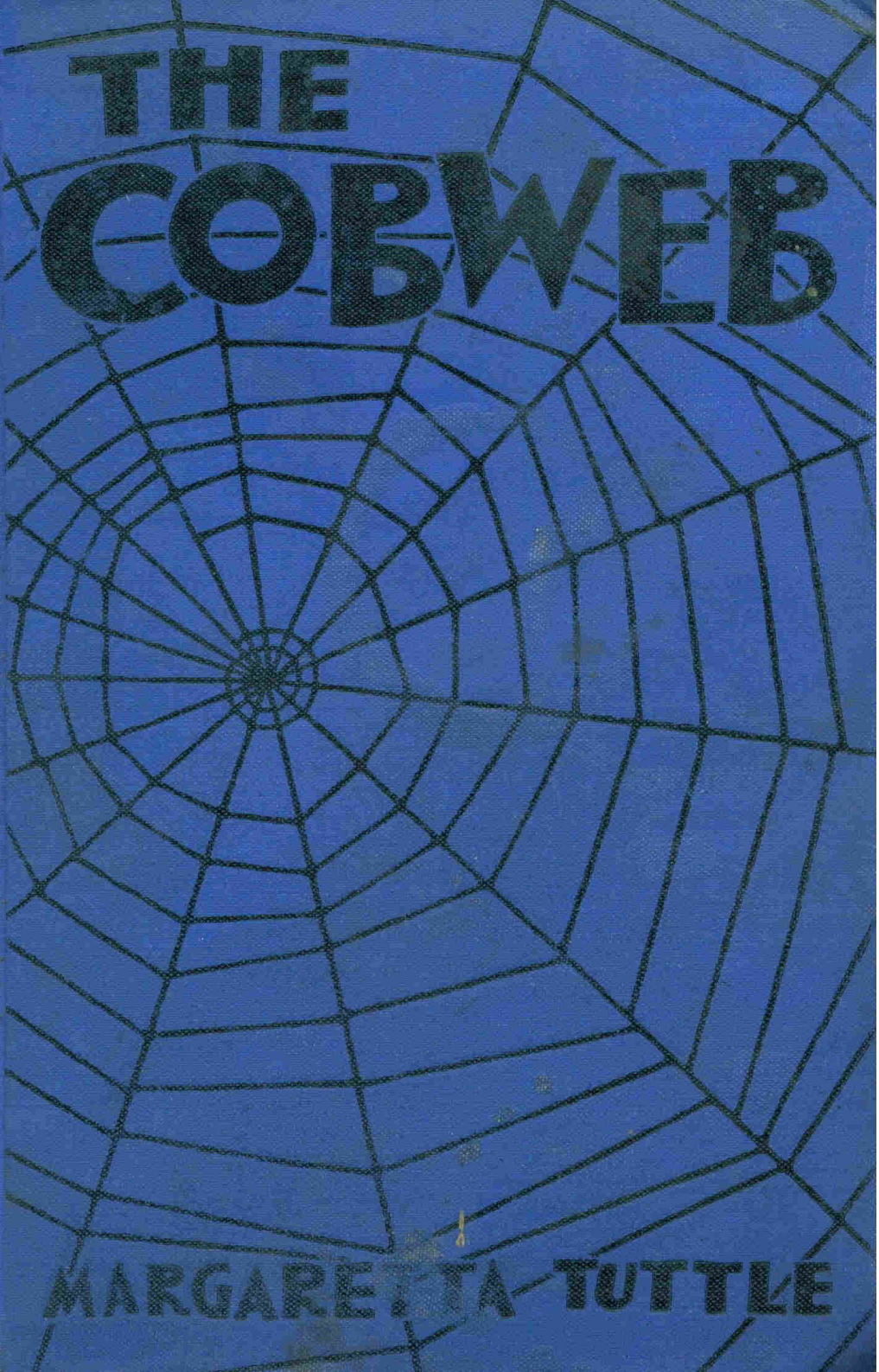
THE COBWEB



MARGARETTA TUTTLE

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By Margaretta Tuttle

Feet of Clay
The Cobweb

THE COBWEB

By

MARGARETTA TUTTLE

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Light as cobwebs in the dawn
That yet can check the opening of a flower.

The Cobweb

CHAPTER I

She stopped because the gate, that usually swung slantingly to and fro, had caught in its rusty latch. She bent over the latch from the outside and pushed at it, but she did not look down at it, because just beyond the gate was a little tree trying to blossom, and a slanting ray from the setting sun had set the little, new, green-and-white leaves glistening like the flash of a lovely idea under morning light.

"Oh, Stranger-within-the-gate," she said softly, "stay a little—just a second." A faint breeze ruffled the shining little leaves. "I saw the flash of your wings then."

Her fingers, struggling with the latch, grew impatient as she watched the translucent, moving white petals.

"Gates," she said in the same soft voice, "must be to make us pause—like doors—maybe to give us time for a thought before we go through to something else. And if they're hard to open," she laughed softly, withdrew her eyes from the flash of white within the gate and looked down attentively at the latch, "why, then you think the harder before you go through, don't you?"

The rusty hinges creaked as she swung the gate on them and she nodded at them. "I heard you say yes."

She spread out her tingling fingers before the glistening tree. "It's my effort I offer you," she breathed, as a little breeze stirred the petals.

"I know what you are saying—all kinds of things about gates. Life is a gate, and love—no, love is something else. I think the gate must be opened for love. Perhaps love will only enter through an open gate; and death—oh,

don't go yet," for the breeze had stopped and motion and sound with it —"what is death the gate to?"

She bent her head as one who listens intently. "Wouldn't it be odd if death were the gate to life; if love could go through this gate when it was opened? Would it be too strange to believe that love went on sometimes, through the gate, swifter for an open way?"

She heard an upstairs window flung up and she could guess that somebody was looking down on her. The boarders who could afford the front rooms seemed to have little else to do than to look out of the windows for which they paid so high a price. And she could also guess that anybody who stopped to talk to a tree would seem more than queer to anybody who looked out of those windows.

Then, as she glanced up she stopped, for the face at the upstairs window was new to her: a colorful face, young and framed with shining dark hair, and it looked down on her with a desperate wistfulness she never remembered to have seen on any of the women's faces that came and went through Mrs. Gazann's Park View Inn.

Then the front door opened and a resounding voice hailed her from the hall as the bulky figure of a blithe young man leaned out over the umbrella stand.

"Hi, Linda, I passed my examinations! I'm a lawyer now."

"Not really, Ollie! I congratulate you. Look out, you'll empale yourself on the excrescence. How many pounds did you lose on your exams?"

"Four! But they'll come back! I can't seem to get rid of anything I'm used to. Where are you going?"

For the girl had gone through the dark hall to the dining room, where the long table was set for dinner and dimly outlined behind drawn shades. She looked at the cream pitchers with eyes aslant; then she took the one at the head of the table and exchanged it for one near the foot.

"Just because Father never kicks up a row," she said, "he can drink milk in his coffee. Move back from the door, Ollie, and let me out. What are you going to do with your job on *The Sun* now that you're a lawyer?"

"I'm going to hold on to it with all my might. It pays Mrs. Gazann, and that's more than the law will do for a while. Wait; the new woman is at the telephone; you don't want to go out now."

The telephone of Park View Inn was in what was known as the side hall; the little turn of the hall that led to the side door just beyond the dining-room door; a side entrance originally intended for those who ate meals at Mrs. Gazann's but did not live there. It was the only telephone in the house and it obstructed the narrow way to the dining room. Mrs. Gazann had had it put there because the friends of the boarders preferred to call them up at meal time.

"Yes, I do want to go now." The girl's low voice was impatient. "Did you see Father at the office, Ollie?"

"Yes, he's held up by two things, one natural and one unnatural. The whole of Bookwell Block's afire, and he has to repage. Maybe he won't get home to dinner. He said for me to tell you; that's why I was waiting for you —one reason why. And here are the passes for the theater. Your father says to get the seats as you go in, if he can't get home. They're reserved in his name."

"Repaging isn't enough to keep Father from going to the theater with me. It's only six now. What's the unnatural thing that's keeping him."

"The boss blew in from New York on the three o'clock train."

"Your Uncle Oliver?"

"Not when he's bossing; just John Oliver Shelburn. The whole office is buzzing around."

"Huh! Much he has to do with the buzzing of that office!"

"Oh, that's the thing he likes best about himself, the way he can run a newspaper from New York. It was invented by Uncle Oliver's father when he founded this paper—long-distance running. Uncle Oliver may take me back with him to New York if I can take his dictation fast enough. Say, listen to that woman at the telephone. Somebody's getting peppered."

"Ollie, what are you going to be? Not a private secretary? You've just become a lawyer and you've been a reporter for a year. It's a shame if your uncle is going to make a secretary out of you."

"Uncle Oliver wants a secretary that's a lawyer; and it's not so private; I go all over the continent with him—if I make good."

"I know; but your future, Ollie?"

"Ethelinda, this interest in my future is the best thing I've run into to-day. Say, I believe that woman's crying into the telephone. You know,

Linda," teasingly, "with your way of making trees and things personal and getting answers from them when you speak to them, you ought to go in for this writing game."

The girl frowned. "Ollie, you were listening. Susie Ryland is pulling a hundred a month just writing, 'A good time was had by all.'"

"Oh, society writing's some job! There are not enough adjectives. I heard your father tell Susie yesterday to lay off of 'thoroughbred.' And Susie says it's because your father's so thoroughbred himself. The woman must be listening now; is she still crying?"

"Ollie, what's the matter with you? Are you staying here just to listen to that woman?"

"No, to listen to you, but I can't help hearing her. You're not a reporter under your father. If you were, you could talk and listen too."

"Father won't give me a job."

"He can't. Uncle Oliver kids himself into thinking he runs the paper by hiring and firing and your father has to stand for it. How do you think I got my job—by my brilliancy or my experience? Not much. Uncle Oliver told your father to hire me."

The girl looked at him doubtfully. "Poor Father! What does he do with cubs like that?"

"Do? Do you know why they call him Gentleman George in the office? Because he is just that. He's a gentleman; he doesn't curse over what's handed to him; he makes it over. He made Susie Ryland; she'll tell anybody so. He taught me more in two months than I learned in two years at college. The only man he couldn't teach was Brate; and when Brate put it to Uncle Oliver that he and your father couldn't stay on the same paper, Uncle Oliver took Brate off and put him in charge of these gas properties he's buying in Virginia. Brate came here from Middletown yesterday; I saw him, but he didn't go near the office. He's sore still, I bet."

Young Knox looked around the corner of the door and lowered his voice to a whisper.

"Say, she was listening to us, not into the telephone. Can you beat it!"

"Maybe her number's in use and she's waiting for it. Who is she? I saw her upstairs in the window when I came in."

"She's the new boarder—came after dinner in priceless furs, whatever they are. And when the other women asked Mrs. Gazann what her references were, Gazann said they were her board in advance and any one of them could give the same references, if they liked. She's a rip-snorting beauty, so the other women suspect her of everything, from leaving a husband to bootlegging. Oh, she's got her number; she's talking."

A voice, low and urgent, trying to keep itself from being overheard and yet insisting on attention, vibrated through the little hall.

"I will not stay here; it is a hateful place. It is full of people far more curious than any hotel could hold. . . . No, even if I stayed in my room all the time they'd talk about me. I've stayed there for hours and hours, doing nothing but wait; without even a telephone. I have to come downstairs to telephone you."

The silence that followed was as urgent and as insistent as the sound had been. Even in the next room Linda could feel it.

When the woman spoke again her words had to Linda the same wistful desperation that had been in her face as it looked out of the window.

"You need not have left me alone this way. You could have telegraphed if you couldn't telephone."

Knox looked at Linda and his mouth no longer sagged.

"No," the voice had gained courage. "I will not stay. I am going to the hotel. . . . No, I don't care how small it is and I don't care whether you are there or not. . . . You expected me to come; you must have made some arrangements about your affairs."

Again she paused. Then sharply and with a faintly ominous accent, "I will wait until seven o'clock; not a moment later. . . . No, I don't have to go back to New York to get out of here; there are other trains than the New York ones."

There was the sound of an abruptly hung-up receiver; the whisper of silken skirts; and a light step on the stairs.

"Some motion-picture hero isn't doin' right by our Lizzie," said Knox.

"I hope she leaves before he comes," said Linda curtly.

"There's your father. Gazann has him; it's a touch; you can tell by her voice."

"Much chance Mrs. Gazann has for a touch the last of the month." The girl bent forward.

At the front door a man was listening to a tall woman so thin she was almost gaunt. His head was bent a little to one side and inclined toward the woman with polished deference.

When she finished her plea he straightened up and said, "He shouldn't have talked to you that way, Mrs. Gazann."

Movement and voice in a woman would have gained the name of grace. In this man it was something more impalpable; something beyond well coördinated muscles or felicitous speech, or perhaps behind them. It was noblesse oblige; it was *a* manner, *not manners*.

"Write a letter to the paper," he continued; "there's a column just for that. Ah, Linda!"

"Father, there is one telegram upstairs and three letters down here. Is the Bookwell fire out?"

