPTER XXIX

The Ruthlessness of Treman

Father and daughter returned to the Long Island bungalow the following morning.

Before leaving, Marcella rang up Miles. The weight on her mind was so appalling that it made her sound *distracte* and almost cold.

“Oh no! I can’t see you today. And—and please don’t come to the station. Mr. Treman will be there.”

There ensued a pregnant pause. Then Miles, trying to sound calm, but very strained in tone:

“I thought we settled all that yesterday. You were to go to him and explain that—caring for me as you did and do—it’s quite impossible to go on with the engagement. Have you forgotten? Or shall *I* deal with him?”

She shivered. Treman would cast a slur upon her father. Not even Miles must *ever* know her father’s lapse.

“I—I shall talk to him myself,” she stammered, realizing what a horribly false impression she was giving Miles. “Everything’ll come out all right in the end. I know it will. I—I *hope* so.”

Strange words for a girl who only yesterday had agreed to snap the chains that bound her!

“You regret having promised me too much, then?” was a lover’s natural assumption, spoken in a voice curt with anxiety.

“It isn’t that. But I must take my time. I mustn’t make him angry. *He could do me so much harm!*”

Hard hearing for a lover’s ears!

“Marcella, did you tell me *everything*? Isn’t there something you’re holding back?”

She hesitated. There was a something . . . terrible . . . ! He sensed it, too.

Her mind groped for adequate words to meet the situation. But not a phrase would come. She had to be sincere with Miles . . . sincere or silent! And, perforce, she chose the latter, swinging the receiver back upon its hook.

He did not ring her up. She waited for five palpitating minutes, staring at the telephone.

“He doubts me. He is hurt and angry.” The wheels of the railway train repeated the accusing sentences in a dreary monotone. Treman was in the smoker, but would presently return, and she would have to listen to the worst. In the seat opposite, her father, worn out, was asleep.

How old and tired he looked! Her heart smote her for her bluntness to him when he made confession. Carelessness in money matters, lack of business sense, had been at the root of the affair. He was no more criminal than a baby; but the law, discovering what had happened, would surely find him guilty.

Obtaining money under false pretences. Weren't the papers filled with cases of that sort? Short shrift was made with the offenders.

The thing to do was to pay the money back at once. But already he had spent six hundred pounds of it! Three thousand dollars!

He had owed half that sum to Warwick Treman. The rest had gone in rent for the little bungalow (paid in advance), in railway fares, and necessary items.

There would be money coming for the tour, of course. She'd save every cent of it so that the full sum could be refunded.

But meantime, if Warwick chose to expose the fraud?

She must fling herself upon his mercy. She must beg him for a further loan.

But would he? If she broke the engagement, no! He would merely use this knowledge as a lever to hurry along the marriage!

A hundred pounds was left from the sum she had borrowed from her fiancé some weeks back. Her father and she must live on that, not touching a single penny of the money from the wretched vase.

Warwick, in some unfathomable way, was at the bottom of the last transaction. Her father was so utterly unbusinesslike, and so unworldly, that the former had successfully contrived to get him in his power.

But Warwick's share in the affair would be so hard to prove. It might be better to go direct to the rich purchaser, tell him the whole tale, and beg for time in which to refund the full amount.

Had her father really told her everything? Having no money sense, it was quite on the cards that he'd forgotten other channels in which further amounts from the recent sale had ebbed away.

Warwick at last came from the smoker. There was an air of insolence about

him that very seldom had he shown before. It was almost as though he wished to say:

“I’d have you know, young woman, I’m top dog! I can afford to swagger! Who laughs last, laughs loudest!”

He dropped into the vacant arm-chair next to hers on the side farthest from her father. Unceremoniously he swung her seat round until she directly faced him.

“Well, give an account of yourself my dear. I have a little bone to pick with you. You gave me the slip yesterday, and I want an explanation.”

His manner was quite jaunty, but it jarred.

“I ran down to see Atlantic City. The day was fine, and——”

“Oh, don’t shilly-shally. You wanted to get away from *me*. I get you, Steve!”

Slang did not suit him, nor did jocularity. She could see, too, the suspicious glint in his narrow-set eyes.

“My father has told me all about the Egyptian vase,” said she, trying to sound cool. “Between you both, you seem to have muddled the affair!”

He gave her an odd, sidelong look. Just how much *did* she know?

“He told you, did he? Well, there’s no harm done.”

“I differ from you. The original vase was smashed. You allowed a fake to be sent out as the real thing. Isn’t that getting money under false pretences?”

He was a little startled by the directness of the attack.

“My good child, I assure you I had nothing to do with the affair. It was none of my business.”

She wasn’t to be daunted.

“If it came into a court of law, you would, at any rate, be cited as ‘accessory after the fact.’ ”

“Ah, ha!” He gave a nasty smile. “You realise that your father has got himself into a nasty predicament. Speaking of courts of law, it would be hard to prove his innocence, wouldn’t it? A little late in the day to talk of that, after he’d paid the cheque into the bank and used a good deal of the money.”

Marcella rushed to the defence.

“He thought the buyer *knew* it was a copy. It was *your* mission to tell him

so. You let the thing go out under the wrong colours——”

“Tush! Don’t be foolish! When you father took that cheque for twenty thousand dollars, it was under no misapprehension of the facts. I’ve only to ring up any one of half a dozen newspaper-offices in New York, give them a hint of the transaction, and it would be a front-page story. Following that, the court case would be another. Make no mistake about it, my good girl.”

She shivered as though some one had walked across her grave. The notoriety would *kill* her father! He couldn’t live through it.

“The matter will be arranged, though I have to sing in the streets to get the money,” she said, white now to the lips, but utterly determined. “My father hasn’t an evil thought in the whole of his make-up. He——”

“He slipped a cog this time,” sneered Warwick Treman. “You can talk till Doomsday, but I tell you he’s in a pretty tight corner if I chose to give the show away. Of course”——the sneer faded, and a light kindled in his eye that to Marcella was even more repulsive——“as I’m going to marry *you*, it isn’t likely that I’d give my prospective father-in-law away, is it? So why worry?”

“I wanted to talk about that too,” said Marcella bravely. But he cut her short. He had divined her thoughts.

“If you’re going to tell me you’re still hankering after Holden, and want to leave me in the lurch, I swear I’ll play my trump card right away,” he breathed. “I’ll get hold of the Greenwich Village fellow who made the copy of the vase, and take him to the purchaser, and tell the story. It’ll ring from one end of New York to the other. Your father will be ruined in this country, and pretty well done for everywhere else as well. His tour will be cut short. The scandal will be in the newspapers. Indeed, I should think he’d be imprisoned. But”——sarcastically——“you’ll have your lover! So what will *you* care? Although”——he grinned triumphantly——“I’m not so sure that young Holden would care to marry the daughter of a criminal. It would ruin *his* career.”

“I beg you, as a gentleman, to release me from my engagement.”

Marcella, desperate, had dared the conventions and gone to entreat Warwick Treman in the suite of his hotel.

The floor clerk had stared oddly at her as she hurried by. And that Transatlantic institution, the floor patrolman—a kind of watch-dog or policeman allotted to each floor of nearly every big New York hotel—had stealthily followed her to see where she was going. If there was any funny

business, he would call the house detective. Now, however, he was quite content to stand outside the door, ear strained to catch every word of talk that floated through the open transom.

The gentleman inside, however, frustrated this laudable intention by closing the said aperture and then lowering his voice.

“You’re a venturesome young lady. But don’t try my endurance too far, my dear.”

“I had to come. It’s so terrible not knowing what is going to happen. The Egyptian vase——”

“Speak softly. Even the walls have ears.”

She walked over to the window, and shivered as she looked at the tremendous drop down to the street. What a height these buildings were!

“I’ve come to beg you to release me from my promise. And also to ask you to give me fragments of the broken vase.”

“Why should I? Aren’t they a very definite link in the chain of evidence against your father? If they came into your possession, you’d do away with them, no doubt. And then, having nothing to compare the fake with, its owner might never get to know his purchase wasn’t the original and genuine antique.”

“I only want a small piece, Warwick.”

“You’ve got some game or other up your sleeve.” He stared suspiciously at her.

“The fragments are my father’s property. You have no right to hold them back. They aren’t yours.”

He laughed at that.

“Finding’s keeping, when it suits my book.” Then, in a different tone, and with a turn of subject: “Come, Marcella be sensible. I’m mighty fond of you. It isn’t likely that I’d let you go and marry some one else if it were in my power to prevent it. Look at the thing reasonably, and be sensible.”

She moved back into the centre of the room and faced him.

“It isn’t real love you feel for me. Real love wants the other person to be happy. You only make me miserable.”

“Tush! You’re a silly child, and don’t know your own mind for two days on end. Once you’re my wife you’ll be as happy as the day is long. You’ll get everything a woman wants to make her happy and contented.” And he

proceeded stubbornly to enumerate what, to his eyes, was a roseate vista of expensive pleasures, yachting cruises, balls, fine houses.

Marcella smiled wanly.

“For all your cleverness, you’ve no real understanding of the human heart. Money’s your god, and it blinds you. Least of all do you understand a woman,” she said slowly, earnestly.

“Rot! I’ve known lots of women in my day. Don’t pose, my child.”

Her talk was fruitless. Treman’s mind was set, and not one jot could it be moved.

“You were keen enough about me till that Holden chap butted in. Once married to me, you’ll get keen again. I’ll be good to you. You bet I will.”

She shivered.

“I’ve fixed our wedding for next Monday,” went on the ruthless voice. “I’ve engaged the parson in that little church about a mile from your bungalow near Lady Warrington’s place. I told you I would, so don’t pretend to be astonished.” With an attempt at jocularly, he pinched her ear. “I’m going down to Lady Warrington’s for the week-end. I’ve just written and told her of our arrangement.”

It was useless to argue. The alternative he held up was too horrible. Her father *ruined!* He was ill already. If the storm burst it would kill him.

In vain Marcella pleaded for time. Treman laughed at the idea.

“And now I’ll put you on your train,” he said. “It doesn’t look too well for you to linger in my rooms. We don’t want the house detective in, do we?” He gave a careless laugh. “See how careful I am of your reputation!”

Rage, profitless rage, surged in her young heart.

He left her for a moment, going into the bedroom to get his hat and stick.

And it was then that the girl espied a tiny fragment of the broken vase, wedged half below the end of the carpet immediately underneath the mantelpiece.

She swooped down, and, before Treman had returned, slipped the fragment into her handbag, unobserved.

CHAPTER XXX

Love in the Moonlight

Enchanting moonlight shone on a coppice of young larch and golden rod and silver birch, and made a silvery play on the faces of a young man and a girl who were standing very close together, staring at each other with an air of dumb misery that yet displayed a flame behind it—the flame of intense mutual attraction, that vital flame that only lovers know.

“I *had* to come, Marcella,” said the young man in a sort of broken whisper. “I ran into Lady Warrington this afternoon in New York, and she sprang it on me that you and Treman are—are getting *married*—tomorrow! Say it isn’t true!”

She gazed up at him with piteous eyes.

“Marcella! Sweetheart! I’m waiting for an answer.”

Dumbly she nodded. Her dry lips could not utter what she knew she ought to say.

“It is true, then?”

For answer she suddenly flung both arms round his neck and utterly broke down.

“Good God! And—and you don’t love him! You love *me*, Marcella—only me! I know it!”

“I do! I do!” she sobbed brokenly. “But the—the pressure’s been too strong for me. You don’t understand.”

It was very silent in the little wood, for at half-past ten at night birds and beasts were sleeping. But suddenly in the undergrowth a twig snapped, and Miles raised his head and looked sharply in the direction whence the sound had come.

“What was that? Did you hear——”

She raised her tear-stained face. He spoke again.

“Shouldn’t be surprised if some one’s watching us.” He moved over among the young larches, thrusting back the branches and peering round and about.

Then he came back.

“I can see nothing. Expect it was only a rabbit scampering through the undergrowth. Or”—with a sudden thought—“d’you think it’s Treman?”