"Almost out." He gave her a quick look. Then his glance passed on to Knox. "Knox, I have just left your uncle at the hotel. He asked me where you lived now and he seemed surprised when I told him you lived here."

"It's my ability to pay my board, Mr. MacGrath, that surprises him."

"He asked me to tell you," said MacGrath, "that he is engaged and does not want to see you until to-morrow, and he authorized me to get you passed into the theater to-night, if you like."

"Like! I've been trying to persuade Linda to let me go on her passes ever since I brought them to her. Do you mind if I go with you?"

"I will even make use of you. I had no time to get the seats; so I'll send you ahead after dinner, if you don't mind. The house will be crowded."

He took Linda's arm and they moved upstairs together.

CHAPTER II

On the third floor at the back George MacGrath opened the door for his daughter. The room, like a shabby child, was delightful in spite of itself. There was a bed, a washstand with shaving things on it, and a piece of furniture of shiny oak, the kind that in boarding houses is called a bureau. But these things were scarcely to be seen unless you picked them out, for in front of you, as you entered, was an old clawed table whose mahogany had been dulled by many hands. And on the table were piled all kinds of new and shiny books—psychologies, novels, histories, philosophies—bearing little printed slips: "For the Editor of the *Morning Sun*." On the walls of the room were bookshelves crowded with all kinds of older books—law books, medical books, old paper-bound Tauchnitz editions, inscribed Heidelberg, 1875, Vevay; and a case of paper-bound French books—Bourget, Cherbuliez, Feuillet.

All these books—red and green and yellow and blue ones—were loved. You could feel it. They weren't taken off the table, or the floor, or wherever they were put after their journey from the office, and placed in the shelves until they had won their way into affection.

Over the books were pictures that must have been put there the same way the books were put on the shelves.

There was the inside of the Grand Opera House at Paris with an inscription in a pointed hand, "To Romeo from Juliet"; there was a blue-and-gold painting of the curve of the Mediterranean where Nice becomes Mentone; and an Anderson photograph of the ilex trees of the Villa d'Este; a Pompeii of glowing color and warm rock. And between the windows the wall was filled with signed photographs of writers, artists, actors. Under them was an illuminated legend: "There is no mistake so deadly as to do nothing when things are going wrong."

Beside a little oval table with a brass student's lamp was a long sleepy-hollow chair worn threadbare. So, too, was the little pillow in it, quite evidently designed for a back that must have had sensitive spots; a chair as desirable as a mother's lap or lover's arms after absence. The only other chair in the room, beside the oak ones of the house of Gazann, was a stately green leather one so shiny and cool it was evidently intended for the uninvited guest and unfailingly offered to him.

Linda handed her father the telegram, a long night letter over which he pondered for a few minutes.

"I am invited to rub Aladdin's lamp," he mused. "My brother Sandy has been made vice-president of the Consolidated Gas Company of Virginia and he invites me to spend the rest of my life looking down gas wells in Virginia."

"Oh, Father, are you going to?"

He smiled at her and with the smile there came into his face a tolerant kind of quietude, as of energy suppressed for physical reasons perhaps. Linda could not have found a reason for the restlessness this quietude roused in her. Her own zest for adventure burned ragged holes in her days of study and she slaked it by leading debates, and acting parts in the Dramatic Club plays, and by going from office to office for advertisements for the *Annual*, and even by wearing two fraternity pins in defiance of custom. The Springfield University was co-educational.

"Father, you said last week that two weeks in the country would cure your cough; and now here's the country offered you."

"But not for two weeks, my dear."

She brushed this aside. "Father, is it more money?"

"It is, if you get paid."

"And didn't you say yesterday that you were tired of every word in the English language?"

"I can't get rid of the English language in Virginia."

She looked at him helplessly for a moment; then she said, "Do you know, Father, I believe it's because your brother made you the offer. You turned down his last offer. And he never writes you or anything, or comes to see you."

MacGrath swept his room with a quick look and all the sophisticated little lines about his eyes crinkled into infinite amusement.

"I wonder what Sandy would do here in Mrs. Gazann's house? Her Friday fish would make him wonder why he lived. Sandy used to employ the best chef in New York; he may yet, for all I know. But I do know that his butler wouldn't brush his coat when his valet was ill, and Sandy went unbrushed."

"Father, if he made you an offer that would take you to New York, would you accept it?"

MacGrath straightened the picture of the Paris Opera House that was askew on the wall over the washstand.

"Well, now, little traveler, that is a shrewder question. All my boyhood was spent in New York; I was born and raised there, as they say in Virginia. Nobody knows New York better; the pulse of art beats there as well as the pulse of trade. I have many friends there. But an offer from Sandy—well, all the Scotch blood in the family runs through Sandy MacGrath's heart. I've an idea Sandy wants somebody who is not so tired of the English language that he can't use it in behalf of Sandy MacGrath.

"Some day, my dear," he went on, "when you've finished college, and are a bit more mature, we'll go to New York—maybe to live. I'd like to have you meet New York, well presented; she's a fastidious lady, of many whims, and she has rich gifts for those she likes." He sighed, his eyes on the curve of the street before the Opéra that led into the Street of Peace.

"But we have to have money to do all that, Father, and you turn down things that offer you more money. Susie Ryland said yesterday that when you were Washington correspondent for that New York paper ten years ago, you were the most promising political editor they had; that there was talk of starting a paper for you here in Ohio because you knew everybody worth knowing in politics and because nothing was too original for you to undertake. If that was true, what brought you here, Father?"

He did not look up, but there was that faint change in his voice that she knew meant the opening of the door on a hushed place.

"My dear, nobody who can avoid it, starts new papers. They buy old ones that need new editors to make them grow. Ten years ago the Springfield *Morning Sun* belonged to John Shelburn, father of its present owner, and it was not making any money; principally because Shelburn was making gas for Cleveland and steel in Middletown. Shelburn made me an offer, which I declined. Then came your mother's long illness. I took her to her own Virginia mountains; and she died there. I had no money left and of course no work. The elder Shelburn had died. His son made me another offer. There are literally none of your mother's people left in Virginia; there was no aunt or cousin to leave you with, while I hunted for work in a place I might prefer. And so I brought you here. And it has been a kindly and pleasant place for you, Linda, a good place to bring up a girl without her mother. The

lads are well-bred sons of men who have become my friends; the schools are good. I know you wanted an Eastern college——"

"Oh, Father, I didn't really. I wouldn't have left you for four years for anything; and you know what it would have meant to me, if I had; I might have learned what was in my textbooks, but all the rest that you have taught me, day after day, without my knowing I was being taught—all the little suggestions, all the ways of looking at things, all the humor, and all the proportion, I would have missed. I've had you with the world's news at your finger tips all these years, and I've had so much more. We've been such good friends, Father, such comrades—haven't we—say we have."

"Yes; all of that. It's why I have explained this to you this way."

He paused, impatient with this language he so easily mastered; it invariably gave out when you needed it most. He was indeed tired of making English expressive; tired of his slovenly educated reporters, tired of interminable galleys. How could he tell Linda that the very thought of closing his desk and taking train or ship any place, any time, was one that had to be held down by daily sight of her growing grace and promise. He to whom the cities of the world were appetizers, nursed by Heidelberg in his teens, approved by Paris in his twenties, dined by Washington in his thirties—considered his daughter's restlessness and found no words to tell her that he stayed where he was because a growing girl was a delicate flower to uproot and he must give her her chance; it was the last and the best thing he could do for that girl he had loved in Paris, and lived with in Washington; lived in a rainbow of glowing color with never a thought of the pot of gold. In what words could he make this girl's daughter see that she was succeeding in this small midwestern town in a way that would mean success in any city of the world he knew so well, and that it was her success, not his richness of living, that concerned him.

"You see, my dear," he said at length, "it would be easy to wire Sandy my acceptance of his offer. But it's not enough to reach out for things. You must be able to hold them when you have grasped them. In our family Sandy was always the one who got the best of the bargain. It would be pleasant to believe that he meant what he said and that he would really like to see me well provided for; but there is nothing in the last twenty years of my experience with Sandy to substantiate that belief. He probably needs some faculty of mine he is familiar with; but I cannot believe he needs it permanently."

Rather suddenly his quiet vanished and his voice held hot anger. “It was I, ten years ago, who told Sandy MacGrath there was oil and gas in Virginia. It was I who showed him where it was. I found it. I found it in my long tramps over the mountains when I earned enough to make your mother comfortable doing whatever I could that would keep me there where she was. But I had no money and my wife was dying. All I could do was to tell Sandy. And now he offers me a little work at a little salary in the company he has but lately organised, after these years of quiet buying of land to which I directed him.”

The girl’s face flushed. “And he is your brother; the only one of all your family left. You’d think he would want to give you your share.”

The dinner gong clanged, and he opened the door for her.

At one end of the long table the star boarder was pouring the contents of his cream pitcher into his coffee with visible discontent. At the other, where Mrs. Gazann presided, MacGrath seated his daughter and paused while Mrs. Gazann pronounced his name to the new woman whose chair was next to his. She repeated, “Mr. MacGrath.” Linda could see that look of her father’s that searched while it seemed to be merely glancing. She also saw Knox look up from his just-filled plate when MacGrath’s cultivated voice asked with the merest courtesy:

“Is this your first visit to Springfield?”

“My last, I think,” she answered, if it could be called an answer.

“I have rarely known a Virginian to like Ohio at first sight,” said MacGrath.

She turned on him eyes shadowed with faint circles. “Why, how did you know—” she hesitated—“that I was from Virginia?”

“Not an intricate process, Mrs. Brate. It was merely your pronunciation of the letter r.”

The woman let the fork in her hand slip. “Yes, but you have my name wrong.”

“Then you are not—Mrs. Brate?”

“Oh, no. He merely brought me here. I am unfamiliar with the city. He found this place for me.” She did not offer her name.

MacGrath looked thoughtfully at the hand that had let the fork slip. It was trembling. “You must not get lost in our little city. If you need help, my

daughter will direct you."

"Thank you!" Her voice was as low as his; a voice on the edge of something.

She did not finish her dinner, but left the table early, her quick step carrying her through the door with self-conscious haste.

"Father," said Linda, "let's go early to the theater so that we can go by the fire. If Ollie's going for the seats, we don't have to get there ahead of time."

"You'll have to hurry then. I'll go upstairs with you; I left my pipe."

"Father," said Linda, as she stood by his desk, waiting for him to fill his pipe, "how did you know that woman's name? Mrs. Gazann didn't introduce her."

"I saw her come with Brate."

"She said it wasn't her name, didn't she? She came down to the telephone this afternoon, Father, to reproach some man for neglecting her. Ollie and I heard her. She seemed in some kind of trouble. Did you know that, just by looking at her? I never knew you to talk to any of the women here before, that way. Did you think she needed help?"

"I don't know, Linda. It's because I don't know that I spoke to her. In such uncertainties—well, I have known the merest chance to change a decision that did not have right behind it to give it stability."

The girl paused in the shabby hall, frowning a little.

"Oh, Father, if you could have heard her this afternoon; she cried at the telephone. I didn't want Ollie to hear her, and I didn't want to pass her in the hall, while she was crying, so I waited in the dining room talking with Ollie. Is there anything to do?"

"I am afraid not—not directly."

"But if you wait——"

She preceded him out the front door, looking for the shining white tree. And, so looking, she almost stumbled over a suit case on the porch floor. Her father caught her and looked over her head for the owner.

A dim figure disentangled itself from the little white tree on the lawn and hurried to the porch. The voice that made a soft apology was punctuated

with blurred Virginian *r*'s. In the woman's hands, held with infinite care, was a tiny bough of blossoms.

"They bloom like that in the Virginia mountains, the wild plum, do they not?" said MacGrath. "I have gathered them often there."

The woman put out a protesting hand, as if she could not bear it. Then she said, "I have seen you gather them; you once came into our yard to ask for some for your sick wife. We would have given Linda Paget the whole tree, if she wanted it."

It was so unexpected, so utterly unbelievable, that not even George MacGrath could take it in. When he did, he straightened up with a swift look up and down the street, and he spoke with rapidity, without question: "You are leaving! Let me take your bag. It is only a short walk to the station."

For a moment the woman neither moved nor spoke. One of her blossoms fell to the floor and Linda stooped and picked it up. Then the low Southern voice whispered, "I was going to the hotel. There are no trains out—now; not for hours."

Something urgent seemed to flow from MacGrath. "You looked up the trains? You do want to go? There is the traction car. You change at Middletown for Cincinnati, where you can get a train in almost any direction. Have you money?"

She did not answer for some seconds, and her hesitation became something ominous to Linda, as if more hung on it than could be measured in so short a time.

"I cannot change at Middletown. I don't want to go there."

Apparently MacGrath scarcely heard the futile words. It was the tones of the voice he was listening to.

"You will not meet anybody that you know there."

"I might." The tone was final.

MacGrath bent toward her; his voice lowered. "I must have known, from the first moment I saw you, to what race you belonged in Virginia—the Randolfs and the Brinsleys. I did not know *you* at once; but I do know you now. You are Valentine, are you not; Valentine Brinsley. I knew your mother —you are very like her. Where is she?"

She lifted her eyes, dark and sullen, to his, and whatever she had meant to say died on her lips. No sound came from them, though they framed the

words,

"She is dead."

The man was still a moment, and Linda stirred. Then he said, "She was so dear a friend—your mother. Do you remember bringing the white blossoms, your little arms full of them, the day—the day Linda Paget died? I put them all about her, on her bed. In return for that gift, so gracious, so unreturned, let me go with you to Middletown and see you safely on your train. Let me do this for Linda Paget's sake. Wherever she is now,—wherever that other Valentine is—do you not think they would thank you for permitting me this?"

"I—oh, how can I? I must leave some word." She looked restlessly from house to street, and then her eyes came to a stop on the white blossoms shimmering under a faint breeze.

"Why must you leave word?" MacGrath was saying. "Why not for once consider your own wish? Why not take for once, instead of give? See, the traction leaves from the corner, in a few minutes. We have but to walk across the park."

MacGrath lifted her bag. "Tell Ollie, Linda," he said evenly, "that I was detained and that I leave him to take you to the theater. You can ask Mrs. Gazann to use the third ticket, if you like."

Linda moved softly to the little blossoming tree, watching the two figures grow into shadows as they crossed the park. She lifted her hand and touched the lowest bough of the tree, brushing from it a cobweb, light and soft as the flowers beneath it, yet strong enough to rob them of their shining and their growth. She looked at the cobweb on her fingers and back at the flowers that had shrunk under it, then she looked thoughtfully away at the two figures across the park, their dim outlines made visible by the lights of a car that had stopped at their signal.

CHAPTER III

Linda MacGrath, tucking her gloveless hand in her pocket, sped out of the shop door and was held from bumping a girl she might easily have bowled over by the fox muff the girl held out in front of her face.

"Say there, you baby catapult, keep off my nose. What's the hurry?"

"Hello, Susie Ryland. Nothing except your elegant fur kept you from a black eye. What sent you abroad so early in the morning?"

"Oh that dumb matinée musicale! Why in the name of Saint Cecilia women don't play music in the afternoon instead of the morning I can't see. There isn't a Springfield woman who has her housework done by eleven and yet they all pretend they're Chicago millionaires with lackeys to bow them to their cars right from their breakfasts in bed. They all wear the same coats and hats each time and they sit with the same expressions on their faces and yet I have to describe their furs and make a picture of their pleasure."

"Say, Sue, you get paid for it. You're sporting furs none of them can afford by writing about the furs they can afford; where's the fuss come in? You're wasted on Springfield. I wish you would go to New York and give me your job."

"You! You couldn't hold this job two days. You'd have Mrs. Bookwell upholstered in her usual black velvet, and Mrs. Winters in a new layer of fat. You wouldn't see through appearances."

"Do I have to see through four layers of fat?"

"To be a society reporter you don't see fat. You see ideals."

"Susie, you have blinders, not ideals."

"Well, I cash 'em in, whatever they are."

Linda looked at her wistfully. "I asked father if I couldn't have a job on his paper. But he said I'd have to go right on through college to learn how to handle my adjectives. You didn't go to college, Sue."

"What makes you think I know how?"

"Father said you did and so did Ollie."

A faint flush rose to the girl's face. "Yes, I know what Ollie Knox says! He told me yesterday if I used the word 'thoroughbred' again he would turn the hose on me. What do you want to go into this kind of work for, Linda, with your face and figure and every man in the place crazy about you?"

"For money. I never have a cent. It takes all Father's money to pay Mrs. Gazann and his cabs home at two in the morning."

"Why don't you marry money?"

"Why don't you yourself? What a silly question. You know it wouldn't be mine if I married it, and there isn't any money here to marry."

"There is Bob Bookwell. Why aren't you in your little school this morning?"

"I'm going to the Beta ball to-night and I haven't an earthly thing to wear. I'm cutting psychology to make over one of mother's dresses. I ran down here for lace."

"So it's the Beta's now. How many fraternities do you run with?"

"If you tie to one, you're gone; there's no competition. If you tie to three, there's so much safety in numbers that nobody cares what parties you go to. Good-by! I wish I had your muff. I put my gloves on the heater to dry them at the only moment in the whole spring that Gazann fired the furnace and now I've only one glove."

"Well, you hate gloves, anyhow. I'm coming to dinner at your home to-morrow. Ollie Knox has asked me. I have two passes to the theater because the star wants notice of herself in the society column; and I am taking Ollie, so he has to blow me for the dinner."

"And he doesn't have to pay cash for it at Gazann's."

"Oh, well, I don't like Ollie for his cash. 'By!"

From across the street where he had been watching, a large blond lad lounged to Linda's side and fell into step with her, bending down to look at the two fraternity pins her open coat displayed.

"Say, Linda, if that was my Beta pin, you wouldn't wear a Sigma Chi one over it."

"That's one reason I'm not wearing your Beta pin, Bob Bookwell."

"Whose is it?"

"So long as it's not yours, what do you care?"

"Oh, I don't care. Only I get sick of seeing nice girls like you going around tagged with the pins of the fastest boys in town."

The girl turned her bright blue eyes on him angrily. "Fast your granny! You wouldn't say that to them. Who's fast in the Betas?"

"Why, the whole lot."

"Sure, that's easy. Anybody can say that. Name one or two, and see how it is to be brave."

"Well, there is John Winters; he was hanging around last night at the railroad station with a man named Brate that everybody knows is a crook."

"You like the Betas better than us, that's plain."

"No, I don't. But I'm sick of this way of fighting. I'd stand up for you the same way, if John Winters talked about you."

"He won't ever have the chance."

"Oh, a thing doesn't have to be true for people to say it."

"You mean——"

"I mean I'd like you to say that the Betas are fast to their faces."

"I'd as lieve."

"Then you won't mind my repeating it?"

He gave her a disconcerted look. "You know whatever you do is more important to me than what other girls do. You know why it worries me to have you going about with these sports. I don't even like the idea of your driving home with them late at night."

"Well, my word! They would like to hear that. Make yourself easy about the driving home. You know perfectly well Father always comes for me as he leaves the office at midnight. There's one thing you can do, Bob, about these crazy ideas of yours and that's keep them to yourself. Good-by! Don't walk further with me. We'd be in a quarrel by the time we reached the corner."

Mrs. Gazann shuffled through Linda's door on tired feet whose arches had long been troubling her.

"You certainly do look pretty; the lavender silk makes your hair look like fresh chocolate." She sighed. "Gazann used to call my hair chocolate hair."

Linda twisted a lavender ribbon from a candy box around her chocolate hair and laughed at the appropriateness of the decoration.

"Mrs. Gazann, if you had time to marcel your hair it would be stunning; you've so much of it. I suppose you haven't heard anything about Mr. Gazann."

"Heard anything! That detective took my good money away from me and hunted all through New York for the name Gazann. I says to him, I says, 'You're nothing but a crook to take money and call this detective work. Nobody would keep the name of Gazann that wasn't married to it.'"

"How long has he been gone, Mrs. Gazann?"

"Seven years."

"Well, what do you want him back for? Aren't you getting along better without him than with him? If he were here he'd just use up your money."

"Well, there's times when I feel like that, too. And then I think I'll just get a divorce and look around a bit. But there's other times when I know a divorce wouldn't do me any good at all, because I don't meet any men I want to marry. The men I meet all want free board and they don't any of 'em look as good to me even as Gazann. Is there some one coming for you to-night? Funny idea your father has about bringing you home himself. Well, I know you're the best chaperoned girl in Springfield. I heard your father tell you yesterday that it was only the underbreds who didn't like chaperones and that sooner or later an underbred gave you trouble and you might as well weed them out sooner than later. Haven't you any other cape than that? Do you want to borrow mine?"

"Something might happen to it, Mrs. Gazann. You know these fraternity dances aren't held in private houses. This cape is good enough."

"Well, I'll leave the light in the hall for you; I know it won't be kept burning later than one o'clock."

"You wouldn't believe, Mrs. Gazann, how quickly midnight comes. I'm always having to run out to father's cab just when things are at their best."

"You take it from me that's the smart way to do things. It's leaving men just when they want you most that makes them chase you. Don't they come out to your father's hack in droves to ask him to let you stay? I've seen them ride home here with their supper plates in their hand to get a little more time with you. I've seen them come down the steps from where the party was, begging you not to go."

There was no group of lads coming down the steps with Linda that night, as she came out to her father's cab; no eager voices urging her to stay. Never before had her father known her to come unattended to his waiting cab. To-night as she drew her shabby little evening cape under her chin he was not surprised to find her brilliant color gone.

"Well," he said softly.

"Oh, Father, what do you think. I met Bob Bookwell this morning; you remember I told you when you got up this noon what he said about that Brate man and the station. And Bob called John Winters and all the Betas fast, and I said he wouldn't dare say it to John's face, and he said he would and he didn't care if I repeated what he said."

"You didn't repeat it, did you, Linda?"

"Not just like that, Father." She was breathless. "But when John Winters said something about nearly getting arrested last night, I told him he oughtn't to go about with a crook like Brate. And he asked me how I knew and I just laughed and told him he especially oughtn't to go about with a crook where the rival frat men could see him because it reflected on his whole fraternity. And oh, Father, what kind of force has a fraternity over a boy? Just say its name to him and everything gets different. This was just a bit of light dance talk until I said the word fraternity, and in two minutes there were a dozen of them in it."

"Well," his voice was quiet.

"Well, of course, I ought to have backed right down and said I was only talking; but I got the crazy idea that would be cowardly. Bob Bookwell had said he didn't care if the whole frat knew he had called them fast, so I took him at his word. Wouldn't you have thought, Father, that they'd just have laughed and maybe ragged Bob about it to-morrow?"

"What did they do?"

"Oh, they sent four boys to his house a block away at once, to bring him right over there to take it back. And they brought him. And, Father, he looked me straight in the face and said he had never said it."

"Ah!"

A sob crept into her voice. "Bob Bookwell did this, Father. Bob Bookwell, who only last week told me he loved me and asked me if I wouldn't wait until he could marry me. Last week he thought he loved me enough for that and to-night he did this. You'd have thought anybody would

have known he was lying. You'd have thought all of those boys would have known it by the way he looked."

"Maybe they did."

"Maybe; but that didn't keep them from apologizing to Bob for the fuss and letting him go home with their excuses sounding halfway down the street. And it didn't keep them from moving away from me as if I were some kind of a plague. I had to go to the dressing room and stay there; nobody danced with me after that. Why, Father, all these boys were my good friends, some of them were my special suitors and not one of them stood by me. They just acted as if I were something dangerous."

"You were, weren't you, my dear?"

"Father!"

"No woman can afford to get into a situation like that, Linda, in public. Sometimes it can be carried off privately."

"But *all* of them, Father! If there had been one boy who had stood by me, I would have remembered it all my life."

"Think what it would have meant to him, Linda."

"To him!" She fell silent; then, "What if it did mean something to him! It is dreadful, Father, to have to go into the dressing room because nobody asks you to dance. There were girls there who had been crying. Oh, it isn't fair! A girl ought to have the chance, if a boy does a thing like this, to make him own up that he has lied. Can't he be made to take it back?"

Her father helped her out of the cab and they climbed the stairs softly.

"How," said her father, "is Bob Bookwell to be made to take it back?"

She stared at him. "I wish I had slapped his face in front of them all and said, 'You are a Liar!'"

"Why didn't you?"

"How could I? And it was so plain that it was a lie that I thought they would all see it. I remember being sorry I had thrust Bob into such a situation."

He looked at her broodingly. "If you had been older you would have known that only an unusual lad would stand up under a thing like that—brought by four men from a rival fraternity to face a lot of girls and boys."

"It isn't only Bob, Father; it's John Winters and all the other boys who have been my friends. They didn't care at all about me, compared to their fraternity."

"The fraternity, Linda, represents public opinion for these boys—the public opinion of their college life. It is a hazardous thing for a woman to put herself against public opinion. Women always find this hard to believe. You see, a man finds it very difficult to respect the person who has lost the respect of others. It is the herd instinct and no woman can fight against it with more than a brief success."

The girl's face whitened. "Cowards! They knew me to be truthful and publicly permitted my truth to be doubted. I will never dance with any of them again; I've some herd instinct of my own."

"My dear, the tragedy of all failure is not the failure, but that we should bring it on ourselves and then not learn of it. If you learn, you have won something worth paying even failure for. The world is so full of men and women not brave enough to look their failures in the face, not wise enough to say; it was my fault. See, Linda, *you* did this; not young Bookwell or John Winters, but you. You were garrulous; quite without malice, or with much malice. Now look it in the face; possess it; don't be possessed by it."

CHAPTER IV

Linda laid her hat on the shiny green chair in her father's room and then tore off the month of March from the calendar over her father's desk.

"It has been a hateful month, the most hateful month I remember. I'm sick of saying that the tragedy of failure is to bring it on yourself and then not to learn from it. What can you learn from failure anyhow? It's really a path you need not have taken. I don't believe you ought to stay on such a path. I believe you ought to get out of any place where you're failing."