“No. He left the bungalow an hour ago, by car. Only fifteen minutes back he telephoned me good-night.”

She shivered a little, none the less, and moved closer to Miles.

“He wanted to see my father. Daddy’s ill, you know. He—he doesn’t know—about tomorrow. He told me not to marry Warwick. Says he’d a thousand times rather face the music than have me made unhappy——”

The young man gazed at her with puzzled eyes.

“Face the music? You—you’re going to do this infamous thing to *shield* _____”

“No, no,” she said hurriedly, terrified that even the man she loved might know about her father.

But Miles wasn’t to be put off easily. To him it was all too obvious that Treman had a hold on her and was working it to the very limit.

“You must tell me, darling. I’m not going to give you up, even though I have to stop this marriage at the very altar. When the parson speaks about the just impediment or whatever it’s called, I shall get right up in meeting, as they say over here, and——”

His voice broke, cutting short the miserable attempt at jocularly.

That little break cast down the girl’s reserves. Miles could be utterly relied upon. He loved her very truly. She loved him. Even at the eleventh hour he might think of some solution to this desperate position. . . .

“I couldn’t bear you to know before. It wasn’t really daddy’s fault. He’s so unbusinesslike. He always has been. Up in the clouds. And of course it was a terrible blow to have the—the real vase—smashed.”

Miles listened, then he said curtly:

“Treman did it on purpose, beast that he is! He ought to be made to pay. Legally, I believe, he could be held responsible. And then letting the fake go out from his rooms without any explanation—it’s too utterly caddish!” He clenched a fist as though it would bode ill for the schemer, were he near.

“I think so too,” rejoined Marcella drearily. “But what—what *are* we to do?”

“I’ll go up to Lady Warrington’s and see him.” (Miles was staying at the local inn.) “I’ll make him do the decent thing. Why, killing would be too good for him——”

Marcella held him back.

“You won’t do anything rash? Remember—daddy’s reputation——” Marcella suddenly thought of Leonie Day. “She’s staying at Lady Warrington’s. What will *she* think?” she asked, wide-eyed.

Miles looked a little awkward.

“I’ve told her that our engagement was an absolute mistake. She knows I never really loved her.”

“Did you tell her about—about caring—for *me*?”

“Indeed I did. She took it rather well, I thought. I imagine there’s some one else she’s interested in. She’s had a lot of attention in New York, you know.”

Marcella wasn’t quite so sure about Miss Leonie’s acquiescence.

“And now, sweetheart, since you’ve told me all, I’m going straight up to The Larches and interview that fellow.”

“Isn’t it too late? It’ll be eleven before you get there.”

He shook his head determinedly.

“Slip out here in about an hour’s time, darling, and hear what happened. Maybe you and I will have to run away tonight. Whatever occurs, you’re not going to marry that brute!”

Marcella promised she would be at the rendezvous one hour from then.

They parted with a long, lingering kiss. In the moonlight the two of them, young, slender, and ardent, made an enchanting picture. Some one, watching from behind the bushes stealthily, felt a curious pang. . . .

“I’ll run back to the bungalow and see if father needs me. He was sleeping when I left, but he wakes often.” Marcella kissed her lover once again and hurried off, Miles going towards The Larches and the all-important meeting with the man who would dare to take Marcella from him.

CHAPTER XXXI

Tragedy

In the Long Island bungalow sat Marcella, listening to the interminable ticking of the clock.

Upstairs, her father was asleep. He looked so like a tired child that her heart smote her when she looked at him. Whatever Miles or Warwick did, *he* mustn't bear the brunt of things.

She was very anxious, none the less.

Suppose her two suitors lost their tempers—as was likely—and a dreadful scene ensued? Suppose they fought? . . .

She ought never to have allowed Miles to go up to The Larches.

The ticking of the clock and the snoring of the coloured maid, who now—since Marcella's fright on the evening of the storm—slept nightly in the bungalow, were the only sounds that broke the silence.

An hour went by, and the girl, flinging a wrap about her shoulders, stole out into the silvery moonlight and sped through the garden to the little coppice.

Miles wasn't there.

She waited patiently. And at last she heard his whistle.

"That you, Marcella?" He came striding through the undergrowth, and she could see how strained and white his face was. There was something peculiarly agitated in his mien and manner.

"Tell me! How did it go? Was he very angry?" she asked in staccato. Much of his agitation had communicated itself to her.

"We—we had a row." She could see that Miles' hands were shaking. "He said vile things. I lost my temper and struck him."

"You mean you *fought*?" breathed Marcella. Then, noticing that his collar was torn and that some blood was on his chin, she gave a startled exclamation.

"Oh, I'm all right. But I want you to go away with me tonight, Marcella. You—you've *got* to go! D'you hear me?"

"It's impossible! Where *could* we go to? You've got a room at the inn, and the last train for New York has already gone." She glanced at the luminous

hands of her wristwatch. "It's nearly midnight."

"You must get your hat and coat and leave a note for your father," said Miles stubbornly, one hand on her arm. "I can hire a car at a garage half a mile from here, and we'll motor to New York—or better, to a justice of the peace, who'll marry us. D'you hear?"

His manner was so distraught that it frightened her. She tried to soothe him.

"It would look terrible at this hour of the night. Besides, how *could* I leave my father?"

"You must, Marcella!"

She drew back.

"Let me go now, and tomorrow morning early we can make a move." He *must* be pacified, she told herself. Besides, maybe tomorrow morning her father would be well enough to travel, and they'd all three slip away, far from this impending marriage . . . and be happy. . . .

When Miles realized that she was firm he did at last go off, assuring her that he would call soon after daylight with a touring-car, and she must have everything in readiness.

Then, kissing her ardently, he disappeared among the bushes in the direction of the village inn.

"How strange he was!" the girl thought, wondering and shaken. "And, oh, how furious Warwick must have been!"

Then happiness crept back to her. Miles would take her father and herself away. . . . Miles was so clever he'd clear up the matter of the vase. . . . Tomorrow he and she would marry. . . . Life would be wonderful together.

Methodically she set about her packing, moving very quietly.

Then into the silent air cut the sharp ting-ting of the telephone. Her heart missed a beat. Could it be Warwick, suspicious? . . .

It wasn't Warwick. Holding the receiver close against her ear, she heard a confused medley of voices, then a man's . . . it sounded like the tones of Lady Warrington's butler . . . greatly excited.

"Speak louder. I can't hear," said Marcella into the instrument, with a sudden premonition of disaster. "What is it?"

More jumbled tones. Then Lady Warrington, in high staccato:

“Give me the phone, you fool! I’ll speak to her.” A second’s pause. “Is that you, Marcella?”

“Yes.”

“Brace yourself. . . . Something terrible to tell you. . . . Hello! Can you hear me?”

“Yes, yes. What is it? What has happened?” Her heart hammered in her throat.

“There’s been a murder in the house. We’ve just found Warwick Treman. . . . Hello! hello! . . . Can you hear? . . .”

Marcella’s dry lips could not utter a single sound. God! this ghastly premonition. . . .

Then Lady Warrington’s voice again, sharp and excited:

“We’ve just found Warwick Treman in his room—lying on the floor—shot through the heart!”

Warwick Treman . . . *murdered!*

The receiver fell from Marcella’s rigid fingers with a jangling clatter. She swayed uncertainly, a mist before her eye’s.

Mechanically, she reached for the instrument, found it, and stammered:

“W-when did it happen? Are—are you sure?”

Lady Warrington’s voice was full of compassion.

“Positively. The doctor says he has been dead for over an hour, perhaps longer.”

“I—I can’t believe it.” (Awful premonition! Miles’ face white and haggard, the smear of blood upon the chin.)

“I’m sending the chauffeur down for you at once. It would ease your mind to be with us tonight.”

Lady Warrington rang off before Marcella could say anything further.

The girl stood before the instrument, staring in dazed fashion at the wall.

A murder!

Warwick Treman . . . *dead!*

Why, *why* in God’s name, had she sent Miles to him on such a mission?

She was responsible. It had been on her behalf.

That look on Miles' face when he returned to her . . . his shaking hands. He knew what had happened.

He had urged her to run away with him that night. "You've *got* to go!" he had implored her. He had said that he would hire a car immediately.

She had pacified him by agreeing to an elopement early tomorrow morning soon after dawn.

Too late!

"He never meant to kill him," breathed the distraught girl, hands pressed before her burning eyeballs.

But—

He had struck the dead man. They had fought. He had told her so.

The disaster had happened because of *her*.

Another solution of the awful tragedy came to her. Miles had told Treman that she, Marcella, loathed him, that she'd brave any publicity rather than marry him, and in despair Treman had shot himself.

Ghostly as that was, and a lifelong load upon her conscience—so she told herself, a-tremble like an aspen leaf—it cleared Miles of . . . *murder*.

She was still standing by the telephone when the car arrived for her. Lady Warrington's chauffeur ran lightly up the porch steps, tapping on the glass door.

Marcella's trunk was in the living-room, half packed, and various articles of clothing strewed a couple of the chairs. Evidently the young lady was going away in a hurry. The man made a mental note of that.

Or, of course, as had leaked out, she had been going off on her wedding trip tomorrow with the unfortunate deceased, and these were her preparations. Rather belated? Looked *odd*, somehow.

"I must go and see if my father is asleep," said Marcella, still with the dazed look in her eyes. "He has been ill. I don't want to wake him."

She stumbled up the stairs, the chauffeur watching her. This terrible affair must have been a nasty shock for the poor young lady. He was a bit shaken himself, for it was barely a few hours back that he had driven Mr. Treman from the depot to the house and been tipped two dollars for his trouble. Not that he had ever really *liked* the curt Englishman . . . he wasn't likeable

somehow . . . but it gave one the creeps, it did, to think how suddenly and with what ghastly despatch the latter had been hurled into eternity.

“My father is asleep.” The young lady, wearing a loose cloak of some sort, came down the stairs and hesitated what to do next. “Ought I to wake Clarinda and tell her what has happened, and ask her to keep the news from my father till I return?”

The chauffeur shook his head. He knew these coloured girls.

“If she hears there’s been a murder in the neighborhood, she’ll have hysterics. Leave her alone until the morning. She won’t wake.”

So Marcella very quietly stole away.

As the car sped through the woods, the soft air, fragrant with scented things, blew in her face, bringing an agonized reminder of her interview with Miles. Their first talk in the woods, this very evening, had held ecstasy, despite its pain and fear.

But the second meeting had terrified her, filling her with dread forebodings.

Warwick . . . *murdered*.

She shivered in her thin wrap.

“Cold, miss?” The chauffeur gave her a sympathetic glance. “We’ll be there in no time now.” And then he added: “The police and the doctor arrived before I left.”

She shivered uncontrollably again. *The police*.

Was Miles there, too? Had—had they gone to fetch him?

The chauffeur spoke again.

“The last person to visit Mr. Treman was that sculptor gentleman. I forget the name. Graves told me.”

Marcella bit her underlip to keep from crying out.

“He wasn’t staying in the house. That’s the queer part. Come visiting Mr. Treman late, he did, and didn’t go out by the front door, either. The window was left open, and the police’ve marked off a wide circle in the flower-beds, and are guarding it so as to get the footprints right.”

Marcella sat as though turned to stone.

Lights were blazing in The Larches when they neared the house. The front

door stood open, with Graves, the butler, guarding it.

“Lady Warrington is in her room, miss. Up the stairs and first on the left. Here, I’ll go with you”—he closed and barred the front door carefully—“you don’t want to make no mistakes and go into *his* room——” He broke off meaningly, with a sympathetic glance at the pale, set face.

She followed the man up the stairs and was clasped in Lady Warrington’s embrace.

“There! *Cry*, darling. It will do you good! Isn’t it too terrible? You must be brave . . . brave.”

It was like a nightmare to Marcella. She heard the good creature ramble on distractedly:

“So *awful* to have this happen in my house. I’d rented it for the season, as you know, and now *nothing* would induce me to stay on. Whoever *could* have done it? You poor child! On the very eve of your wedding. And you *adored* him, didn’t you? Such a charming man! So *suitable*. And Graves is saying such queer things about that delightful boy, Miles Holden. I’m furious with Graves. You know . . . the lower classes . . . such odd minds. I’m wretchedly upset!”

“What—what is Graves saying?” The same instinct that makes us bite on a painful tooth forced Marcella to the question.

“Something about a late call. I was in bed, and I don’t know. Graves is half blind, I think, and, in any case, that downstairs hall is frightfully badly lit . . . an antique stable-lantern . . . one would hardly recognize one’s best friend.”

Thought Marcella with quick fear:

“Is she trying to *shield* Miles? Is all this chatter to cover up what she suspects?”

Lady Warrington pattered on:

“It’s too absurd to think he could be in the neighbourhood, because, if so, where would he stay but *here*? His girl, Leonie Day, is here. I am his friend. The house is open to him.”

A knock came at the door, interrupting the vehement flow.

Lady Warrington went to open it.

An officer of the law stood on the threshold. He held something in his hand.

“We found this in the long grass not far from the window, ma’am,” he said quietly, cautiously displaying a revolver.

Both women fell back.

“Don’t be afraid. I took out the other cartridges.” He turned the weapon round. “Ordinary pattern, but it’ll give a clue, maybe.”

He looked keenly at Marcella, and Lady Warrington said:

“This is the young lady who was going to marry the—the murdered man.”

“Ah!” He drew out the syllable. “We shall want her evidence. Has she just arrived?”

Marcella nodded dumbly.

The three went down to the hall. Graves was marching up and down like a sentry.

“Come here, my man. The last person you knew to enter the house before the murder was——”

“Mr. Holden, sir,” came the quick reply.

“Did you notice anything peculiar about him?”

The butler hesitated.

“He was excited. He said he *must* see Mr. Treman right away. It was important.”

“And you went up to Mr. Treman’s room and knocked?”

“Yes, sir. Mr. Treman was in his dressing-gown in an arm-chair, reading a book.”

“Did he agree to see this Mr. Holden?”

“He didn’t seem too pleased. He kind of hesitated, and then asked me what the gentleman’s business was, and couldn’t it keep until the morning?”

“And you said——?”

“Just what I said to you, sir—that the gentleman seemed agitated and said he must see Mr. Treman.”

The officer glanced up quickly.

“Peremptory, wasn’t he? Well, what then?”

“Mr. Treman gave a short, hard kind of laugh, muttered something that

sounded like ‘*the fool*,’ and then told me to show him up.”

“You did so?”

“Yes.”

A pause. Graves looked uncomfortable, as though more lay behind all this, and yet he dreaded to unfold the tale.

“What time was it?”

“Round about eleven, sir. Maybe a little later.”

“And every one else in the house was in bed?”

“In their own rooms, anyhow, sir.” The butler looked at Lady Warrington as though for help. She nodded confirmation.

“Had you retired?”

“Er—yes—in a way of speaking. But I hurried on my things and went to answer the door. I kept the gentleman waiting perhaps five minutes.” Graves looked apologetically at his mistress. He wasn’t supposed to retire until eleven-thirty.

The police official was jotting down the answers in a little book.

“You showed Mr. Holden up to Mr. Treman’s room and then waited downstairs?”

“Yes, sir. But I got tired of waiting and went up again.” He hesitated. “There were sounds of dispute, sir. Mr. Treman’s voice was raised. I couldn’t help hearing——”

“A quarrel?”

“Practically, sir.”

Marcella shivered. The web was tightening . . . everything was being chronicled in that dreadful little book.

“What did you hear?”

Graves hesitated again, opened his mouth, shut it, and opened it again. He looked extremely like a fish.

“Well, we’re waiting. I must have your deposition properly,” gruffly said the man of law.

“I—I couldn’t say rightly what I heard—just that they were using violent words to each other, sir.” Graves mopped his forehead. Then he added, as

though the words were torn from him: “I did hear young Mr. Holden say something about—about being——”

“Yes. Go on. Don’t be afraid to speak out.”

“About being ready to kill him, ‘and be damned to the consequences,’ ” gulped the unfortunate butler, on the rack. (He had liked Mr. Holden, and it seemed treason to a friend to talk like this.)

“Indeed! What else?” More rapid jottings with the pencil.

“Something about rascals like—like Mr. Treman—not being fit to be allowed to live.”

Lady Warrington was pale with astonishment and incredulity.

“But there was no *reason* for a quarrel to occur between the two,” she gasped. “They met in my house in England, and quite liked each other.”

How little she knew! reflected poor Marcella, trembling.

The official took no notice of the interruption. He went on:

“Did you go into the room again?”

“No, sir. I waited outside for perhaps five minutes.”

“You didn’t hear the sound of a shot?”

“Oh no. The two gentlemen grew quieter. I went downstairs and waited in the hall to let Mr. Holden out. He never came. Time passed. Then I went back into the pantry to get a sandwich, being hungry.”

“How long were you in the pantry?”

“Maybe ten minutes, maybe a little more. The clock in the hall struck twelve, I remember, when I went back. Thinking Mr. Holden had let himself out, I locked the front door and bolted it.”

The other hesitated a moment.

“Were the windows and doors of the kitchen premises, and all the other windows, fastened?”

“Downstairs? Yes, sir. Cook was out with her young man till half-past ten. Then I locked the place up after she’d come in.”

“I see.” A pause. “And the front door had been locked until Mr. Holden called? You locked it again after you thought he had gone away?”

“I did, sir. Then I went to bed. But—I was uneasy. I couldn’t sleep. At last

I rose and went up past Mr. Treman's room. Through the crack under the door I saw the light still burning, so I knocked."

"Yes. Go on." The man of law was making quick entries in his notebook. "What then?"

"I got no answer, so I turned the handle and went in. What I saw you already know, sir." And Graves gave an uncontrollable shudder.

"You found Mr. Treman lying on the floor, a wound in the chest?"

"Yes, sir. He was dead, sir."

"All right, Graves, that will do just now." The man put the notebook into his pocket, turning to Lady Warrington. "I sent a couple of my men over to the inn to make inquiries. They telephoned that Holden was there, and are bringing him over."

CHAPTER XXXII

A Weapon Sinister

The door-bell of The Larches rang, and the captain of police went to open it.

“Ah! Here they are. This way.”

Miles Holden looked very white but was outwardly composed. In a few words, the captain of police gave him Graves’ deposition.

“You were the last person we know of to visit the murdered man,” he said finally. “I understand there was a quarrel. Is that so?”

“There was.”

“You made some threatening remarks.” He repeated what the butler had overheard. “You admit making them? Be very careful what you say.”

Miles held his head up squarely.

“I do admit making them. I had every justification.”

“And what was that?” rapped out the other quickly, seizing on the chance.

The young man hesitated. Marcella, standing near-by and within earshot, trembled like a leaf. He saw her tremble, and it braced him.

“The matter is a private one. I can’t explain.”

The captain of police smiled wryly.

“No doubt you’ll explain fully at the inquest. The coroner’s court is a great place for secrets to be brought to light.”

Marcella gave a smothered cry.

The inquisitor went on:

“Now, tell me, what time did you leave the deceased?” He brought his notebook out again. “Do you remember?”

“About half-past eleven, I should think. I’m not certain.”

“Graves was in the hall at half-past eleven. He didn’t see you go out. It must have been later. Think again.”

“It wasn’t any later,” said Miles firmly, “and besides, I didn’t leave the

house by the hall. I went out through the window.”

“Through the window? Why?”

“I was confused and—and angry. The window’s only six feet from the ground. It was open. I wanted to get away at once. I jumped——”

From a pocket of his coat the man of law drew forth a shining weapon and held it out to Miles.

“This was found in the long grass near the window. I suggest you dropped it?”

Miles drew back as though astonished.

“A revolver? I had no revolver on me! What d’you mean?” Then, looking at it more closely: “Good Lord! Where did you say it came from?”

The captain of police watched him keenly.

“Look at the initials. M. H. They’re yours all right. The revolver is your property, isn’t it?”

Miles was staring at it as though hypnotized. Carefully he lifted it and turned it around. The initials M. H. were quite visible to all.

“Yes,” he said blankly, “it’s *my* revolver right enough.”

They were all looking at him so strangely . . . The captain of police, his men, and Graves the butler.

Lady Warrington had given a startled cry that she sought to strangle immediately at its birth, as though fearful she might say something, do something, to implicate Miles farther.

He began to speak, to stammer, but the captain of police intervened.

“Safer not to talk. Safer for yourself, I mean. Least said soonest mended, though it’ll take some mending. . . .”

“But I know nothing of this murder. I *tell* you I don’t. It’s just a coincidence that I came here about the time. . . .”

“You can tell that at the inquest. Better leave it alone now, sir. It may make things harder for you.”

Miles swung round on him.

“What on earth are you driving at? What are you insinuating?”

“I’m not saying anything. It’s for the coroner’s court, all that. You can talk

there freely.”

“If you’re thinking I’d anything to do with it——”

“That’ll do, sir. No need to get violent. You’ll have a fair opportunity later on to state your case. I wouldn’t say anything now, sir.”

They went upstairs to the scene of the murder, leaving Marcella and Lady Warrington in the hall.

“Isn’t it too awful?” breathed the latter. “And to heckle poor Mr. Holden so outrageously! You don’t *really* think, Marcella, do you . . .? But then, finding it was *his* revolver . . . in the grass . . . and he did go out by the window. . . . Very odd. . . .”

Marcella’s thoughts were in a tumult. The extraordinary coincidence. . . . Miles’ stricken face. . . .

Her heart seemed frozen.

Lady Warrington rambled on incoherently:

“But the *motive*, darling? What possible motive could there be? Or do you think it was suicide? But then Mr. Treman was marrying you tomorrow . . . today . . . poor child! How heart-breaking! *Cry*, dear. It will do you good.”

But Marcella could not get relief in tears.

In the midst of all her pain and anxiety and suspense, she hated herself for being unable to feel actual grief over the death of Warwick Treman. Pity? Yes, in full measure. How terrible to be cut off in the prime of life! Horror? Plentifully.

But the thought of Miles—the man she loved—being implicated in the murder—that thought was bathed in all the sorrow of her heart.

Warwick had been cruel and vindictive. He had aimed deliberately to strike at her through her old father. Greedy and grasping, bold and unscrupulous, he would crush all weaker things that crossed his path.

His alleged love for her had been love’s travesty. True love is kind, desiring above everything the happiness of the beloved.

For her own personal happiness, Warwick Treman had not cared one jot. He had sought to sacrifice her to his desires as ruthlessly as he had planned to encompass her father’s ruin.

For her father now there was a respite. Unless—she trembled at the sudden thought—there were letters, papers, in the dead man’s room to expose the

whole affair? That hard-featured, bullet-headed captain of police was even at this moment gathering together all the documents of the murdered man!

Would these documents be read aloud in court?

The girl shivered.

“Darling! How ill you look. No wonder! Losing him on the very night before the wedding!” Lady Warrington slipped an arm about her friend. “You’re icy cold!”

“I’m all right,” said Marcella dully.

“Come back in the pantry, and I’ll make some coffee. That’ll occupy us. And these men will need something, anyhow.” Lady Warrington led Marcella to the kitchen regions. The girl walked mechanically, as though only semi-conscious.

The older woman thought it unnatural that no wild grief over the deceased was openly expressed. Girls were queer. Was it not just on the cards that Marcella had been contemplating union with Treman as a marriage of convenience? That his money and position were the attractions, and not the man himself?

She—Lady Warrington—had admired Treman, and had thought Marcella lucky. If only this disaster had occurred *after* the wedding, and not on its very eve, Marcella’s fortunes would be vastly different! She would have been a rich young widow. . . .

With Lady Warrington, to think was to express. Tactful silence had never been her forte.

So she gave vent to the above sentiment.

“What a pity it hadn’t happened *after* you were his wife! All that money! Too bad!”

Marcella stared almost vacantly out of the pantry window. It seemed as though she had not heard.