She looked down at the familiar pile of bills on the desk and compared them with the unopened ones of last month. They were about the same. She had had to have new shoes, so there was that extra bill.

"I wonder if the people who can afford to pay bills ever run them. Come in. Mrs. Gazann, what can I do for you?"

"Nothing, Miss Linda; it's your father I came to see. It's the first of the month, and he'll be coming home to dinner with his pay in his pocket."

"Why, Mrs. Gazann, aren't you the little money grabber! Do you think it's that necessary to be on hand?"

"I don't think it is, Miss Linda; I know it. I missed it last month, and I didn't get paid until the middle of March. It's better for your father. Men have no sense about such things. If your board is paid, you can go in the clothes you have. So let them be paying their board first. Your father hasn't come, I take it."

Linda grinned. "Maybe he expects you to be waiting for him, Mrs. Gazann."

A faint twinkle lightened the harassed eyes of the gaunt woman.

"There's more men have stayed away when they expected to find me in their rooms than have come."

"How scandalous! How do you avoid gossip with all these clacking women about you and your need to rob the pockets of their men before they do?"

Mrs. Gazann looked at herself in the mirror over the bureau. It was not a mirror made to cheer any woman over forty.

"Well, I don't always have time to wash my hair before I put the coloring matter on it and so it's colored in stripes half the time. And you know what chance I have to buy clothes!"

"Some day, Mrs. Gazann, I'm going to wash all that henna off your hair and marcel it and put you into a good pair of corsets and some gray fox furs. With your height and slimness you'll be a stunning-looking woman."

The older woman stared at the young girl with a look that went beyond her to some lost ideal of girlhood.

"If I did that," said Mrs. Gazann, "and went out and found Gazann, he'd probably go blind."

"You know," said Linda, "I've always been sure that you would run into that man again. That's why I don't want you to lose your good looks and your youth. There's Father now."

"Well, you kinda lose your ambition to do your hair when you lose the man you wanted to look nice for. Good evening, Mr. MacGrath. You'll never know how glad I am to see you come."

"There's no welcome like the rent collector's, is there, Mrs. Gazann?" Linda saw her father's eyes twinkle. He put his hands behind his back. "What pains you've been at all in vain. My wages were garnished to-day for a tailor's bill and I haven't a cent."

She fixed her eyes on his face and she seemed to like doing it. It was a young face, for all its forty-eight years. The hair was scarcely touched with gray. The forehead beneath it was bright with dreams, the mouth was full-lipped with humor. She looked down at his clothes.

"You were never garnished for a tailor's bill, Mr. MacGrath. You've been buying them ready-made ever since you came here and you gave your best suit away last week to that young chap I had to put out. I know, because I came near holding him here for the police, until I could telephone you. I thought he might have stolen it. Now there you go, Mr. MacGrath, getting me to talking. He can always get me talking, your father, and I forget all about the board bill."

"I've developed the gift, Mrs. Gazann, with all the duns I get. Here's your money."

Linda had gone to his closet. "What will you do, Father, if you get wet? You haven't another thing to put on but what you are wearing."

Mrs. Gazann closed the door softly.

"Do," said MacGrath. "I'll get dry. You look white, Linda. Have you been out doors to-day?"

"Yes, Father, it's—it's school. Father, couldn't I quit school?"

"Quit! Why you've only a couple of months more to finish this term and only one more year to graduate."

"I know you think I ought to see this thing through, Father," she said, with a ring of suppressed feeling in her voice. "And I would see it through if it was just suddenly losing the fun and the privilege popularity brings a girl; if it was just learning the other side—what the unpopular girl has to stand. But it's more than that; it's the whispers that are hushed when you join a group; it's the group disintegrating because you've joined it; it's all the excuses I have to make when they ask me why I do not go to the things I've always gone to.—Oh, sometimes I think it isn't any of these things; I don't know what it is—but won't you let me stop and go to work? We haven't enough money, not even enough to pay these bills; and look at Susie Ryland. Father, I can write as well as Susie. Can't I get a job on the paper? I could interview, and I could do society."

"If you have to be a reporter, Linda, begin in the police court where you'll have something to write about, not in the parlor where the shape of the teacups is the only conspicuous thing. Get close to the things that shape men and women—hate and love and hunger—not clothes and servants and gossip. Listen to both sides of the case, see what the judge is up against; interview the prisoner." His voice died. "But you are so young, Linda, for the bloom to be rubbed off. I wonder if your mother—what she would think about it."

He sat still looking at her, seeing not the blue eyes that had become shadowed in the last month and the white skin that had become whiter, but the shadowed eyes of the mother in that hour she had become a mother. Then he came back to the exquisite flower creature before him, wondering if the look in her eyes held the pain of birth—if new things were being born in her mind and heart and character. Not character nor love nor strength could grow without pain. He supposed we had to pay in priceless fashion to learn the value of what we gained. He thought of the way he had trained her to run and to fight; of his pleasure in the little muscles getting hard and strong; of her growth into grace and intelligence and character, and always he remembered hoping it would not go hard with her.

"Father," she broke into his thoughts, "I don't want to be a quitter, but unless you think I'm welching I'd rather quit than do anything I can think

of. I'd rather quit than have my old popularity back. I think there must be some better measuring-rod than college success. I think I've been all wrong in believing you are not educated if you don't learn certain things in certain ways. There's something the matter with the sense of proportion there. This thing I did was just a little mistake. If I went on enduring results that seemed to get larger every day, I'd soon be all wrong in my sense of proportion. I'm wrong already. They let me alone so at school that I get too much of myself. And I am getting so that I imagine I am being slighted, even when I am not. That's what I mean when I say I'm losing my sense of proportion."

A silence fell. At length MacGrath said:

"If it's a fight against walls closing in on you, Linda, I'll help you come out of the walls and I'll help you select your weapons. But if it's just running away from a fight, I think you should stay and fight it out. I leave it to you to judge which it is."

She sat still, withdrawn within herself. The dinner bell clanged; footsteps tramped downward; Ollie Knox's voice was lifted for some ear on the floor above him. MacGrath smoked in silence.

"No," said Linda at length; "I am not running away."

MacGrath knocked the ashes from his pipe; and he looked at the face of the miniature on his desk.

"Well, then, it's out in the world for you, my dear."

"Father, may I do this? I have only two more months to finish this year. Would you mind if I went to college in the morning and finished the term's study and got my credits, and in the afternoon took a reporter's job on the *Evening News*?"

"That would be a better fight," MacGrath declared, with a light in his eyes as he looked at her. "If you can do it you will win back your sense of proportion, you will not run away and you may get out from your enclosing walls."

CHAPTER V

Susie Ryland munched an apple while the Court absented himself to eat his honorable luncheon.

"Cub reporters," said Susie, "are always losing their jobs. They write too little or too much; they think or they don't think. Say, what on earth, Linda, are you writing such a volume about; you'll never be fired for writing too little."

"I'm taking notes."

"Great grief, they must be promissory! Haven't you got over taking notes yet? You'd go to an interview with a notebook in your hand."

"Susie, if I could write the way you do, I would blow up and burst with pride. I've seen you go to a symphony concert and just look around and smile at the people you knew and in the next morning's paper you have correctly described every woman and her costume. I don't know how you do it."

"Well, hasn't your father got an eye on you?"

"Not an editorial eye. He said that reporters lost their jobs every week or two and that if I couldn't get a job on my own I had better not go into this business. So I got my job on the *Evening News* without his help."

"How are you paid—space?"

"Yep. I can't do anything else until school is over. Then I'll get a regular job. I wouldn't be here this morning if it wasn't Saturday."

"You can't live on the money you make from space."

"Father pays my board."

"Holy Mardi Gras! If I had anybody to pay my board I'd stick to college." Susie sent Linda the swift glance she spared only for her choicest interviewing. "Is it your space work that keeps you from all the University parties? I know you're not going to them because the parties are my job."

"No," said Linda, "the space work is only part of the reason. I don't get asked to the parties."

"If I didn't know you for a truthful girl brought up by the greatest truth-teller in the world, I'd say you were lying. What are you doing with this money you earn? You're not buying clothes."

"I'm buying rubbers to wade in. I used to look at the pile of duns on Father's desk and think if I had your money, Susie, I'd pay them all next month. But when I get through paying my carfare on the stunts the City Editor sends me on, I haven't enough left to buy clothes."

"Oh, when you get used to money, you'll handle it better."

"Say, I'm hungry, Susie. If I thought his Honor wouldn't get back until two, I'd go to Gazann's for some bread pudding. I wouldn't have to pay for it there."

"Why don't you bring an apple, like I do? It will improve your shape and you'll write better hungry."

"I will not. I never will write better, full or hungry. You can't write just because you know the alphabet. And to think, only a month ago, I thought I could hold your job as well as you.—Well, I'm going home for the bread pudding."

"So long. You're making a mistake to leave, but come back. It's the thing to do after a mistake."

Linda looked about the courtroom. "Funny, I don't want to come back and hear any more of that woman's drivel. If a woman's going in for that kind of thing, why isn't she smarter about it?"

Linda stood on the steps of the courthouse for several minutes while a stray cur fawned on her, was patted and wagged himself down the steps to the street. Out in the gutter the cur turned its head to look at her before starting across the roadway and in that second a shining red car clanged down the middle of the street while other cars drew to the curb to avoid it. The dog stood still for a second in the center of the street and then rolled on its side.

Linda flew down the steps with no more thought of ladder wagon and engine than if they were not sounding their startling noises just around the corner. She bent over the dog, stiffening on the asphalt. And then a clang so close it was like a shot sounded about her head; a human voice spoke in her ear, and hands like steel shot out and dragged her by the neck and shoulders to the curb and, because a crowd was gathering, these steel hands drew her into a basement entrance and shut the door. Linda looked up into eyes over which blond brows were knotted angrily.

"Couldn't you see the engine was coming? Are you deaf?"

"Do you mean am I blind or couldn't I hear the engines coming?"

Even as she said it she knew she was speaking subconsciously from the training of weeks of newspaper work. The man let go of her abruptly. "Holy St. Francis" was all he said.

"Of Assisi or de Sales?" gibbered Linda.

He bent forward with a tolerant male glance at the impudent blue eyes, the flushed cheeks and the parted lips before him.

"That engine didn't hit your head by any chance," he asked.

Linda put her hand to her head. Her hat was on one ear.

"No. I'm so sorry it hit yours."

Then she felt an astonishing thing, yet even as she felt it she was not astonished. She felt him shake her. He was the astonished one. He dropped his hands while a flush spread under his blond skin up to the hatless high forehead, where little drops of perspiration dampened sandy hair to a waviness carefully brushed out.

"I beg you to excuse me. Something does seem to have hit my head. At that I haven't my hat. It isn't even on my ear."

Linda took her hat off, straightened the corn flowers on it, caught the man's look at her hair, and covered her hair again with her hat. "Do you mind telling me what time it is," she said.

"It is fifteen minutes after one."

"Oh!"

"Is that a tragic hour? You sound distressed."

"I am. I had three-quarters of an hour to get lunch and now I've only fifteen minutes and I'm hungry."

"I, too, am hungry."

"Is your time limited?"

"It coincides with yours," he said promptly.

"Well, then, the only place you can lunch without your hat and in a hurry around here is just across from the courthouse, where all the lawyers go, but you'll have to sit on a stool."

"Will you sit on a stool beside me?"

"Yes. I ought to thank you for saving my life, however, before I do anything else."

When he laughed, she wondered if her effort to thank him had sounded as stilted as it had felt.

"It is customary," he said, "to marry anybody who saves your life, is it not?"

"Oh, do you wish me to?"

"Certainly."

"Very well. It seems the least I can do. I should hate to be unconventional."

"My name is Steffin."

"Your first or last name?"

"My last name."

"Well, my first name is Ethelinda."

"Very well. Meantime, a betrothal luncheon should be an affair of ceremony. Would you go with me in one of the taxis out in front of the courthouse and buy a hat and a ring—the hat for me and the ring for you, and eat more ceremoniously than you have suggested?"

"I would be glad to see you own a hat and to see myself own a ring, and to eat as much as I feel I could at this moment, but I'd lose my job."

"Ah, your job!"

"Yes, I am police reporter on the evening paper. A lady of prominence is testifying this afternoon in her own behalf and I have to write about her. Steffin—Steffin—no, you aren't in the case, that I recall."

"No, I am not. I came to the courthouse to see if there was any record of the marriage of another lady of prominence, who ran off a day or so ago to this town, presumably to get married."

"Oh, that's why marriages are on your mind."

"The one I am now considering has another reason for being on my mind."

"Well, if it were anything else involved than my job, I'd go with you."

"But you won't need a job after you've married me. I will support you. It is required by law."

"Can you support me—in the way to which I am accustomed?"

There was absolutely no hesitation in his voice. "Certainly not, but I can support you in the ways to which I am accustomed."

"Ah, how hungry that makes me feel. Perhaps the society reporter will lend me her notes if I am late."

He took her arm and she had again the feeling of great strength of fingers. "Then shall we go across to the courthouse for a license?"

Linda stood still, and in the moment her eyes met the hot gray eyes above her. She actually whitened. Almost it was as if she were faint with the queer thing that swooped down on her, a thing of sheer strong feeling, a moment of an open gate on a new country, and then her conscious mind pounced on the feeling, and she found herself saying to herself, "He's gorgeous and you'd really like to marry him, little impressionable fool. It's the first man you've ever seen you'd like to marry, and for no reason beyond the way he looks at you."

He was quite grave, staring back at her. Then he spoke:

"Fine senses often vibrate instantly to truths it takes long to verify. There may be many reasons why marriage would be successful with us. I am unmarried. Are you?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, this is one way to decide to marry—swiftly, following the event. It has swept on us, swept us together—the event. Have you the nerve to follow it?"

"No. Marriage is not so casual to me."

He sighed and unclasped her arms.

"I'm sorry. Somehow, I don't believe it would have been a risk." He surveyed her gravely. "But you are a woman and of course you'll need courtship—when as a man I don't. What about being engaged to marry me?"

The color began to return to Linda's face. It flooded it and the man made a little inarticulate expression.

"What," said Linda, "does being engaged to you involve?"

He laughed but he said only one word and he drew a little away as he said it—"Exquisite!"

He looked at her thoughtfully for some seconds; then he said, "Doesn't betrothal mean making acquaintance, with a view to marriage, if the acquaintance turns out all that at first sight it promises?"

He bent towards her again. "I wonder if in the heart of every woman the need to give does not come in that first swift moment of impact when a man looks on her and finds her desirable, and she looks back at him and sees possession as a possibility, even when she does not know what it is that she sees."

Linda took a long breath, as if she had been running fast; wondering if this had been what she saw in that first moment when he had taken her by the arm—the moment that opened a gate to a new country. She put out her hands as if to push back some force.

He laughed. "Your hands cannot ward it off," he said. "It is joy. It is power. And if your hands do push against it, it is only that they may gain strength to hold it. Look! I take your hands! The circuit is complete. Do you feel it? You know you do; it is flaming in your cheeks; it is starred in your eyes. You might as well take me now as later."

She shook her hands loose. "No, no. Why, you are mad!"

"Do I not talk rationally?"

"Oh, you talk well enough—of a thing supposed to strike one dumb."

He was not cast down. "Perhaps you've only known boys in love."

"Love," she exclaimed.

He narrowed his eyes, "Yes, love—a word in many mouths. Love must begin; and it is love when it begins as it is love afterwards. Love must be born and it is love at its birth just as it is love after growth. Sometimes we do not know the moment of its birth until long afterwards, but that is not to our credit. Why not have the courage of one's discernment?"

"Or of one's experience." Her delicate brows drew together. "Yours must be amazing."

He considered her for a moment; then, "Some experience of the attraction of women I have had, of course, even some times when I have said, 'This is love.' You are growing angry. Curious! Your whole self is fighting this. Oh, well, fight, Ethelinda! That's what love is for—to win a

fight. I do not say, 'I love you.' I only say, 'I could love you.' Why not? That's a thing one may say when one has a vision. And I think I can add that if you gave yourself a chance, you might love me. Shall we leave it at that? It is enough for an engagement, if you say so."

She made no answer. She looked about the little, stone basement corridor with its ash cans and its dingy barred door.

"It is my cave into which I have dragged you. And you are hungry, and all this new sweep of wings has tired you. Come, it is a day of sunshine, a day of adventure and romance. I can be trusted with you—really. Let's have luncheon and then let's drive out into the sunshine. Here are three hours before us. To-night perhaps you will present me properly to your people; but now this is our day, yours and mine. There are all the things to find out that are only between us: what flowers you like best; what colors please you; what books you read and do not read; what you have done and left undone. Will you?"

"Yes," said Linda. "But if I have to answer any questions I shall not be able to. My head is swimming."

"It's your heart, little To-be-loved; the faster flow of your gorgeous red blood—your head getting used to a new altitude. I wear a lion's head, I know, but even so I can recognize Beauty and you do not mind the Beast."

CHAPTER VI

A little before six that night Linda stopped before the gate of Mrs. Gazann's yard and nodded a silent greeting to the glistening white-and-green tree inside. She did it because she found herself for the first time that she could remember unwilling to open the gate, admitting it as her own. She had entered that gate with many youths, and she had not given her surroundings a thought. She was a little at a loss now to know why the appearance of the house annoyed her so.

It bore the indefinable air of a house too scantily provided with servants for the unessentials of regular window washing and porch scrubbing. The curtains at the front windows were of different colors in the different rooms, because they were not furnished by Mrs. Gazann, but by the renters of the rooms. It was not Mrs. Gazann's fault that these renters would not wipe their muddy feet on the mat she provided for the purpose. She had the porch scrubbed every Saturday and if it rained on Sunday the porch had to go muddy the rest of the week. She had the hall swept every morning, and if it was dusty by night, that was because so many people went through it, not because of poor housekeeping.

So there was a certain courage in Linda's voice when she said, "I live here." And she did not look at the young man, glowing with an afternoon in wind and sun, when she said it. If she had, she would have seen the glow diminish as happens with some fine-fibered people whose perplexities register themselves in their arteries as well as their nerves.

Truth to tell, Linda could not have told why she needed courage. There had been no single thing in all their three hours together that should have caused this poignant regret that she was not taking him to a pleasant home, no matter how modest. For their talk had ranged the realms of Faery; it had never once descended to the plane of broken cement walks and dusty porches.

They had taken the river road and talked of all the things he had said he needed to know instantly about her—her favorite writers, all of whom he also seemed to know well; her favorite poets, whom he didn't know at all. She found out he had been a captain in a company that had been in Belleau Wood—he had put it laconically and named his company—and that he liked autumn winds and blue eyes and had studied law once and been a newspaper

reporter once; that he liked dogs, and most children, and that though the War had interfered with such things as the practice of law, he still practiced it, though he was also in business, several businesses.

But after a while he knew all about her; about her father and her college and the job she was holding while she finished college. Good Heavens, how she had talked! Good Heavens, how she had wanted to talk!

"Do you know," she said, pausing before the door, "I believe I have talked every minute." Watching closely for a hoped-for approval of this faultiness she became aware of the dimmed glow in his face and she drew back.

A curtain in the front window of the house was cautiously drawn back and Mrs. Gazann's face peered out and was as cautiously withdrawn. The man frowned with some concentration that did not, for the first time that afternoon, include the girl.

"You live here?" he asked. "You've lived here some time?"

She felt her color rising. "Yes." Somehow it was all she could say.

"That was the—the proprietor at the window, wasn't it?"

Poor Mrs. Gazann's hair was unusually streaky this week, but Mrs. Gazann was her friend. One did not apologize for a friend. She looked at him speechlessly.

And it being the first time this had occurred in three hours, the young man presently took note of it. His frown of concentration unbent. He gave porch and windows a lightening glance and then he peered into her flushed face.

"Why, you precious, lovely sun-girl, you rainbow of light and promise, you do not think it matters to me where you live or how you live or with whom you live, so it isn't a husband! I had to come here this morning to make urgent inquiries and I received only aggravating answers. That is all. The lady whose head just appeared at the window was not born yesterday or the day before. She should be in the diplomatic service. Listen, dawn-flower, what were you thinking of me to put such a look in your face?"

Linda flung the door open hurriedly, stooping for the paper the paper boy threw at their feet with a smack. He reached it before she did and his face touched hers. He laughed at her.

"Once, in all this twenty years we have covered this afternoon," he said gaily. "But wait! After I have seen your father——"

She looked up the narrow stair. For one second the odor of cooking food, the dull carpet of the room they called the parlor, the dreary mustard walls, and the white marble mantel actually nauseated her.

He laid his hat on the marble-topped table and observed her narrowly. "You are troubled."

"It is because you are such a stranger to me."

"What, after all these hours! Well, then, it should give the final zest. It is the soul of romance. It is the reason long engagements are so fatal. The woman should venture with the unknown, so that she gasps over its strangeness. The Princess of the Kiss woke to strange lips on her own and she rose and followed them. Isolde saw a strange face and loved it so she had to blame it on a magic potion. Romance lived in those days."

"Good Heavens!" she gasped. "How much you do know about women. I'm going to bring Father downstairs now. Do you know as much about men?"

He laughed at her. "It's romance I know about, not women; except in so far as romance requires a woman to make it romance. Maybe I'm incurably romantic. No, I don't know much about men but I had a father once."

"Will you wait here?"

Had she been asked to wait for his mother or his father or any of his relatives, she knew she would have paced the floor holding her breath. But as she mounted the stairs, from the tail of her eye she saw him sink comfortably on the uneven sofa, and open the paper. She stopped a second and looked down at him. Men were strange. The light from the parlor window shone on his blond hair, perceptibly waving now that the sleeking process had not occurred for some time. His shoulders escaped being broad. He swung one leg over the other with ease;—the figure of a Mercury not of a Mars; delicately nerved, long and slim—and a stranger to her. It was indeed romance, for even while she admitted his strangeness some delicate new rejoicing of her blood denied it. When she opened her father's door her face was white.

"I've not been in court all afternoon, Father. I've been riding with a strange man. I've walked on the river's bank with him."

"You look it." He had risen from his deep, hollowed chair when she came in. He now laid his unsmoked cigar on the desk.

"He's downstairs, waiting to speak to you. He does not live here. I believe he lives in New York or Long Island or maybe both places. His name is Steffin."

"Very well. Are you going downstairs with me?"

"Why, yes," breathlessly.

As they neared the drawing-room, the man at the window reading his paper made an odd noise. One long leg fell off the knee of the other and he straightened up.

"Holy Saint Francis!" he ejaculated, and the note of amazement was so arresting that involuntarily Linda and her father stopped.

MacGrath did not hold out his hand at Linda's presentation of her guest. He merely said "Good evening," and waited. But the other man had been seized by something so interesting to him that it shone not only in his eyes, but radiated about him.

"Why, you are George MacGrath, sir, are you not? Alexander MacGrath's brother. You are the associate editor of Shelburn's paper here, aren't you? I've known your brother for some years; since the War, in fact. We are all in this new gas company, Shelburn and Lansell and your brother —but of course you know—" He paused, knitting his blond brows as if to recall something that was escaping him. "You yourself, Mr. MacGrath——"

"No, I'm not in it."

"Oh, you should be, sir! Of course it won't pay now, but it's going to make so much money in five years that it's well worth going without everything right now to buy in. I have been in Middletown in the steel mills, arranging for the new pipe lines we are about to install. There's enough gas there to heat all the Southern States."

"I understand there is. I suspected it ten years ago."

Again there was an imperceptible pause, as the young man once more knit his brows. "You knew it, sir, that long ago, and aren't in it now, though you believe in it?"

In the side hall the telephone had been ringing for some seconds. It stopped now, and Mrs. Gazann came to the door. She gave a curious glance at Steffin, but she spoke to Linda. "The *Evening News* wants to speak to you, Miss Linda. This is the third time they have telephoned since four o'clock."

"Oh," gasped Linda, "I forgot the *News* altogether. They wanted my copy and I never got it there."

Around the curve of the hall, Mrs. Gazann halted her a moment.

"Is that man a friend of yours, Miss Linda?"

Hand on the receiver, Linda nodded.

"Well, he spent an hour this morning trying to pump me about that woman that came so suddenly a couple of weeks ago and left without a word. It seemed awfully important to him. He must like her a lot."

For a second Linda just stared at her, while she envisaged Steffin's pause as they had entered the house. Why would he make inquiries about that woman? Wait—when her father had told the woman she could take the traction to Middletown and change there, she had said she didn't want to go to Middletown. And that was where this man had been, working for a company in which Shelburn was interested and his man Brate; and it was Brate who had brought the woman here to Mrs. Gazann's. Could it have been to Middletown the woman had been telephoning?

Linda leaned on the telephone stand, trying to recall what it was the woman had said; remembering the sob in the woman's voice and the desolation of her appeal. Even Ollie had hoped the woman would leave before the man came to her. The recollection lay cold at Linda's heart.

Could a man who had been as charming as Steffin had been to her this afternoon be as unkind to any woman as this unseen man at the other end of the telephone had been to the woman who had sobbed over his answers while Linda and Ollie Knox waited?

But how could you answer this question when you asked it about a strange man you knew nothing about. Strangers, no matter how enchanting to talk with, were not for anything more than the moment's light interchange of talk. And yet how they had talked! And he had spent an hour with Mrs. Gazann trying to find out what had become of a woman he had been so unkind to that she ran away from him, for fear he would be more unkind than could be borne.

She felt a little sick as she picked up the receiver and said "Hello."

As she ended her explanation to the *News* office and hung up the receiver, she leaned against the wall. This thing that had possessed her was really enchantment. She must rid herself of it somehow. That she could think only of this man's deference, of his consideration of even her most girlish

ideas, was but a part of the enchantment. Men could be like that to women of their own class and negligent to the point of brutality to women who were not of it. They could be delightful when the woman pleased them and utterly selfish when she no longer pleased them, even when she was an old friend. Had she not very lately met that astounding experience herself? Bob Bookwell, her old friend, and John Winters, who had wanted to marry her, and all these lads who had known her for years and who had been charming to her had denied her publicly, had repudiated all she stood for, merely because being kindly to her would have brought them up against this public opinion her father said men would not fight. Perhaps in coming to this unknown boarding house this stranger woman had opposed herself to this same public opinion.