“Once or twice I’ve thought that Leonie Day was on his track,” went on the chatelaine of The Larches, busying herself about the coffee, but with one eye on Marcella. How queerly she was reacting! Was it indifference?

“Is she staying here?”

“Oh yes; she came down for the week-end whenever she knew that Mr. Treman was to be here. If you’d cast him off, I’m sure she’d have had a try for him, even though she is engaged to that handsome Holden. That affair’s been

simmering down of late.”

“Is she in her room just now?”

“Yes. We haven’t wakened her, though I went in twice. She had a bad headache before she went to bed, and I gave her aspirin. I expect that nosey captain of police will insist on having her roused pretty soon.”

She handed Marcella a cup of hot coffee.

“Drink that, dear. It will warm you up. You look like a ghost.”

Yes, it was a shame about the money. No doubt the girl was suffering the tortures of the damned in contemplating what she’d missed. And by a hair’s breath too. Life was a cruel joke.

Lady Warrington expressed these sentiments to the white-faced girl, but was rather disconcerted when the latter turned on her, exclaiming:

“Put such a thought out of your mind for ever! For months I’ve hated the very thought of Warwick Treman’s money. It’s been like an—an octopus—dragging me down, and down——”

She broke off on a smothered sob as behind Lady Warrington appeared the captain of police.

“I wish you hadn’t said that, darling,” said Lady Warrington later to Marcella. “The man heard you, and I’m sure he jotted it down in his nasty little notebook. He’s all over the place, eavesdropping.”

“I don’t care what anybody hears,” rejoined the girl wearily. Her thoughts, when she could drag them from the horror lying upstairs where it had fallen, were all on Miles. How would it go with him at the inquest? He was sensitive and highly strung. The notoriety would hit him very hard.

He wasn’t guilty. No, of course not.

But . . . that distraught air? His wild aspect on returning from The Larches? His entreaties that she should fly with him immediately?

Had Warwick threatened him, and Miles shot in self-defence? Had Miles lost his temper, and in a fit of rage discharged the weapon?

Had the shooting been an accident?

Leonie Day, pale but composed, appeared in an elaborate kimono. At the order of the captain of police, Graves had aroused her.

“It’s the most shocking thing I ever heard of.” She looked long and searchingly at Marcella. “Where were *you* at the time of the—the murder?”

A little wave of angry colour crept into Marcella's chalky cheeks. She hesitated for a moment, then she answered:

"In my own house. Why do you ask?"

But Leonie said nothing further, though ever and anon her eyes would watch Marcella's face as though to get a clue.

"That girl gives me the creeps," whispered Lady Warrington irritably. "I wish I weren't such a creature of impulse, and would learn to study character more. Then I wouldn't be taking up with all sorts of impossible people, and inviting them to stay with me."

Marcella scarcely heard her. Why didn't Miles return? Where was he? What was he doing, in that gruesome upstairs chamber?

Were they putting him through that form of torture known to the police as the third degree? If so, and he lost his head, would he not implicate himself yet more deeply?

He appeared at last accompanied by a couple of the men. At sight of him she breathed a temporary relief.

He looked at her and smiled. It was a smile to communicate courage—and hope.

Marcella rose.

"I must go home," she said, turning to the others. "My father is not well. He's alone in the bungalow, except for the coloured girl. He may wake and need me."

"You'll be wanted at the inquest," said the captain of police. "You're not planning to leave the neighbourhood, are you?" He gave her a searching look.

"No."

Miles stepped forward.

"I'll see you home——" he began, when the captain of police laid a restraining hand upon his shoulder.

"Not so fast, young fellow. You don't leave this house tonight. The young lady can go if she gives me her word that she'll be on hand when wanted. I'll make a note of her address."

"But surely——" Miles protested.

"It's quite in order, sir. I should be exceeding my duty if I allowed you to leave the place."

“Are you implying . . .?”

“I’m implying nothing, sir. That’s the coroner’s business, and not mine. You’ll answer to him. But leave this house tonight you shall not.”

Marcella turned upon the speaker, white with rage.

“You—you——” she stammered. “How—how dare you——”

Then, to the astonishment of the company, she rushed straight up to Miles, flung her arms about his neck and kissed him.

“I don’t care what they say, I believe absolutely and entirely in you——” she cried, then burst into sobs, and ran down the hall and off.

Lady Warrington hurried after the weeping girl.

But the night had swallowed her up, and she was gone.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Tigress Claws

Marcella ran through the woods like a hunted thing.

Miles! Accused of murder! Oh, how dared they?

She was glad, glad to the very soul that she had braved them, and flung her arms about his neck and kissed him there in front of all of them! She had showed them—Leonie Day included!—just what she thought of him.

Cruel, suspicious Leonie, with her beady little eyes!

Love! What did a woman like Leonie know of love?

And Warwick Treman? *De mortuis* . . . she must not speak ill of the dead . . . but he had made of love a travesty, a weapon sinister!

And at the eleventh hour it had turned and rent him!

Miles was innocent. *His* hands weren't stained with blood. She knew it now—had always known it—despite that terror at the heart. The clear, straight smile that he had given her—it held no guilt behind it.

She shuddered when she thought of all the intricacies of a court of law. Juries, judges, and lawyers could all prove that white was black. How would it fare with Miles?

She would be there. She would get up and speak before them all. Nothing would stop her.

Tomorrow she would see him. That grim-faced captain of police and his men could not hold her off.

The inquest! Dreadful thought! She'd read of them in books. Court-room filled with a curious, morbid mob of spectators, revelling in sordid details.

She scurried through the dark woods, her mind in chaos. Sometimes, in spite of everything, and to her own horror of the workings of her mind, she felt a queer relief that fate had settled the awful problem of her future life with Treman.

"But I never wished him dead!" she murmured, running as though the spectre of her own thoughts were after her.

Who could have done it? What revengeful spirit?

Treman had been so powerful, his methods so completely ruthless. Until the last few months she had never gauged his character aright. She had thought him generous and kind, but never dreamed of his unscrupulous tenacity of purpose, the urge that was always on him to have his own way in life, regardless of all the suffering that he might cause.

Had some one else who had felt the iron grip grow tighter, tighter, done the awful deed?

Some other woman might have got into his power and sought revenge.

The image of Leonie Day's face, white as death, but composed as a piece of marble, rose to Marcella's mind.

Leonie Day! She had known Treman for some time. They had been friends. Had he some hold on Leonie, and—knowing it—the girl had shot him?

Running and stumbling, pushing back the undergrowth, plunging through thorny thickets that were shortcuts, Marcella reached the little bungalow at last.

All was in darkness as she had left it, save for the faint night-light burning in the living-room. She unlocked the door and went in. Lifting the night-light, she ascended very softly to her father's room.

How peacefully he was sleeping! His breath came evenly, and a look of calm was on his fine old face. Marcella slipped off to her own room, undressed, and went to bed. But not to sleep. Sleep was impossible. She tossed and turned, and turned again, until daylight crept through the latticed windows, and the birds commenced their cheerful twittering in the trees outside.

A new day had come. What would it bring?

It was after six when finally she fell into a doze. And nearly nine o'clock when she awakened, gradually, with a sense of misgiving, of calamity.

What was weighing on her mind?

Then a full realization came over her of last night's awful happenings. In the clear light of day it seemed incredible—like a nightmare that the fresh, clear day must drive away!

"Brekfus ready, Mis' Ma'cella," called the coloured girl.

Down in the living-room the morning papers waited her. Abstractedly she picked one up and glanced at its front page. . . .

A cry of astonishment broke from her. Heavens! *How terrible!* Complete with photographs of herself, the murdered man, and Miles, a lurid account of

last night's tragedy, rife with surmise and innuendo, occupied the centre of that front page!

"You must not grieve so, Marcella," said her father, anxiously regarding the wan aspect of his daughter, and holding out a thin hand to touch her own.

"If Miles is convicted——" she broke out, for the twentieth time that day. "If Miles is convicted——"

The invalid did his best to comfort her. Her very weakness seemed to give him strength.

"The jury at the inquest will find out the truth, my darling."

Marcella rose and walked about her father's room.

"But the *evidence!*" she reiterated. "It's so convincing. And how can ordinary, pig-headed men see beyond that?"

The sun was setting in a blaze of glory, and its rays, climbing through the vine-encircled windows, illuminated the small room. They shone on the girl's distraught features and on her father's fine old face.

"All will come right, Marcella," he repeated firmly.

At that moment Clarinda popped her head into the room.

"Yo' wanted downstairs, ma'am. Mo' of dem genelmen from N'Yawk, Ah guess!"

Marcella gave a smothered groan.

"Reporters! They've been coming and going all day. Why can't they leave us alone?" Then, sharply, to the maid: "Tell them I can't see them. Tell them I'm ill. Tell them *anything* to drive them off."

"Ah sho' did, ma'am. But dey done take no kin' of no-tis of what Ah say. Dey done sit demselves out on de po'ch, smokin', and waitin' fer yo'."

Marcella muttered and went downstairs. The table of the living-room was littered with the evening papers, which contained still more graphic accounts of last night's murder. A snapshot of herself, taken this morning, gazed up uncannily from a prominent page.

"There is nothing more to tell you," she said wearily, pushing a stray lock of hair back from her puckered brow. "If you only knew how terrible this publicity seems to me—to everybody concerned——"

The reporters nodded sympathetically. They were kindly fellows, but they had to hold their jobs, and to return without a story was unthinkable.

Pretty soon they went, however, and Marcella was alone.

Could she, dare she, telephone to Miles? She longed to hear his voice, to reassure him of her enduring love.

But the very wires had ears these days. And her fear as to the result of the coming inquest might only serve to involve him farther, deepening his aspect of guilt.

A shadow fell across the verandah, and for one pulsing moment she thought that Miles himself had come to see her.

Then Leonie Day, in a nut-brown costume that was quiet in cut, and with a very serious aspect, crossed the threshold and walked in.

She looked directly at Marcella without saying anything—a strange, searching look.

Then she broke the silence with a curt, “I’m glad to find you alone. I want a talk with you.”

Marcella pushed a chair forward, but Leonie did not seem to observe the action. She remained standing.

“Won’t you sit down?” invited the other. She was very tired herself, and sank into a low rocker. The motion soothed her jangled nerves a bit.

“No, I won’t sit down,” said Leonie Day in a queer, strained voice. “This—this isn’t what you might describe as a friendly call. There are one or two things I want to say to you.”

“Yes?”

“You took Miles Holden from me,” accused Leonie, still in that odd, staccato voice. “You deliberately followed him to America to try and get him in your toils again.”

Marcella met the envenomed gaze.

“That is untrue,” she answered quietly.

“In what way?”

“Because a man like Miles isn’t for the ‘taking’.” (Strength was returning to her, and a calmness that she hadn’t felt all day.) “A man as fine and strong as Miles is, follows the dictates of his heart, of what he knows to be true—and right.”

“Tush! You talk like a country sermon,” sneered the other, “but you can’t hoodwink *me!*”

“I have no wish to hoodwink you, as you call it.”

The well-bred composure of Marcella’s manner infuriated Leonie, who, not having had the other’s background, in moments of stress forgot her acquired veneer and reverted to an earlier day.

“You needn’t be so high-and-mighty! You needn’t come the fine lady over *me!* I’m as good as you any day, and better.”

“I have no doubt of it,” was the other’s quiet comment. “As for what you say about following Mr. Holden to America, I had no notion of his plans, but merely accompanied my father on his tour.”

“That’s as may be. The inquest will unfold a thing or two.”

The tone of the last remark held an insinuation. But Marcella ignored it.

“You wanted Treman’s money, so you clung to him like a leech,” went on the other. “And then, when you’d got all you could out of him, you tried to fling him over. Oh, I know your kind, for all your airs!”

Marcella rose with dignity. This was going much too far.

“You forget yourself.”

Leonie gave an angry titter like an infuriated bantam.

“I won’t go until I’ve said my say. Treman was mighty fond of you, though what he saw in you I’m blessed if I know—except that you were sharp enough to play fast and loose with him, and he wasn’t accustomed to that in women. They mostly spoilt him. But”—lowering her voice, and coming a step nearer the other—“what I want to know is, why did you let the engagement continue right up to the very day before the wedding? What was the idea?”