Linda lifted her head. She had said she would enter no place where Bob Bookwell was; that she would never again dance with any of those men who had denied her at this dance that had ended so tragically for her. Nor would she make friends with any man at whose hands any woman could receive the treatment this stranger woman had known, there in Linda's own house. Enchanting this man might be on a sunny afternoon of first adventure. But if there came another time when she needed help or when she was unfortunate or in a situation where public opinion was against her and she could not count on him any more than that stranger woman had been able to count on him, or any more than she had been able to count on these boyhood friends, why, what was the use of such a friendship? It was but three hours old; it could stay where it was; she would not add to it.

Linda moved down the front hall toward the drawing-room. She heard her father's voice and then, because her whole self was strained to it, she heard Steffin's low answer.

"But, Mr. MacGrath, she has not been heard of since. She has literally disappeared. That cannot be allowed to happen. Even Mrs. Lansell who employs her, negligent as she is about such things, had to make some inquiries. She doesn't want the notoriety of calling in the police, but if I can't find her, that will have to come."

"Mr. Steffin," said MacGrath, and Linda thought she had never heard her father's voice so hard, "don't you think that under the circumstances nothing could be better than just this fact that Miss Brinsley cannot be found. It was a great pity that so young a woman as Miss Brinsley should have been allowed to live with Mrs. Fergus Lansell. To put an unsophisticated girl from a little Virginian village in the midst of this especial way of living, as it is done by as beautiful and interesting a woman as Mrs. Lansell, is criminal."

"But she had to earn her living, Mr. MacGrath, and she could really do little else than household things. She was admirably fitted for a private secretaryship with a social woman of many engagements, and the position offered her unusually attractive surroundings most untrained girls do not get in trying to make a living."

"The Brinsleys," said MacGrath, "have been fit for any position that requires social finesse for many generations. I can well imagine this girl could be indispensable to Mrs. Lansell, if only because she could be in evidence when the conventions required it and dismissed when they did not. But for the girl, I repeat it, it is a pity. Six months of it would give her a tolerance for these subterranean ways that she would have been better able to value in their right proportion had she been older. Such a girl's way of looking at life could be changed in half a year; what has happened proves it. And I would be the last one to help anybody to find her now, at so critical a time, if she has run away from what she has actually found to be dangerous."

Linda heard no more. Suddenly the thing that was overtaking her, making her physically sick and faint, became recognizable. It was pain.

This man asking his questions of her father was not a fairy prince born for her alone, overtaken by first love; this was no mate flung to her by fate, recognizing her by some mystic intuition, but a man like the men she would no longer dance with at college; a man willing to let the honor of the woman who had given him friendship remain undefended.

The side door closed with a bang and Knox swung around the corner of the hall and paused abruptly at sight of Linda.

"I say, Belinda, do you want a glass of water or anything? Here, buck up! What's the matter?"

"I've lost my job. I didn't turn in the copy I was sent for."

"Well, say, I thought somebody had died. What's a lost job? You can get another."

"You know I can't, with only two newspapers in town—not a job where I can go to school too! They were always afraid I'd do something like this."

"How did you come to do it?"

She looked at him with hard bright eyes. "The spring got me."

"Huh! You're not the first person to lose a job that way! Linda, give up this job business and get married."

The girl backed away from him in sudden dismay. “Is anything the matter with me to-day——”

“Yes, you’re all trembly. You’ve worked too hard; working all Saturday and Sunday and afternoons and studying besides. I say it’s good you’re canned.”

Some faint remnant of pride flickered up. “No, Ollie, dear. It—it just isn’t my marrying day.”

Knox bent toward her perplexedly. “Listen, I’ll tell you what you need; you’re housed too much. I’ll bet you’ve been in that courthouse all day with its dust and its smells, and you’re faint. Come on out with me for a walk before dinner; a fast one like we used to take; a dog trot. You’re all white. What do you say to dinner some place?”

The girl cast a breathless look at the drawing-room door. Before her swirled a shining river feathered by budding boughs, and two beside it watching the jeweled sunlight on the water as they talked of poets and their lore.

“I have been outdoors all this afternoon. But I will go, Ollie. Let’s go some place for dinner. I’m sick of this house. But I must tell Father and get my hat.”

“He’s talking to somebody in the parlor. Mrs. Gazann will tell him. Shall I ask her to, while you get your hat?”

She sent another look at the drawing-room door. Something within her was begging hard for a chance to grow, something new and lovely, something that fought hard, and that she did not know how to answer. If he had been that man of the straight look and the gay gray eyes he had seemed by the river’s bank, that man she longed to build with, how joyously she would have given this lovely thing a chance to grow. But he was not. To have a thing like this growing in her heart for a man who could put in the face of a woman who cared for him the look that had been in that other woman’s face, and into her voice that desperate catch that had choked it would be intolerable. She pulled herself together.

“Ollie, if I go in the drawing-room, I won’t be able to get away, and I don’t like to leave it to Mrs. Gazann. Father is waiting for me in the drawing-room. Will you tell him I have to get Susie’s notes at once to fill in the copy I didn’t turn in this afternoon, and please not to wait for me for dinner? He will—I guess he will understand. I’ll come down to the side door after I get my hat.”

CHAPTER VII

Linda paused inside the Gazann door and loosened her new opera cloak about her throat while Ollie Knox lit the hall gas jet that she might see the stairs before her. The hall lights were turned out at eleven and it was now after twelve.

"I had a wonderful time, Ollie."

He looked at her doubtfully. "Did you really enjoy it? You're different at a dance than you used to be, Linda, and you came home so early."

"Why, I always come home early, Ollie; usually Father comes for me at twelve. I really came home because of him. He has a bad cough. He didn't go back to the office after dinner to-night."

"Why, he's had that cough ever since I remember him."

"I know, but it's worse. Good night, Ollie. I had a lovely time."

She moved up the stairs brightly until she was out of his sight; slowly afterward. At her father's door she stood still, pondering over some disagreeable matter, by the look in her face. There was no answer to her knock, but under the crack between the door and the floor came a shaft of light. So she opened the door softly, for he often read himself to sleep at night in his big chair when he could not sleep in his bed.

He was sitting at his desk with his head on his arm, sleeping. An open book had slipped to the floor; and Linda stared at the book because on its white page were drops of blood. She slipped out of her coat and tiptoed to the desk. On the floor beneath it a handkerchief lay crunched into a ball.

She could not see his face but she stood looking at his hunched shoulders with some nameless fear clutching at her heart even while she reproved herself for the fear.

As if even in his sleep he felt her, MacGrath stirred and opened his eyes.

"Did I fall asleep?" He smiled at her. "Did you have a good time? You look troubled but lovely in your emerald gown."

She lifted the latest popular novel from the floor and laid it before him.

"Father, have you seen a doctor lately?"

"Oh, that! That's nothing. I'm subject to that, you know."

"Father, you're not holding something back from me? Have you seen a doctor lately?"

"Not since I had the flu, the time I went on to see Sandy and Doctor Lansell took me in charge."

"What did he say?"

"Well, he's a surgeon, not a doctor. He told me to take a rest. He hadn't been home from the War long and he thinks the flu is the root of all evil and rest the cure for it."

"Father, will you see a doctor to-morrow?"

"What for, Linda? Just to have him tell me to stop my work and go to the mountains, two things that would be impossible for me to do."

"Father, what if you have to stop. I don't know much about coughs, but I do know a vacation would help you. Wouldn't Mr. Shelburn give you one? Ollie told me his uncle called you 'the emergency editor' because if anything happened that nobody could handle, you could do it. Father, he wouldn't want you to get sick just for lack of a vacation. Wouldn't he give you one on pay?"

"He might. I'll go to the doctor to-morrow. Now go to bed, dear."

Linda thought the next afternoon, as she watched her father's face when he closed the doctor's office door and joined her in the waiting room, that she had never seen him so blank. He did not tell her exactly what the doctor had said. But he did not shrug over it as usual, and he walked home to dinner with her slowly. And after dinner he asked Ollie Knox if his uncle had gone back to New York.

"No, Mr. MacGrath, he's in Virginia looking over some natural gas property."

MacGrath nodded. "What is your uncle's address, Knox?"

"Lindanburg, Virginia, until Friday, Mr. MacGrath."

It was a thin little letter that Linda mailed to that address in time for the nine o'clock mail, for her father did not go back to the office. He sat at his desk a long time in writing it, for all that it was so short, and when he gave it to Linda he looked very tired.

"Don't bring it back, even if I call you," he smiled a little wanly.

She sped down the back stairs and out the side door, lest he should call her. She swung the gate of the Gazann yard on its rusty hinges and paused, thinking how gayly she had struggled to open it the afternoon she had talked to the white-decked plum tree about gates; the afternoon the wistful face had looked down at her from the window upstairs—the face that came before her now whenever she thought of another face, as blond as it was dark, as gay as the woman's face had been wistful. She shut the gate with a click.

"You funny old thing," she apologized, "don't you know you're the only gate in the city and that gates have long gone out of fashion?"

The wild-plum blossoms were gone now, and there was no breeze to stir the leaves to shining.

She mailed the letter, her whole mind turned on this matter of money and its importance; money that could save health; that kept a man from the need to write a letter he hated to send; that made it possible for him to live spaciously, not herded with other people in a boarding house. She thought of the uses to which her father with his knowledge and his experience could put money. All the money wasted in the world! Was wisdom always won after the need for it, never before?

"I'm a good one to ask this, when I couldn't wait to spend my first wages on a party coat. I, who had no better sense than to set a whole college gossiping about me. I don't suppose it mattered in the least that I meant no harm." She came back to the gate and opened it. "What is this thing we have to learn, before we open our gates?" She bent her head as if listening. "I know; Father would say it is self-control; power under control, not without it; power geared, willed, thought-directed."

She looked up at the lighted windows of the Gazann house. Nobody behind them ever seemed to have money saved or speech under control. She had been like them. They were strange people who came and went, dissatisfied with the place they were in, with the food they ate, with the people about them; seeking always outside themselves for something they did not find, never hunting for it within.

"Well, I have Scotch blood in me as well as Uncle Sandy. I will be thrifty, that I may be generous. And I will never again get into that especial row of, 'He said' where one's truth can be impugned; never. I'll report it in the nearest paper and get paid for it, if I have to talk. Yes, and I'll get back the job I had, if I have to make a picture of Spring itself for that editor."

It is just possible that she may have made the editor see something he was unaccustomed to the next day. For his eyes looked beyond her at some

horizon she did not discern and there was a moment when he ceased to smoke.

"What was he here for?" He asked at length.

"I don't know. That's the end of the story."

"It's the beginning to any good reporter. Here, Slade, Westwin Steffin was in town last Thursday, just a few days after Shelburn was here. They're both hooked up together on this Virginia Consolidated Gas project. See if one man's visit had anything to do with the other's? You'll find out at Middletown, I imagine; call the Consolidated Steel Mills. Come now, Miss MacGrath, that almost made you jump. What was he here for? You didn't spend that much time with him without getting some inkling, did you—and you a reporter! I'm asking to see if you are a good enough reporter for me to put you back on the job."

Linda stared out the open door of the office to the big room beyond, with its crowded desks and its littered papers and its telephones. Slade was listening at the long-distance telephone, his hand on a pencil.

"Are you in a hurry?" Linda asked. "It's just possible, if he knew my job depended on it, he might answer me if I wrote."

The man looked at her curiously. "I'll give you another week's trial," he said laconically.

Slade returned. "Shelburn wasn't in Middletown at all sir. He just came to Springfield for the day. I believe he expected to stay longer, but he left the same day he came. Steffin came to Middletown on business for the Consolidated Gas Company. They didn't know in Middletown that he had been here."

"Well, he didn't come here to look at the railroad station and he didn't come on your account, Miss MacGrath, since you were an accident. Go to the courthouse, Slade, and see what he was doing there."

"Is he so important, Westwin Steffin?" Linda now asked.

The man humped one shoulder. "His father was Ambassador to France when he died; they brought him home in a warship, don't you remember? His mother was one of the Lansells of Virginia, related to Fergus Lansell and allied with titles in both England and France. This chap got up a company for the War from the blue bloods of the four hundred."

"Oh, just socially important!" Linda was cool.

“Not on your life! He’s just been made secretary or something of this new gas company and he’s on a dozen boards and head of some town council on Long Island where his country place is. And he’s a corking good lawyer in addition. Say, what did you learn about him in the time you had to learn it?”

“None of those things.”

For another second the man ceased to smoke. Then he said abruptly, “What does George MacGrath think of your work?”

She paused on her way to the door. “Why—I don’t know; he never said. He did say that cub reporters were always losing their jobs and I’d better learn how to get a job as well as how to hold it.”

“Did he teach you how?”