Marcella was so astounded at the girl’s insolence that she could not find voice for a reply. The other went on rapidly:

“You may say it’s no business of mine, but I intend to make it my business. Sly little cats like you ought to be exposed. Confess, now, Treman had some sort of *hold* on you? Isn’t that so?”

Marcella started. This abominable girl was getting near the truth.

The other saw that her shot had told.

“Treman had a hold on you,” she continued triumphantly. “You first of all played him, to get all you could out of him. No, don’t interrupt. That isn’t the

important part. But what is important comes later. Tell me”—her eyes narrowed like a cat’s—“tell me where *you* were at the time of the murder?”

“I will tell you nothing. You have no right to come here like a detective _____”

Leonie gave a jeering laugh.

“All right; but don’t forget I know a thing or two. I’m fond of Miles Holden, soft and silly as he is. And I don’t intend that he shall swing for this if I can help it.”

She stood for a moment uncertainly, then she said in a different tone:

“Why not own up? It’s bound to come out at the inquest, anyhow.”

“I don’t understand you.”

“Yes, you do. It’s bound to come out, where you were.”

With sudden recollection Marcella thought of the queer rustling in the bushes late last night, when Miles and she had had their lovers’ rendezvous. Had Leonie Day spied on them? Had she hidden herself in the undergrowth in the little wood, and watched, and listened?

Little did she really guess what was in the other’s mind.

CHAPTER XXXIV

The Coroner's Court

The coroner's court was crowded. Long queues of people waited outside for admission.

Marcella, seated in the body of the court with Lady Warrington, felt as in some dreadful dream.

At a desk on a platform that headed the room sat the coroner, facing the assembly. To the left was the jury, on long benches. There was a table out in front with some men sitting at it. Marcella had no notion who they were.

She felt desperate with apprehension.

And yet, underlying her fear for Miles, there was a queer excitement that buoyed her up.

The coroner was speaking. Marcella could scarcely comprehend the meaning of the words. "Deceased . . . tragedy . . . shocking discovery."

The police evidence and the doctor's came first. All the gruesome details were unfolded. Then Graves, the butler, in the witness-box, telling all he knew, and greatly flustered.

Across the court the sharp eyes of Leonie Day were watching Marcella. There was no getting away from those curious, condemning eyes. *Were* they condemning? What did the odd light in them express?

But Marcella did not care. The girl hated her, of course. What did *she* matter?

Miles! How would it fare with him? That ghastly chain of evidence. . . .

She could think of nothing, see nothing properly, until Miles was in the box.

The ruthless questioning! He had been the last person known to have visited the dead man. At what hour? He gave it.

What had been the reason of his visit?

(Ah! What answer would he make to that?)

Quixotic to a point, Miles had determined not to drag Marcella's name into the inquiry. His answer was distressingly vague.

Business!

What business?

Of a private nature!

There had been a quarrel, hadn't there?

Well, not exactly. A small dispute. (Graves' evidence had borne that out.)

Quite a quarrel, wasn't it?

Miles hesitated.

This was *his* revolver, wasn't it?

Yes, he admitted that it was. These were his initials.

But he hadn't brought it to the house. Oh no! *No!*

How had it come to be lying in the long grass near the open window?

Miles didn't know. Had no idea. He had lost the revolver sometime back . . . couldn't quite remember where. Oh yes, he first discovered its loss the last time he was in the States . . . or maybe on board ship . . . he wasn't certain. . . .

Marcella could see the bad impression deepen on the jury's faces. Miles' nervousness lest her name should be dragged into the light of day, their midnight rendezvous in the woods, that any possible aspersion should be cast upon the girl he loved—these fears made him hesitate and weigh his words unduly, so that his natural frankness and honesty of manner seemed at a discount.

He admitted leaving the house by the window, which was open. Related in the cold light of the coroner's court, with hostile eyes upon him, there seemed no adequate explanation of that proceeding.

"I wanted to get away at once. It was a short-cut," he repeated lamely.

A little sigh, as of disbelief, went round the crowded room.

"You admit that this is your revolver?"

"Yes."

"You did not drop it in the grass near the window?"

"No, no. I tell you I had no weapon of any sort when I went to the house. I haven't seen that revolver for months."

"Then isn't it a strange coincidence that you should have passed within a few feet of the very place where it was found lying?"

Miles mopped his wet forehead. He couldn't understand it.

At what hour had he left the house?

He wasn't sure. After eleven, some time. Or no, it must have been half-past.

Had he gone straight back to the village inn?

More hesitation. Nothing must be said that would involve Marcella.

Well . . . no.

Where had he gone?

Just for a walk.

In what direction?

What time had he returned to his room at the inn?

Was it true that the police, who had gone to fetch him after the discovery of the murder, had found him hastily packing his clothes, as though he planned immediate flight?

Miles admitted he intended to leave Long Island on the following morning.

But why had he come down for such a flying visit? Why? What motive?

On it went interminably. Once or twice Marcella had to thrust her handkerchief into her mouth to keep herself from screaming out in court.

When they were harassing him about his movements, she could contain herself no longer, but got up on her feet, and, regardless of the buzz it caused, called out:

“He was with *me*—before eleven o'clock—and then again at midnight—we were meeting in the woods——”

The coroner glared at the girl.

“Who are you, madam?”

“Marcella Field.”

He consulted some papers on the desk in front of him.

“Field? Field? Ah, yes! You come on later. Engaged to be married to the deceased, were you not?”

She bowed her head, all eyes in the court upon her. There was triumph in the sinister gaze of Leonie Day.

“Sit down. You will appear in the box, in due course.” The coroner glared at her through his glasses.

“Marcella darling, how *could* you?” whispered the astounded Lady Warrington. “Your good name——”

“I don’t care,” muttered the girl, two feverish spots on either cheek. “I couldn’t let him bear it all alone.”

Leonie Day was scribbling something on a piece of paper. She handed it to an official, who passed it up to the coroner’s desk.

And when Miles’ period in the witness-box was over, to the surprise of the court it was Leonie Day who was called upon to take his place.

She gave her name in a clear, carrying tone, with great composure.

Yes, she had known the deceased for many years. She had come over from England to the States with the intention of marrying her fiancé, Mr. Holden, who had just been in the witness-box.

Did that intention still hold good?

Here Leonie drooped her head pathetically, and answered: No. Mr. Holden had formed an attachment for Miss Field, the young lady who—on her own saying—had met him on the night of the murder, out in the woods. Mr. Holden realized that Miss Field was engaged to Mr. Treman, the deceased, but their idea had evidently been to break that engagement.

“So Mr. Holden threw you over?” she was asked. She murmured something unintelligible. The court gave a sort of sigh, as though to sympathize with her wrongs.

“Did Mr. Holden give you a reason for breaking the engagement with you?”

“Yes. He cared for Miss Field. He wanted to marry her.”

“Knowing that she was engaged to another man—to the deceased?”

“Oh yes.”

A little buzz went through the audience. This girl had been ill-used.

“The murder occurred the very night before the wedding. That has a direct bearing on the case. You were staying in the house when the murder occurred?”

“Yes,” answered Leonie.

The coroner looked at the scrap of paper in his hand.

“Will you relate your movements on the night of the murder?”

She raised her head, and, speaking slowly and clearly, said:

“I had a bad headache, and went to bed at half-past ten. Lady Warrington gave me some aspirin—ten grains. I slept till a quarter to twelve, waking with a sudden start.”

“What woke you?”

“I don’t know. I’m a heavy sleeper, and it takes a good deal to wake me.”

“Perhaps you heard a shot?”

“I don’t know what it was that woke me, but the hands of my wristwatch—which are luminous—pointed to a quarter to twelve. The headache came on worse than ever, so I decided to go and fetch the aspirin, which was in a small box in the bathroom, on a shelf. I got up, opened my door, and just as I did so I saw a woman come along the corridor from Mr. Treman’s room and hurry down the stairs.”

A hum of interest and muttered exclamations rose in the body of the court. The coroner leaned forward, staring at the witness through his glasses.

“Why haven’t you mentioned this before? This is a most important piece of evidence.”

Leonie hesitated, as though in some distress. Then she said gently, almost compassionately:

“I didn’t want to be the one who—who told. I thought maybe she herself—could explain—could clear it up.”

“Is the woman here, then? Do you see her in this court?”

More stir. Every one’s neck craning. . . .

With a sudden dramatic gesture Leonie pointed straight at Marcella Field, the eyes of the whole assembly following her.

“There she is! *That’s* the woman who came from Mr. Treman’s room at a quarter to twelve on the night he was killed!”

Marcella—wide-eyed with horror at the ghastly accusation—stared at the speaker. That Leonie Day hated her, she knew. But that the girl would go to lengths like this seemed totally incredible.

Murder! This Leonie Day was accusing *her* of murdering Warwick

Treman!

“Stand down,” said the coroner to Leonie Day. Then: “Next witness. Marcella Field.”

Slowly Marcella dragged herself to her feet. A pulse had started to hammer madly in her throat, and her tongue was parched and seemed incapable of speech.

“She’s going to faint,” some one whispered in a carrying tone.

With an effort the girl tried to pull herself together, and contrived to get to the witness-box.

The coroner rapped out his questions.

She was—or had been—engaged to the deceased? Yes. Yes.

But had not intended to go through with the marriage?

No reply.

“Speak up.”

She muttered something inaudible.

“Evidence must be given distinctly and in a proper manner. Answer, please.”

A compassionate soul handed her a glass of water from the table. She drank a little, choked, and then stammered:

“I—I wanted to break my—my engagement—with Mr. Treman.”

Had she succeeded in her wish?

No. No.

Why not? Had Mr. Treman refused to release her from her promise?

Yes.

The court stirred in anticipation of what was coming. Romance and tragedy and drama . . . they were all here in the forthcoming narrative.

“You wanted to break with Mr. Treman because you found you did not care for him? Or was it because you wished to marry some one else?”

Marcella hesitated. Standing slim and forlorn in the witness-box with many eyes upon her—and some of them were hostile, and nearly all of them showed intense curiosity—she looked like some hunted woodland thing at bay.

“I—I didn’t—care sufficiently—for Mr. Treman,” she said very low.

“I suggest that you cared for some one else?”

No answer.

“Speak up, please.”

She raised her head, and said with an effort:

“You are right. I do—care—for some one else.”

“The witness. Miles Holden?”

She inclined her head, and murmured in the affirmative.

A little stir went through the court. Inquisitive eyes were turned from the pale girl in the witness-box to the good-looking, equally pale young man on the front bench. It was noticed that the young man looked directly at the girl when she made confession of her love for him—a wonderful look that held a depth of feeling amounting almost to adoration.

Spectators saw that that encouraged her, for she spoke more clearly now.

“Will you relate your movements on the night of the murder?”

“I was at home all evening,” said Marcella slowly, “until half-past ten when I went out for—for—a stroll.”

“Were you alone?”

“At first I was. And then I met Mr. Holden——”

“Where?”

“In the little wood not far from the bungalow.”

The coroner stared at her through his glasses. “You met him by arrangement, I suppose? How was the assignation made?”

“By telephone.”

“He called you up from the inn, having just arrived from New York?”

Marcella inclined her head.

“I suggest that he came down to prevent your marriage.”

“To—to ask me to reconsider——” She broke off.

“Had he heard that the marriage with the deceased was planned for the very next day?”

“Yes.”

“And at the eleventh hour he arrived to stop it? Was that so?”

She bowed her head.

“You told him that the deceased would not hear of your breaking your promise? And so Miles Holden offered to go up to The Larches and have it out with him?”

“Yes. That is so.”

“Did you not anticipate a quarrel between the two men?”

She nodded. “I was afraid of it.”

“You found Mr. Holden a hot-tempered man?”

She roused herself in quick defence.

“No, never.”

The coroner went on relentlessly:

“After Mr. Holden left you, I suggest that you became extremely anxious as to the outcome of the interview between the two men, and you followed him up to The Larches?”