She hesitated a moment, then looking back at him, blue eyes misting, she said, “No—I think he must have hoped I’d learn it myself.”

CHAPTER VIII

It was at five the following afternoon that Susie Ryland, the last telephoning done for her next morning's social column, ran down the steps to the sixth floor of the *Morning Sun* building to practice what she called "Giving fate a chance."

Susie contended that a woman had the worst of it when she wanted to see a man. A man could go to see a woman; but if a woman wanted to see a man the only thing she could do was to walk casually down the street he was likely to walk up, or come through the door he was going out of; this was what Susie called "Giving fate a chance."

It was rumored about the office that Ollie was going to New York and Susie found the rumor disagreeable to her. She sped out of the dingy stairway entrance and hailed the office boy:

"See Mr. Knox, Billy?—What's the row? Have you all quit work on this floor?"

"Naw. Mr. MacGrath is sick. The doctor just come. He doesn't know whether to take him home, or leave him here."

Susie moved forward, for Knox was coming out of the managing editor's office to the telephone at the city editor's desk, and he was wiping his hands. Susie's news instinct leaped to her tongue.

"Is he hurt? Is he wounded?"

But Ollie only humped his shoulders and asked for Mrs. Gazann over the telephone.

"Mrs. Gazann, Mr. MacGrath is ill and he doesn't want to be brought home in an ambulance for fear your boarders will make it unpleasant for you. Does it really make any difference to you?"

"For heaven's sake," said Susie, "what does it matter what those boarders think."

"He has had a hemorrhage, Mrs. Gazann. Yes, the doctor is here and he wants to keep him flat on his back, when he moves him. Mr. MacGrath is worrying about the ambulance, and I just want to tell him that it's all right."

"Ollie, ask where Linda is," said Susie. "You're not going to bring her father home that way without telling her first."

"I asked for her quite a while ago." Ollie hung up the receiver. "She's not there. I hoped we might get him home and fixed up before she came. It looks so much worse than it is, the doctor says. If we could get him fixed it wouldn't frighten her."

Susie stared before her in a moment's silence. Then she said, "I'll go ahead and find Linda. She may be there by the time I get there. Are you coming with him?"

"Yes, I think he's getting a hypodermic. When it works we'll bring him."

"You can die of a hemorrhage, Ollie; for heaven's sake, be careful."

"I'd rather die of one than go on that way for years."

"Maybe he would, too,—you watch him."

"Oh," said Knox, and the two looked at each other a moment. "Don't put a notion like that in Linda's head. She wouldn't sleep or eat."

"Listen, Ollie, isn't there anybody who could do something for them? Linda's lost her job and her father oughtn't to work for a long while. Isn't there anybody with a little money to spare in the family?"

"There's Alexander MacGrath, Linda's uncle."

"Who, Alexander MacGrath that has just been made vice-president of the boss's gas company? Why, he's spattered all over the New York social columns that I have to read. He lives in a house just off the Avenue, and he hasn't any family. Why don't you send a wire to him at his home address?"

"I wouldn't do it, not without their asking me to. They'd never forgive it."

Susie frowned.

"Sure, George MacGrath, who taught you and me everything we know, will go on being sick, and he'll get three weeks' pay and that's about all he will get out of your stingy old uncle, and he'll get behind in his board bill and worry himself sicker every day. And all the while there's all this money in the family going to waste."

"We're not in the family."

"I suppose if he died you'd wait to telephone his only brother until after he was buried, just because you weren't in the family! Perfectly strange

people, walking down the street, have been known to tell people their houses were on fire. Believe me, I've got the nerve to telegraph Alexander MacGrath without an introduction to him."

"Well, you do it then. Have you got the price?"

"Half-rate for a night letter to New York. Ollie, are you going to New York? I'd give my head to be there."

"Yes."

He turned back to the managing editor's office and Susie moved slowly down another dingy stairway to the telegraph room.

As she left the office building she ran into young Bookwell.

"Bob, is your car here? Drive me to Gazann's, will you?"

"I'll drive you any place else, Susie, but not to Gazann's."

Susie turned down her full lips. "Oh," she said, "I forgot for the moment that you are the bravest young example of modern chivalry we have in Springfield. But Mr. MacGrath is so ill upstairs, there in his office, they've sent for an ambulance to take him home in, and I'd like to get to Linda first."

"Hop in. Say, there's more to that fraternity affair than you know."

"Sure there is. I haven't any place in my brain for understanding a man that will hide behind a girl's reputation. It's too bad your frat doesn't know, that's all; and your father. Your father is a good friend of Gentleman George. He'd make you hop. So long!"

She swept into the house and up to Mr. MacGrath's room. Mrs. Gazann was turning back the bed covers.

"Oh, Miss Susie, Miss Linda isn't here. Is Mr. MacGrath very sick?"

"I'm afraid so, Mrs. Gazann. I wired his brother but I didn't tell Mr. MacGrath that I had done it and I'm not going to tell Linda. His brother ought to come, whether they want him to or not and whether he wants to or not. He ought to have given them the 'once over' a long while ago, and then maybe this wouldn't have happened. I'll bet he can go to the Adirondacks or the Grand Canyon for the summer with nothing at all the matter with him, while his brother stays in Oliver Shelburn's hot little office where they won't even put in an electric fan and coughs himself to death."

"If you have your Irish up, Miss Susie, you'd better look at that."

Mrs. Gazann pointed to an open letter of five typewritten lines on MacGrath's desk.

"Look at what," said Susie. "I don't read other people's letters."

"You would if they fell on the floor at your feet and you had to pick them up. I brought this letter up to Mr. MacGrath this noon with his coffee. He didn't get up in time for lunch to-day, so I made his coffee special, and I stayed in his room to pour it for him. Well, he opened his letter and he never drank the coffee nor ate the eggs. He just let the letter fall to the floor and looked out in front of him and never said a word, and after a little he got so white he was gray, and then he started to the office without any food. And I say the man that wrote that letter might as well commit murder and be done with it."

"What was in the letter, Mrs. Gazann?"

"He's lost his job. He's fired."

"What!"

Susie looked down at the letter. Across its unfilled whiteness ran the Shelburn signature that she was familiar with.

"Why—why, Mrs. Gazann, that office can't go on without Mr. MacGrath! He's the thing that makes it run. He's its brain. Shelburn never does anything but draw the money out of it that Mr. MacGrath makes and give as little of it to the people working for him as he can!"

"It would *have* to go on without him if Mr. MacGrath stayed sick."

"He could come back when he got well; and the idea that he was coming back would hold what he put into it steady until he did come back. Surely Shelburn must know that. He's no newspaper man, but he's no fool." Susie's brows knitted.

"Maybe your Shelburn doesn't want to pay Mr. MacGrath's salary while he's getting well. Getting well of this thing isn't like getting over a cold."

"Oh, he couldn't be such a dog as that! Stingy as he is, that isn't business sense. This paper was failing ten years ago when Mr. MacGrath took it. He's built it, every stone of it quarried from his own brain. He's made it into the peppiest, best-edited, brightest paper in the State. If he had signed his editorials he'd be known everywhere. What if he does have to lay off for six months; no man would be that stingy. There's some other reason. I wish I could think— —"

Mrs. Gazann put a bowl of chopped ice on the green leather chair. "Listen," she said excitedly. "Is Mr. Shelburn big and thick, with sharp black eyes, regular insulting eyes—the way they look at you—and heavy black hair slicked back so that it looks wet?"

"Exactly. That is he."

"A couple of weeks ago, a man like this came here around eight o'clock to call on a new woman boarder. And she wasn't here. She'd skipped, baggage and all, though she'd paid her board in advance. And the man wouldn't believe me when I said she wasn't here. So I took him to her room and showed him she'd gone, and I called Sam, the houseman, to tell him how he'd seen her leave the table without finishing her dinner and come hurrying downstairs with her bag. He said Mr. MacGrath took her with him, after telling her to go home. You ought to have seen this man when Sam said that. He asked Sam what Mr. MacGrath said; and Sam hadn't heard very well from the side of the porch, and he just said Mr. MacGrath pleaded with her to go home, somethin' powerful. Well, the man just stood perfectly still, and even Sam, who's used to boarders that curse, kinda backed away. I can't use words like you, Miss Susie, but there was something pretty black in that man's face. Then the man turned back at the door and asked if Mr. MacGrath was in the house. There was something in his voice—well, you wouldn't believe it could be in a human voice. I said Mr. MacGrath wasn't home, that he worked in the evenings, and the man made a queer noise and went on out. I never thought of it's being Mr. Shelburn, not until this minute."

There was a catch in Susie's voice. "That's why he lost his job, then, not because he was sick. Oh, Mrs. Gazann, why did you tell Shelburn who it was that helped the woman get away? Ollie Knox says his uncle never forgets anything to the end of his life, anything that gets in his way."

In Mrs. Gazann's sallow cheeks rose a faint flush. "Do you think I would have told him? I never use names. It was Sam who did it. And I only called Sam to come and talk to him because the man wouldn't believe that she was gone for good. I wouldn't do anything to hurt Mr. MacGrath for all I own. He's the kindest man I ever knew."

"They're coming with him now, Mrs. Gazann. What a mercy to get him here and in bed before Linda comes."

"You leave it to me, Miss Susie. I know what to do. He has to keep still; that's the whole thing."

For one of the few times in her life Susie Ryland hesitated. Then she said, “Mrs. Gazann, do you think Mr. MacGrath would get up and move about purposely? I’ve seen men who were sick and who had lost their jobs ——”

“No, not him. Maybe you think it’s queer I should be so decided, but he’s lived with me five years and in my business you get so you know the very foundations of people after a couple of years, day in and day out with them; especially when they haven’t much money. He’s just got one thing he’s living for, and that’s to educate Miss Linda; maybe it’s better to say, to help her grow in her mind. He’ll hang on to the last strength he has so long as he can watch over her and show her things that way he has. And he can do that flat on his back, and he knows it. And as for his board bill, he needn’t worry about that. If I helped lose him his job, I owe him that.”

Susie turned away. “Yes,” she said softly, “I know his way of showing you things. He’s done it for all of us in the office for years. Don’t worry about that board bill, Mrs. Gazann. There isn’t a man in our whole big place that wouldn’t go without his own dinner to give Gentleman George his. It isn’t only that he’s taught some of us how to write; he’s taught us how to live. We won’t let him die.”

Mrs. Gazann held open the door. There was the sound of feet moving in unison. “Yes, he’s taught his daughter how to live, or I’m much mistaken. She doesn’t know how much she’s learned or how she’s learned it. But she’ll find out some day. And you needn’t be afraid about him. He’s a fighter, for all his kind manner. He’ll hang on, not for his own sake, but for her sake.”

CHAPTER IX

That Susie Ryland should have sent her night wire to Alexander MacGrath at five o'clock in the afternoon seemed to Susie the result of her having her idea at that time. The time of its arrival, just before the morning mail instead of just afterwards, made it lie on Alexander MacGrath's breakfast table beneath a creamy square envelope, on which MacGrath cast a perplexed eye, and not above the envelope.

MacGrath drank his coffee frowning. His reddish brows, drawn over his reddish-brown eyes, relaxed a little over the excellence of the coffee but contracted again as he drew the heavy sheets from the creamy square envelope. There were a good many of them and he did not read them all; he picked a word here and there and then turned to the last sentence. He read this twice and laid the letter on the table with the last page on top, while he refused his eggs and drank another cup of coffee. And he sat quite still for some minutes before he rose and set fire to the letter on the dining-room hearth. Then he picked up the telegram and read it while he poked the smoking letter with his foot, for the heavy paper charred without burning.

It evidently took him a moment to get away from the letter to the telegram, for even after the letter had burned he stood at the hearth considering Susie's night letter. And it was some minutes before his face lightened and his red-brown eyes took on the look of a red-brown fox making an excellently planned escape. He rang for the manservant he had dismissed with the eggs.

"Gaze, my only brother is dangerously ill. I shall be leaving to-night if I can arrange it at the office. I do not know how long I shall be gone. Will you say that to any one who calls me by telephone."

At his office he had his secretary wire the Shelburn Steel Company, at Middletown, that he would be there on Wednesday.

"Wire the Fountain Hotel, Springfield, for a room for Thursday."

And so it was that on Thursday afternoon, as Linda MacGrath sat down on a park bench across the street from Mrs. Gazann's Park View Inn, to catch her breath after her hurried walk home from the office of the *Evening News*, where she was working out her trial week, she was closely observed

by a man who had stopped on the walk behind the bench to look over the front façade of the Park View Inn.

Linda hated to go in to her father with the fatigue of her work hanging on her. So she sat still a moment, resting. She had had a hard assignment and it had been a long time since she sat down. She cast the briefest of glances at the man on the walk. In her work she had learned to eliminate the man who stared. Yet some portion of her subconsciousness must have responded to her brief glance with a long unused memory, for she turned around again and gave the man a second look. Then she rose, for he was as like her father as it was possible for a human being to be who has the same features and yet looks entirely different.

If her work had taught her how to brush aside the man she did not want to see, it had also taught her how to speak directly to the man she did want to see.