“No, no,” she answered vehemently. “I went back to the bungalow, and waited there.”

“I suggest,” went on the calm voice from the desk, “I suggest that you left the bungalow, went up to The Larches, found the front door unlocked, slipped in and went to Mr. Treman’s room?”

Marcella stared in amazement. The coroner continued:

“Graves, the butler, has given evidence that from the time of Mr. Holden’s arrival, shortly after eleven, until midnight, the front door was unbolted. During that period, Graves left the hall twice. Once when he listened at Mr. Treman’s door to sounds of quarrelling. And later, after eleven-thirty, when he went to the butler’s pantry for ten or fifteen minutes to get something to eat. It was perfectly possible for you to slip in during that period, go upstairs, and then slip out again.”

“But I didn’t,” said Marcella, head held up.

“The witness, Leonie Day, gives evidence to corroborate it. Shortly after a quarter to twelve she opened her bedroom door intending to fetch the aspirin, and saw you come from the deceased’s room. She had been awakened by a sound which no doubt was the shot that killed him.”

“I didn’t. I tell you I didn’t go near the house. I tell you——” Marcella put her two hands to her face as though to blot out the ghastly insinuation.

“You were in your father’s bungalow, you say?”

“Yes. Yes.”

“And then?”

“Then I went out again into the little wood and met Mr. Holden.”

“What time was that?”

“I—I don’t remember. After twelve, I think.”

“What did he tell you about the interview?”

She hesitated. So much depended on her answer and the method of its delivery.

“Did he tell you that the meeting had been fruitless? Did he tell you that the deceased refused to give you up?”

“No. He—he didn’t say much about it.”

The coroner raised quizzical brows.

“Odd! What *did* he say?”

“Nothing much,” she stammered.

A wave of disbelief ran through the audience.

“Come, come! Speak up. Did he tell you of the quarrel that had occurred?”

“Y-yes”—uncertainly.

“Did he tell you that he struck the deceased?”

“M’m . . . no . . . yes . . . I mean, I don’t remember.”

The coroner leaned forward, and rapped the top of the desk sharply.

“I demand that you remember.”

Marcella trembled violently.

“He—he said he’d lost his temper—and—and they had had a row. I think that was all he said.”

The memory of Miles’ dishevelled appearance rose before her. Would the coroner wring that out of her as well?

“Mr. Holden, when found at the inn, had his things already packed as

though to leave either that very night or first thing in the morning. I understand that you, too, had packed as though in readiness for flight. Is that so?"

She did not answer.

"Is that so?" Louder this time.

"Yes."

"Then you *knew* about the murder?"

The girl flung back her head.

"Never! It was only when Lady Warrington telephoned——"

On, on went the terrible examination. Once or twice Marcella—growing more and more unnerved—contradicted herself. Once she broke down absolutely, but the relentless inquisitor would not desist.

To the majority of the people in the crowded court-room, it seemed as though Marcella were the guilty party. She had stealthily followed her lover to The Larches, slipped in by the front door while Graves was in the pantry, shot Treman dead with Miles' revolver (borrowed), then flung it through the open window where it had been found later lying in the grass. She had made her exit by the front door.

Leonie Day's evidence was very black against her, tallying as it did with Graves' departure from the hall into the pantry which was out of earshot.

There were many people in the court who thought that Miles was guilty, and Marcella "accessory after the fact."

The flight planned for early the following morning seemed damning evidence.

On, on went the terrible examination. The net was drawing tighter, more unbreakable, when suddenly, from the back of the court-room, came a great commotion, and a woman's voice, high and strident, demanding admittance.

"I tell you I *will* get in! You shan't keep me out! Stand off! Let me pass!"

Every one turned round, craning their necks in the direction of the disturbance.

They saw a yellow-headed woman, slim and apparently endowed with catlike agility, struggling with a large policeman who was trying to push her back.

"I *will* get in! Ow! Ouch! You brute!" She twisted suddenly in his grip, and, before he could prevent her, had buried her teeth in his hand so deeply

that, with a smothered cry of pain, he let go his hold of her, and she darted up the centre aisle until she stood by the table directly in front of the raised platform and the coroner's desk.

The woman's hat had fallen off in the struggle, and her eyes burned with an unearthly light. Her cheeks were brilliant spots of colour in the whiteness of her face.

"It's Deirdre," muttered the girl in the witness-box, below her breath.

The woman faced the coroner (who was so taken by surprise that momentarily he had lost his power of speech), and in a ringing voice, and pointing dramatically at Marcella, cried:

"They told me outside what you were doing to that girl!" She swung round on the crowded audience. "*Fools*, all of you! Look at her. Is she the sort to _____"

"Silence, woman!" roared the coroner, starting up. "How dare you come in here! Officer, remove her!"

The policeman with the bitten hand came forward with reluctance.

The woman swung round on him, eyes glittering.

"Touch me again if you have the courage! I don't leave until I've said my say! That girl there"—pointing again to Marcella—"has no more to do with the death of the man who called himself Treman than the babe unborn! Nor"—pointing straight at Miles Holden on the front benches—"nor has he! *Fools*, all of you—to accuse them!"

At this juncture she was seized, but fought with a strength that seemed almost superhuman. The court was in upheaval. People rose in their seats.

"Let go of me! I have more to say! I'm not mad!" she shouted above the tumult, struggling desperately. "I *will* save her! You shan't stop me!"

The coroner motioned to the men to let her be.

"Speak, then. Quickly."

Deirdre drew her breath, and then, pointing again towards Marcella, cried:

"That's the only woman in the world ever did me a kind action—you shan't make her suffer instead of me! It wasn't she who did the murder; it was I—myself—because I *hated* him—because scum like Treman shouldn't be allowed to live!"

The effect of the woman's communication on the court was electric. Cries,

smothered exclamations, people standing on the benches to get a clearer view of her. . . .

The coroner roared for silence.

What happened afterwards remained in Marcella's memory as a confused dream. She was told to leave the witness-box, and her place was taken by the intruder who—in an excited though perfectly coherent manner—told her story.

“Look at her eyes! The creature *drugs!*” Marcella heard some one whisper.

Those oddly brilliant eyes were fixed upon Marcella, who was in the front bench now, not far from Miles.

“I'm not making this up to save her—I'm not!” cried the woman called Deirdre. “I met her on board ship, and she was kind to me. I saw *his* photograph on her dressing-table——”

“Whose photograph?” interrupted the coroner.

“The man who called himself Warwick Treman. I wasn't sure at the time—but later on I knew it was the same. His name wasn't Treman when I knew him in Winnipeg—oh no! It was plain William Hickson. Twelve years since I'd seen him, but when I set eyes on him again I recognized him just the same. He saw me too, and ran away.” She gave a contemptuous laugh. “A bully and a coward, that's him. He hadn't changed.”

“Keep to the point,” said the coroner brusquely. “What were you doing in this neighbourhood?”

“I got a job in cabaret work in a road-house. I came out to New York to join José—my—my friend—but he was caught smuggling dope and put away. And then I met *her*”—she pointed to Leonie Day—“and she told me Miss Field was going to marry this Treman fellow, and if I'd thought she cared for him, I'd never have pumped lead into his body. I'd have lain low and wished her luck, though knowing the beast he is, I'd have been afraid for her.”

“Go on,” said the coroner, leaning forward.

“After José was taken (he escaped and they got him again, you know) I got a job in this neighbourhood singing in a cabaret. I wanted to see Miss Marcella, and find out if she was still sweet on the young chap there”—she nodded towards Miles Holden—“but I hadn't the pluck after what José did. I'll tell that later—how he mistook her for the other girl.” She pointed again to Leonie Day with a contemptuous look. “*She* gave him away about the dope _____”

“Get on with the story,” interrupted the coroner, his eyes through their glasses fixed on the queer creature in the box.

“The other night,” continued Deirdre, “I gathered up my courage and went to see her. Passing through a wood near where she lives, I heard voices. I recognized hers, and stopped to listen. I was quite close to them—him.” She nodded towards Miles Holden. “He was telling her how much he loved her, and she told him the same. Like love-birds, the two were, but worried to death about Treman and his refusing to give her up.

“Then young Holden decides to go up to the big house and see if Treman’ll see reason. The wedding-day was fixed, and all. When he went away I crept after him, wanting to see the matter out. I had my own particular interest in it. Oh, I’m coming to that. Don’t hurry me.

“There was a light in one of the windows, and I guessed that would be Treman’s room. Then I heard voices raised and quarrelling. I crept nearer, keeping always on the grass. Then, after a time, young Holden jumps out of the window, and goes off excited. And I went round to the front door, determined to go in and see Treman for myself, and I found the door unlocked, and up I went.”

The court was tense with excitement, and one could have heard a pin drop in the silence. The woman went on:

“Treman recognized me all right, but he tried to bluff me. ‘You—you *creature*,’ he said contemptuous-like. ‘How could *you* do me an ounce of harm?’ ‘I could stop your marriage with a girl that hates you and that you’re blackmailing into marrying you when she’s head over ears in love with another man,’ I cried. ‘Try and see,’ he said; and then: ‘You have no proof.’ ‘You shan’t ruin her life as you ruined mine,’ I flung back at him. And he laughed at me right in my face. That maddened me. I had a gun with me—I always carry it at night in the country, for I’m nervous—and I—I turned it on him——”

“Is this the weapon?” interrupted the coroner, lifting Miles’ revolver from his desk. A policeman took it over to the witness-box.

“Yes.”

“How did you come by it?”

The woman did not hesitate.

“José took it from *his* cabin”—she nodded towards Miles Holden—“on board ship. I meant to give it back to him, but I didn’t want José to get into any more trouble. So I took charge of the gun. He’s in quod now, José is. I came

out by the front door of the big house, and in the garden I flung the gun—Mr. Holden’s gun—into the long grass. I didn’t mean to get *him* into any trouble, either.”

The coroner rapped on his desk.

“You spoke of being able to stop the deceased’s marriage with Miss Field. What did you mean by that?”

The woman flung back her head and gave a shrill laugh.

“I meant I’d give the game away!” she cried. “The man who called himself Treman wasn’t able to marry without committing—whadda you call it?—bigamy! Because he married *me* twelve years ago in Winnipeg—because in the eyes of the law *I’m still his wife!*”

CHAPTER XXXV

After Life's Fitful Fever

On the front porch of the little bungalow among the cedars and the larches sat Marcella Field, and at her side, on a sort of swinging couch or settee made of striped canvas, was Miles Holden, an old and much-loved pipe between his lips.

Down at the bottom of the garden sang the crickets lustily. Bees hummed among the roses and sweet-scented stocks. The air was full of fragrance of green, growing things and life—*young life*.

Marcella felt peace stealing over her. This hour of quiet, this haven, seemed so wonderful after the stormy passage she had just come through.

The ghastly ordeal of the inquest. Miles in the witness-box, the web of evidence against him growing stronger, more convincing. Then Leonie Day's accusing eyes.

A vision of herself facing the coroner and the crowded court. She shivered at the recollection. Then the woman called Deirdre, her confession, and the thrill it caused.

"Poor thing," said Marcella, turning towards the man she loved.

He smiled in faint surprise.

"Meaning—me? Darling, I never could be poor when I have *you*."

She gave him back his smile. Then her face sobered.

"I was thinking of Deirdre. What will happen to her? Oh, I'm so afraid _____"

"You needn't be. American juries are tremendously sympathetic and biased where women are concerned. The unwritten law, you know. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if she gets off scot-free, and every one sending her bouquets and making her into a sort of heroine."

"She *is* a heroine," said Marcella softly, tears in her eyes. "She—she did it for my sake. She knew how unhappy you and I were. She wanted to show her gratitude because I was sorry for her, and——"

Miles interrupted wisely:

“But she had her personal motive, too, Marcella. Treman had been a perfect brute to her. He had married her and cast her off. Revenge must have been simmering for a long time.”

“Perhaps. But if he hadn’t planned to marry *me*——”

“The same thing would have happened if this woman and he had met. He couldn’t have bought her off. She’s not that sort. She has very strong affections and emotions. I was allowed to talk with her in the cells after the inquest was over, if you’ll remember.”

“Was—was she terribly upset? They wouldn’t let me see her,” faltered Marcella. Poor Deirdre! What a contrast that life was compared to her own! Deirdre had lost husband . . . lover . . . health. She was now branded as a murderess.

Miles hesitated, then he said:

“She wasn’t in the least repentant—if that’s what you mean. You know, don’t you, what’s the matter with her?”

Marcella’s gaze widened.

“You mean she’s ill?”

“Well, yes. Not in the ordinary sense.”

“I don’t understand.”

He moved uneasily.

“She’s not in a normal condition. When you first met her, several months ago, didn’t you notice something odd about her? Excitable and queer?”

“Do you mean that she’s wrong in the head? Will they put her in an asylum? Oh, poor Deirdre!”

He hesitated; then he said:

“She *drugs*, Marcella. She’s what they call out here a dope victim. And the habit has got such a hold on her that I don’t suppose she could ever give it up.”

The girl beside him shivered.

“Drugs? How terrible!”

Her thoughts winged to her first meeting with this woman on board ship. Deirdre had been sad and dull until she’d lit a cigarette. Marcella had wanted one of those cigarettes, but the woman had at once withdrawn her case, refusing to let the girl have one. That had seemed queer at the time, though

since she had forgotten it.

And Deirdre, puffing at her own cigarette, had suddenly grown livelier, and those strange eyes of hers had glittered, and her odd, shrill laugh had rung out queerly.

Drugs!

Miles went on:

“She wasn’t the sort of woman Treman could have bribed. She’s a child of nature, ruled by her emotions. She either loved . . . or hated . . . desperately. She had a strong feeling about you, Marcella. She wished you well. The love of her life, after her long-ago passion for Treman had turned to hatred and revenge, was the José Da Costa, who, in his own way, proved as great a rotter as the other man. But rather than have him injure you, she telephoned the police.”

Marcella shuddered.

“That awful night!”

“He mistook you for Leonie Day. He’s a drug-fiend, and when he does get out of prison, I pity the Deirdre woman. He held Leonie Day responsible for his arrest and Deirdre for his recapture. I hope, for their own sakes, they’re both far from his range when he’s set free.”

“I believe he got a long term,” said Marcella, with troubled eyes. Then: “Miles, we *must* do something for Deirdre. I’m going to see her. They’ll surely give me permission. Not even you shall stop me. It’s my *duty* to go.”

Miles slipped an arm about her reassuringly.

“Of course we’ll do something for her. You bet we will. We’ll hire the ablest lawyer in New York for her defence when she’s up for trial. I promise you I’ll see to that, Marcella sweetheart.”

But Marcella wasn’t satisfied.

“I worry so about it. Poor Deirdre! Poor Warwick, too! Whatever he’d done, or hadn’t done, it was terrible to be cut off in an instant from this lovely world. . . .”

“She was under the influence of drugs when she did it, darling.”

Marcella nodded.

“When we heard that queer rustling in the bushes, if we’d only searched until we found her, then she wouldn’t have followed you up to the house, and

_____”

Miles put his fingers very gently on her lips.

“The might-have-beens are profitless, my darling. You must try to put the whole affair out of your mind.”

What a sweet nature this girl had! he mused. Treman would have done her a deadly injury, yet she seemed to bear no rancour, only a deep compassion and forgiveness.

Odd how the Deirdre woman had not turned up sooner. She had no proof—no written proof—about that marriage in Winnipeg twelve years ago.

But, before her trial, proof must be established. Her lawyer would have to go to Winnipeg himself. Treman had had a different name at that time . . . proof would be difficult. The law was a ponderous and a lengthy process.

He believed in Deirdre. It was no trumped-up yarn, that early marriage. But

He wished that Marcella need not be dragged into the forthcoming trial. The coroner’s court would be as nothing in comparison to the ordeal of the bigger event.

As though she had read his thoughts, the girl beside him said:

“I dread the publicity, not so much for myself, but for you—and dad. He’s so reserved. He feels things so.”

Miles patted her hand reassuringly.

“This isn’t England, sweetheart. You needn’t worry about the publicity. People will swarm to your father’s lectures now that they’ve read about the tragedy down here, and seen his photographs, and everything.”

Marcella wasn’t ready yet for such an optimistic view.

“About the vase, too.” Her cheeks reddened. “We’ve *got* to tell the purchaser it was an imitation. And we’ve got to make that money up to twenty thousand dollars, and return it.”

Miles nodded acquiescence.

“Father’s so much better now,” went on the girl, “I don’t want him to have any further worries, not if I can help it.”

“We’ll put our heads together, sweetheart. That’s what I’m here for, you know, just to stand by on all occasions and be your right hand in everything.”

He stooped to kiss her fondly. Her eyes misted over.

“I don’t deserve your wonderful goodness, Miles. When I think how often I doubted you, and——”

“Forget it, darling.”

“And Leonie Day. She hates me so.” Her thoughts reverted to the coroner’s court and the other girl’s evidence.

“She’s jealous of you, dear, but I don’t think she really meant to lie to the coroner,” said Miles, as though he had read her thoughts. “The Deirdre woman is about your height and figure, and you know that the upper landing of The Larches is rather badly lit at night. I think that Leonie really did mistake her for you. You told me that Leonie came here to question you. Doesn’t that point to the fact that she *did* suspect you?”

Marcella flushed.

“It was abominable of her, any way you look at it. If she thought me guilty of such a terrible thing, she need not have waited until every one was gathered together in the coroner’s court and then sprung the accusation at me. She wanted to confuse me, and humiliate me—*worse than that*——”

“Forget her, darling. You won’t likely ever meet again. She quarrelled with Lady Warrington after the inquest, and went off to New York.”

A little silence fell between the pair on the verandah. The crickets in the long grass sang their loudest and the bees hummed busily among the flowers. How lovely Nature was! How exquisite this Long Island landscape! It was only human nature that made discords and unloveliness.

A telegraph boy walked up the winding path, pushing his bicycle. In the other hand he held an envelope.

“For you, sir.” He gave it to Miles. “They thought over at the inn that it might be important, so I brought it on.”

“Thank you,” said Miles, and tore the flap open, pulling out the sheet.

Marcella watched his face as he read its contents. Bad news? Yes, it must be. . . .

“No answer, boy.” He slipped a coin into the messenger’s hand. Then, when the lad had mounted his bicycle and gone off, he turned to the girl beside him.

“What is it, Miles?” she breathed. So much had happened lately . . . was it bad news about the Egyptian vase? Had the purchaser discovered . . . ?

“It’s from the prison hospital,” said Miles slowly, looking very grave.

“Prison hospital? Is Deirdre ill? What’s the matter? I *must* go to her.”

“No, sweetheart. This telegram is from the matron. You know Deirdre had the drug habit, very strongly; they thought they’d taken away all the stuff from her; but she was too clever for them. Drug victims are very, very cunning about hiding it, and getting it, you know.”

“Yes. Yes. Go on.”

“It seems she wasn’t well, and they took her into the prison hospital. She must have brought some of the stuff with her, unknown to them—or got it, somehow; for she took an overdose, poor soul, and passed away early this morning in her sleep.”

Marcella sprang to her feet, white and shaken.

“Do you mean she’s—*dead*?”

“Yes, darling.” Miles put his arms about her. “There! Don’t cry. The poor soul’s at rest at last. It’s for the best, Marcella. What would her future have been? An outcast.”

Marcella sobbed brokenly.

“Hush, sweetheart.”

“To take her own life like that——”

“No, no, she didn’t. Read the telegram.” He thrust the sheet of paper into her hand. “It was an overdose. An accident. It often happens so when people have been taking drugs for years. She simply passed out in her sleep, Marcella. Can’t you see, darling, that everything works out for the best?”

“It’s too terrible.” With her head on her lover’s shoulder, Marcella wept some very genuine tears.

Miles said soothingly:

“It’s very sad, and yet it would have been far sadder for her had she lived. Think of her without her sweetheart—she loved this José, brute though he was; think of her without health, or love, or reputation, or friends; think of her tried for murder, darling. She’s free of all that now.”

“I was her friend,” wept Marcella. “I’d have stuck to her if she’d have let me——”

“But your friendship couldn’t have cured her sorrows, darling. Come, be

sensible. She was too far gone in drugs ever to have given up the habit. Her life must have been hell for years and years. This was bound to have happened one day, don't you see?"

"I—I suppose so." Marcella sobbed her grief out in her lover's arms—that sure haven in a universe that had gone topsy-turvy.

CHAPTER XXXVI

“Somehow Good!”

Miles Holden took a trip to Greenwich Village.

He sought the pottery-maker who had copied the Egyptian vase. From Marcella, Miles had received a fragment of the smashed curio.

“This matter must be gone into right away,” he had said. He had had a long talk with Mr. Field, now convalescent—a talk which, to some extent, eased the latter’s troubled mind.

“What a splendid fellow Miles is!” said her father to Marcella when the two were left alone in the Long Island bungalow. “He’s a tower of strength.”

She flushed with pleasure.

“Feeling better, daddy?”

“Yes, my dear. You don’t look quite fit yourself.” He gave her a long, anxious glance. The strain of the last week or two had told. He blamed himself a thousandfold for his part in adding to her misery.

But, with Miles’ intervention, there was some gleam of hope.

The day dragged on. It was extremely warm. The convalescent lay ensconced on the swinging couch on the verandah, with Marcella and the coloured maid anticipating his slightest wants.

How *kind* women were! Lady Warrington came nearly every day. She was a good, well-meaning creature, rather tactless, but excellent at heart.

And Marcella was a little gem. A home with such a splendid man as Holden would be a fitting setting for her. . . .

That wretched vase! If only he could forget it for a moment. He hadn’t meant to deceive the purchaser. Matters had gone wrong through Warwick Treman, but . . . *de mortuis* . . . he mustn’t blame the dead. . . .

Yet it was difficult to forgive. . . . The man had planned bigamy, with Marcella as the victim.

Treman had blackmailed him.

He tried to turn his thoughts away from both these truths.

Marcella read to him in her fresh young voice. It was a light novel of some sort, the happy kind. All books ought to be like that, he mused, cheerful and optimistic, in a world of ups and downs.

The bees hummed drowsily and Marcella's voice grew fainter, like the sound of music far away, and fainter. . . .

He fell into a doze.

Shadows lengthened on the porch. He slept more deeply, dreaming happy dreams.

There was laughter in those dreams of his, and relief from worry. He woke with a start to hear that laughter quite distinctly, close at hand.

"You're *sure*, Miles? *Positively sure*?" Marcella was saying in tones that were a freshet of delight.

"Quite certain," came the quick reply. "The chap examined the fragment of the broken vase and spotted it at once as a bit of the copy he'd made himself not long ago. Then I got hold of an expert, and we went round to the home of the fellow who purchased the other vase for twenty thousand dollars——"

Mr. Field raised himself on one elbow, listening eagerly.

"Ah, you're awake, sir! Good news! The smashed vase was *not* the real one, after all, but merely the imitation. Treman made an—an error, shall we call it? The original vase, fully worth twenty thousand dollars paid for it, is the one in your client's possession, quite intact, and everything's all right, and every one is satisfied."

Mr. Field blinked at him like a bewildered owl. He couldn't quite take in the meaning of the announcement.

"But I marked the imitation with a special sign. When the original was broken, the other was still in its box in the cupboard, just where I had left it, with the small cross beneath its rim."

"Treman knew about the mark, did he not?" asked Miles.

"Oh, yes."

"I suggest that he scratched the same mark upon the original vase, and put the latter in place of the copy, in the box in the cupboard. To further his own interests, he then pushed the other vase off the mantelpiece—or wherever you had left it—and led you to believe that it was the original that had been destroyed."

Mr. Field blinked again, confounded. He was a simple-minded, trusting

man, and found it difficult to credit people with such crooked ways.

“Extraordinary!” he muttered, taking off his glasses and wiping them. “You are sure that my man in Greenwich Village claimed the fragment as part of his creation?”

“Absolutely. And Zangvill, the expert in Egyptian antiques, attested the value of the other vase. Indeed”—Miles smiled whimsically—“I understand he is prepared to buy it from the purchaser at an even higher figure than that already paid.”

That was convincing. The elder man’s face relaxed in absolute relief.

“Isn’t it splendid?” cried Marcella, flinging her arms about the convalescent’s neck and kissing him. “So the money’s yours all right.”

There was a pause. Then her father, turning to Miles, said very seriously:

“Marcella, poor child, was induced to borrow a sum of money from Mr. Treman. She did it for me, but without letting me know. I am glad of this news that you bring today, for it enables me, with a clear conscience, to pay to Mr. Treman’s executors the full amount owing. I should be glad if you could attend to the matter without delay. The cheque awaits their convenience.”

Another load rolled from Marcella’s mind and heart.

Miles and she sat on the porch late that night until the moon rose up, flooding fields and woods with molten silver. They did not talk much, but a great happiness, a happiness the more perfect since it had sprung from pain, enveloped them.

“It’s curious,” said the girl, sitting very close beside her lover on the swinging couch, “it’s curious how things *right* themselves in the long run—if one loves sincerely, and hopes and struggles on.”

For answer, he drew her all the closer to him. He was very much in love, and sometimes half afraid that this wonder-girl, who seemed fashioned of dew and moon and mist, might slip away from him, elusively beautiful as she was.

“My darling!”

“I mean it,” said Marcella staunchly, her face like a pale flower upturned to his. “It seems as though there is, there *must* be a definite law that rules the universe—about things working out for the best—‘*somehow good*,’ as a poet says somewhere——”

“You are everything that’s good—and beautiful—and I shall never, never let you go again,” whispered the fond lover.

In a near-by pool, among the water-lilies, the bullfrogs sang a little song in rhythmic monotone.

“Love’s serenade,” said Miles. They both laughed at that. “I want to run away with you tonight, on that long moonbeam over there, and skim over the tree-tops, and sail off. I’m an imaginative sort of chap, and for years and years I’ve woven fancies about *the* girl—*my* girl—d’you understand?”

Marcella nodded.

“I’ve got her now, for good and aye. There’s no getting out of it this time. D’you hear me, sweetness?”

She nestled closer to him.

“Yes, you tyrant!”

“And all your cares and worries are going to be carried on *my* shoulders? And we’re never, never going to have any secrets from each other? Is that a bargain?”

She felt an impulse to tease him.

“Wouldn’t that make life rather dull? Take away the *unexpectedness* of it, as it were?”

He shook his head.

“You’d always keep me guessing, anyhow, you little will-o’-the-wisp you! D’you remember that conversation we had together, months ago, on board ship crossing over to England? We were leaning over the side of the ship, on a night like this, gazing at the phosphorescence on the water. You said it was just an illusion——”

“I remember,” said Marcella, smiling. “Will-o’-the-wisps darting round the hedgerows at home were the same sort of thing, you said. You wanted to keep your illusions, to capture them and hold them, even though it took you months and years——”

He held her close.

“Fireflies, will-o’-the-wisps, and phosphorescence notwithstanding,” he laughed softly, “I have *got my girl!*”

CHAPTER XXXVII

Lady Warrington's Romance

"And so you're going to marry that handsome Mr. Holden! I'm *too* delighted, darling," gushed Lady Warrington, as she and Marcella sat in the gorgeous lobby of a big New York hotel.

Weeks had elapsed since the disaster at The Larches, on Long Island. Lady Warrington had sublet the country house, and was foot-loose, visiting her friends, of whom she had a quantity in this hospitable country, and enjoying herself tremendously, as was her wont, for she was an enthusiastic and appreciative person—a live wire, to use a popular, apt phrase.

Marcella's face had taken on more character in the last few weeks, and there was a misty depth, a tenderness, about the eyes that rendered their beauty doubly appealing.

"I do declare you're growing prettier every time I see you!" remarked her friend, with emphasis. "It's a shame that any one person should have such a monopoly of good looks!"

Marcella smiled, observing with interest the other's well-turned-out appearance.

"You look wonderful yourself," she rallied Lady Warrington. "Something puzzling—*almost bride-like!*" Then, teasingly: "I do believe you've fallen in love yourself. Confess!"

To her astonishment a blush slowly rose to the other's cheeks till it even suffused her forehead.

Marcella teased:

"Who's the lucky man? I always knew you had a soft spot for the men on this side of the Atlantic. And I wouldn't be a bit surprised if—if——"

Lady Warrington recovered her aplomb quickly.

"My dear, I always did say that American men are perfectly charming. So appreciative! So thoughtful! And so generous!" Her voice rose in emphatic crescendo. "Between ourselves, I don't think I could do better; but then, one never knows, does one? I mean to say there's many a slip—and he *did*, at one time, seem rather fascinated by that detestable, two-faced little——"

She suddenly broke off at the approach of a tall, distinguished, grey-haired man who was coming directly towards them.

“Ah!” The long-drawn monosyllable conveyed a pleasant agitation. “Speaking of angels—here he is——” Then, rising: “Marcella, may I present Mr. Sturtevant?”

The three lunched together, and, despite Mr. Sturtevant’s easy manners and pleasant address and Lady Warrington’s high spirits, Marcella was acutely conscious of being odd man out—in other words, a gooseberry.

“She is in love with him,” she thought, watching her friend, who had never looked handsomer or more animated. Marcella felt so happy herself, in the sure love of Miles and the ending of all her troubles, that she longed for others to be equally fortunate.

Her father was restored to health. The lectures were continuing a great success. He had just received a tempting offer to embark upon another series, which would bring him added reputation and more money.

As for Miles, he had more contracts now than he could execute within a year. Success had piled upon success, and fame had come to him.

The tragedy at The Larches had proved a nine-days’ wonder, and then dropped into oblivion. In a busy land like this, it must be so.

Marcella slipped into a reverie. The other two had much to say to each other.

She caught the name of Leonie Day.

“Do you ever see her?” Lady Warrington was enquiring, with an air of assumed carelessness, though Marcella recognized a strained note in her voice.

“I haven’t seen Miss Day in weeks and weeks,” replied Mr. Sturtevant, in his pleasant drawl. “I heard through a mutual friend that she was going back to England.” Then, as an afterthought, he added: “If you see her, please remember me to her.”

Lady Warrington stiffened just a shade.

“It isn’t in the least likely that I shall see her.” She opened her lips as though to say something more, then apparently changed her mind, and closed them. Nothing could be gained by speaking her mind freely on the absent charmer. She had helped the latter, with a view to setting up a hat shop in New York. Leonie had spent the money, and with no results. The sum had not been large, but Lady Warrington was annoyed at what she called the defalcation.

Besides, Leonie had been hateful at the inquest.

And later, from certain jottings in the dead man's handwriting, it had come out that she had been in Treman's pay. Spy and mischief-maker—these were mild names that Lady Warrington mentally applied to Leonie. The latter had accepted money with a view to deliberately parting Marcella from the man she loved. Lady Warrington was incurably romantic, and she thought the action despicable, as indeed it was. She was through with Leonie for evermore, and hoped their paths might never cross.

The presence of the entertaining Mr. Sturtevant, however, soon chased away all galling recollections of that sort, and Lady Warrington was wreathed in smiles again. What a handsome man he was! So well preserved, so well set up, with such a gallant air! If only——

Well, perhaps . . . who knows? . . . He *might*? In a mirror opposite their tables she caught her own reflection. No—not young—but chic—enjoying life to the full. In America one married at *all* ages——

The years fell off in glad anticipation.

“Marcella, child, what are we to do? My tour starts almost at once, and I don't like to leave you here alone.”

Over his coffee-cup in the breakfast-room of the little bungalow, Mr. Field eyed his pretty daughter in faint perplexity.

How charming she looked this morning in her simple gown of some pale substance. Happiness had returned in full measure to her in the last few weeks.

She hesitated for a moment, then she said lightly:

“Don't worry about me, dear. Miles and I have a little plan in mind.”

Her father leaned forward, regarding her fondly.

“You must take me into your confidence.”

She gazed for a moment out of the window at the undulating landscape, with thoughtful eyes. They were lovely eyes, full of character and fine thoughts—and love.

“Do you think it would be too soon, daddy?” she asked uncertainly.

“Too soon for what?”

“Miles and I—you know. Waiting is so difficult.”

“You mean you want to get married, darling?”

She nodded.

“If we don’t, sometimes I’m afraid—oh, I know it’s silly of me, but I can’t help it!—I’m afraid that something may come along to stop it.”

Though a man of dreams, he yet could understand the workings of a loving heart. He thought for a moment, then he said:

“No, my dear child, I can’t see that anything could be gained by waiting. What’s past is past, and to bring about the consummation of your own happiness is no irreverence to the dead. We are meant to be happy in this wonder world, Marcella. We are meant to seize our happiness while the flame of it is burning brightly, and not wait until it dims, or things happen to change its brightness.”

That relieved Marcella. The plan, then, could be carried out, with her father’s full approval.

She was going farther into the matter when, scanning the morning paper, Mr. Field gave a quick exclamation, settled his glasses more securely on his nose, and peered at the printed page.

“What is it? What have you seen?” exclaimed his daughter. She was rather fearful of surprises in these days.

But her father’s face contained no hint of bad news, only a vague bewilderment, with a half-smile at the back of his amazement.

“Speaking of weddings . . .”

“Yes, yes. Who is it?” Marcella got up and ran round to look over his shoulder. “Where?” Then, as her gaze met an excellent picture of her friend, Lady Warrington: “Heavens!” she exclaimed. “*Married!* Yesterday! To Mr. Sturtevant! How thrilling!” She jumped up and down in her excitement. “Quick! Let me see what it says.”

There was quite a long account of it in the paper, for Mr. Sturtevant was prominent in New York, and popular as well as influential. Lady Warrington’s pedigree and accomplishments were detailed in full.

“I’m so glad,” commented Marcella, when she had read the notice. “She was very keen about him, and he seems a perfect dear. I guessed there was something in the wind at lunch. She was quite coy about it.”

She sat down immediately after breakfast to write a letter of congratulation to her friend. A fellow-feeling made her very sympathetic.

But before she had got very far, she was interrupted by the ringing of the telephone, and the bride's voice drifted across the wires on long distance.

“That you, Marcella? . . . I just *had* to call you up and tell you the great news. . . . We're up in Maine, honeymooning. . . . Yes, so *very* happy, dear. . . . I'm lucky. . . . Yes. What's that? . . . You too? . . . I quite agree. . . . No need to wait. . . . Congratulations, dear. . . . You're right. . . . I'm wishing you all the luck in the world. . . . Charming fellow! . . . Thanks! . . . Thanks! . . . Yes, I *am* lucky, too. . . . Expect Leonie Day will be ready to claw my eyes out. . . . Just heard that she's already sailed for Europe. . . . Paris, yes. Good-bye, dear . . . or, rather, *au revoir*. . . . We must join forces later on. . . .”

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Love Wins the Day

Marcella and Miles Holden were married a few days afterwards, very quietly, in a little country church.

The bride was radiant with happiness, and a deep content was on the bridegroom's handsome face.

"At last, Marcella!" he said very softly, when the car carried them away. "Until the very end I was half afraid you'd slip away from me, elusive moonbeam that you are. But now I've got you—and never again shall I let you go! I'm warning you!"

She laughed happily, nestling closer to her husband.

"As though I'd *want* to go away! It's an absurdity!"

The sun shone down on them in radiance, and not a single cloud was in the sky.

"Good omen, isn't it?" said the bride gently, gazing upwards.

Miles drew her nearer to him.

"Let me look into your eyes, my darling. Then, without any need of words, I'll know how much you care for me."

In those dark, luminous eyes of hers he gazed long and deeply. And in their depths he saw the vital flame that in a world of ups and downs alone endures.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled 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 Rebel Bride* by May Christie]