"Are you, by any chance, Alexander MacGrath?" she now asked, direct blue eyes observing him with concentration.

He removed his hat. He had not looked at her because he had recognized her, but because she was very lovely to look at and apparently very tired and discouraged, and because she sat down on a park bench with an air of indecision.

"I am Linda MacGrath," she added quite simply.

"What good luck," he said and watched the little bend of her head as she savored the sound of his voice. It was indeed good luck; the girl was even handsomer than her mother. He began dimly to see why George kept the girl close and stayed where he was with her. For she had not only beauty, but she had something the beauty barbed. For want of another name he called it appeal.

"You look like your mother. She was handsomest of all the Pagets. May I sit down? I shall be so glad to talk to you a moment before I intrude on George. You see, even if he expects me, I must prepare myself for seeming to be an intrusion. And it gives me more courage to do it with you."

"Does he expect you?" she asked gravely. "I did not; you surprise me very much."

"He may not expect me, but I supposed that you did. I have a wire; it is not signed by you but I supposed you authorized it."

"I never dreamed of such a thing. Who sent you the wire?"

"It is signed Susie Ryland and it gets a great deal into fifty words."

"Susie would. She is one of the reporters under Father. We neither of us knew she had wired you."

"Then I'm all the more fortunate to have encountered you this way. Will you tell me about your father?"

"He has been ill a long time and he has been hiding it, or perhaps he did not realize how dangerous it was. With good care and no worry he has a chance. It's whether we can take the care and whether he can escape the worry."

"What do you mean chance—a chance for life?"

"I'm afraid he wouldn't think that much of a chance. I mean a chance for recovery and usefulness."

"Well, if it's up to him——"

"But it isn't. We are penniless to start with."

She felt his swifter attention. "But he's managing editor of Oliver Shelburn's paper."

"He wrote Mr. Shelburn last week, asking for a vacation because he was ill, and Mr. Shelburn discharged him."

"What! He didn't discharge him because he was ill, surely?"

"I do not know. We have only the money I am making, now. I am a reporter on the *Evening News*." She halted, arrested by a new idea. "I wonder if I may talk to you about this. After all, you are my father's only brother."

A faint smile gave his eyes the slanting fox look. "There should be little in such a matter as this you could not talk to me about." He hunched a shoulder much as she had seen her father do it. "He's stiff-necked—George MacGrath, or long ago he'd have feathered his nest enough to have been discharging Shelburn instead of being discharged by him. And I make no doubt that you, too, are a MacGrath, for all that you look like your mother. And that being so, you might, I think, tell me what is on your mind without loss of pride."

The color her mental effort was bringing into her face was most lovely; the faint drops of perspiration on her forehead were curling her hair into little tendrils that did not escape the red-brown fox eyes; nor did he miss the gallantry of her effort when she smiled faintly and answered:

"I want to rid my father of this idea that is hounding him that he is dependent; that he may have to ask for help. I think he'd have more chance to get well if he didn't have to fight this specter. He wouldn't mind being dependent on me; I'm the one to take care of him after all these years when he has cared for me as if he were mother and father both. I want to get work that will give me enough money to keep him in some sanitarium in the mountains, where he can stay until he gets well. The work I do here, even with my utmost effort, will not bring me enough to do that, though I would be willing and glad to live in the most meager way. And there is no other work in Springfield that will bring me as much as I am making now." She hesitated with a doubtful look at him. Then, a little breathless, she added:

"But I have thought that perhaps in a larger city, perhaps in your New York, there might be some work I could find to do that would bring me enough money. I have thought that you, who move among people with money, who live among people willing to pay a large price for what they want, might know of some rich woman who wanted a secretary or some one who needed a housekeeper. I thought perhaps there might even be some office position I could get. I can handle the typewriter, I have had to learn it in my newspaper work—though I cannot take shorthand. Perhaps I might even get a position on one of the newspapers in New York that would pay me more than these smaller papers here."

He leaned on the back of a park bench, looking down at the grass. In the silence Linda looked across the street at the rusty-hinged gate that swung to and fro in the Gazann yard and at the little tree behind it now shorn of its blossoms. She had made her utmost effort. She thought of the day she had come through that gate with fingers tingling from her effort to open it. She wondered if it was really a gate that was about to open for her and if its hinges would creak a message as the old Gazann gate had seemed to, or if its latch were rusty and might need more effort on her part.

"'Twill be no trouble," he presently remarked, "to get George into a good sanitarium at Saranac, and if he does not make the arrangements himself he need not know the price. It is ethical to keep from invalids the things that prevent them from improving." He surveyed her a moment. "You speak with ease. You think clearly for a girl. You can get about or you wouldn't be a reporter. How old are you?"

"I am almost twenty-four."

"You are older than you look. Do you know anything about housekeeping, living as you do in a boarding house?"

"Living in a boarding house shows you how *not* to run a house. I think I could use what I have learned there. I would know what to avoid."

"Could you manage servants? Are you smart about money?"

"The spending or the saving of it? I have lived economically for many years."

"Good!" He looked down at the ground for some minutes and then up at the Gazann house, starkly outlined in the falling dusk. But it is doubtful if he saw what he looked at. Rather was there flitting before him a suggestion of creamy square envelopes that were beginning to rob him of his excellent breakfast appetite. He looked at Linda again; a woman in his house—a woman of his own family, even a beautiful woman—it might well solve his problem! He had to stay in the house; he preferred it; he had always lived there, but this was the first time that he had had to guard himself in it. It was what came of things like this among your own women. If a woman of your own set chose to ring your doorbell, the most that could be said to her was that you were not at home, but she could not be denied entrance if she chose to come in and wait. The only thing you could do was to make her not want to come in. And if she was an experienced huntress in her forest of preserved game, your not wanting her to come in only added zest to a pursuit that amused her. He looked at Linda again and he could well imagine that even an experienced huntress might pause before her. And if she were always there, the kinswoman, the chatelaine—yes, it might well solve the problem.

"Let me speak straight out to you," he said at length. "I have a place for you in my own house. The only thing that is against it is your youth and your very remarkable good looks. If you can handle these two drawbacks; if you can manage my servants and run my house as a business undertaking, not as my niece, then I will give you the position and at a salary large enough to support your father in any good sanitarium—say at Saranac or at Placid, or wherever you like. You yourself will be at no expense, which should be an item. It will be understood in my household that it is my niece, Miss MacGrath, who is taking charge of the place. Does this appeal to you as a solution?"

Her voice was very low. "It is more than I could have possibly hoped for. It should not only remove Father's worry about himself, but his worry about me."

"I wouldn't be too sure about that. You may find your father will not like it at all."

Through Linda's mind ran the memory of that night she had stood in the hall, faint with her disappointment over Westwin Steffin, and heard her father say that it was a dreadful thing to have put an inexperienced girl like Valentine Brinsley in a secretarial position with a woman like Mrs. Fergus Lansell; to have filled her every hour with people whose tolerance of careless living shaped her to their own ways. Linda hesitated a moment. Surely this was a different thing and her father could be made to see it.

"You are doing your part," she said, "be sure we will do ours. It would be a pity if we were less gracious than you."

He had been observing her intently, and now he spoke a little sharply: "My house was once your Father's. Why shouldn't you come into it? Let us go to him; shall we?"

"Yes. Shall I call you uncle? I should think Father would rather have me in this house that he once lived in than any place else—since I have to be separated from him."

Something in the shrewdness of his look checked her impulse to discuss her father with him.

"We live over there, Uncle Sandy."

At her first use of the familiar name the shrewdness went out of his look. Perhaps it was because this was the only creature in the world who could use that name, or perhaps it was because she had used it at exactly the right moment and in exactly the right tone.

"When George would not ask his father's only brother for help, what about asking Shelburn? Did his pride keep him from that?"

"No, because he was of use to Mr. Shelburn. It was his working capacity—his ability to be of better use to him—that he was asking Mr. Shelburn to help. You know how Father writes—without an unnecessary word, and yet you see the things he writes. You know he must have written a good letter." A catch came in her voice. "Mr. Shelburn answered him with five lines, discharging him."

Sandy MacGrath's Scotch brows drew together and his chin was lifted to a point; his eyes were slanted like those of a fox.

"He must have had some other reason than economy. Surely he wouldn't have minded paying his editor's salary until he got well."

Looking down at the girl beside him he saw something bright and shining splash down on her hand—a hand that was small and thin.

"There, don't do that. You mustn't take me to your father with tears in your eyes, or he will never trust you with me. It won't be so easy anyhow. I haven't seen much of George these later years."

Sandy MacGrath paused a second before the porch of the Gazann house and cast a shrewd eye over its unswept floor and its shabby door. Linda opened the door on a hall where Sam, the negro man-of-all-work, had forgotten to light the gas.

The smell of cooking food swept through the hall and involuntarily Sandy MacGrath came to a halt. Through the dining-room door came a tall gaunt woman bearing a tray.

"Oh, there you are, Miss Linda," she said, and the worry in her eyes softened. "I'm taking your father's tray up. I can't trust Sam with it so I'm taking it myself. Oh!" Mrs. Gazann discovered that the man behind Linda in the dark hall was with her, since he seemed to be waiting for her and not going his own way up the stairs or to the dining room.

"This is my uncle, Mr. Alexander MacGrath, Mrs. Gazann."

The lady with the tray was a lady. MacGrath saw it by the inclination of her head as she acknowledged his presentation to her. Her hair was that curious rusty brown with a half-inch of gray at the roots that means it is time to recolor it, and the hasty color put on her face had a touch of pathos, but the face itself held unmistakable signs of gentle breeding.

"Let me take the tray, Mrs. Gazann," said Linda. "We are going up."

Mrs. Gazann cast a hasty glance, almost of panic, at the unlighted hall and then up the stairs. "Let me run up ahead, Miss Linda, and look about your father's room. You've been working all day, and maybe it isn't just the way he'd like to have it for company. You know your father, Miss Linda."

And that was why Sandy MacGrath, to his unbounded amazement, found himself carrying a tray full of things easily spilled, up stairs too dark to mount safely, let alone with such a hazard projected before him. If, on his way from New York to Springfield, he had once or twice visualized George's reception of him, never for one second had he imagined himself entering George's one room in this unspeakable place of food odors and precipitous dark stairs, carrying George's dinner on a huge napkin-covered tray.

He stood within the door and saw Mrs. Gazann go out and close it. The room had a soft, subdued glow, due to the green shade on the student's lamp. He caught a glimpse of books, rows on rows of them, some of them at rest

upon the wall, others ranked upon the floor close to the wall, others on desk and table in conference: George's army waiting to carry his ideas toward their objective. And George himself, pillowed and white against the bars of his ugly iron bed, his hollowed eyes, so like his brother's and so unlike them, flashing from this brother to Linda and resting on her a moment in a doubt that must have hurt, for the round little spots on the thin cheek bones deepened to a brighter scarlet.

"Father," she said, and her hurried word broke as she caught the doubt. "Father, it is—it is Uncle Sandy, come to see you from New York. I met him as I came from work—quite by accident as I crossed the park. I didn't know he was coming. I recognized him because he looks like you."

For one second the man on the bed held his daughter's eyes. Then he turned toward his brother and the same ironic humor that had twisted Sandy MacGrath's mouth out on the street before the gate veiled the hurt doubt in George MacGrath's face.

"Sandy, welcome to our city! Won't you put your impedimenta on the table?"

Sandy MacGrath had already looked anxiously for a place on the table to put the tray and found none. He now followed Linda to the bed, and put the tray on the shiny oak chair she drew toward the heaped-up pillows. And nearer to his brother, Sandy found himself suddenly speechless; he supposed with the shock of it. He had last seen George a dominant figure with a vigor that did not spare even a lifelong acquaintance, which was the high-sounding name George had bestowed on his brother. George had added a "merely" to it that had made it rankle a little, spoken in George's way—a sound-expression of the ironical humor that was perhaps a family gift.

"Won't you sit down, Sandy?" And George MacGrath indicated the green leather chair.

As Linda brought another chair, an oak rocker that belonged to the house of Gazann, the little red spots on her father's cheek bones flared up and the thing tore at something within Sandy MacGrath. Though he could not have explained it, yet he could not endure it; no man could. Sandy sat down and stared at his brother in dismay.

"George," he said, "you ought to eat your dinner while it's hot, ought you not?" He leaned forward and drew the napkin that had hindered his hold on the waiter coming up those unending stairs. "Gad, I've spilled it too!" He looked anxiously at his brother.

George MacGrath raised his head from his pillow the better to see his brother, napkin in hand. Then he let his head fall back again on the pillow and suppressed laughter shook him.

"Oh, Father, don't," whispered Linda, raising the glass of milk from the tray; for the laughter had started a cough.

MacGrath drank the milk in gulps, looking at his brother over the rim of the glass.

"I don't care for the milk myself, Sandy. But I can offer you some if you will have it. It's kept on the window sill in a bottle just as it is in the movies."

"No, thank you." He waited for his brother to stop coughing; then he said abruptly, "How did you get this way; there's none of this in our family."

George MacGrath looked at the miniature of Linda Paget on his desk. Many times he had explained things to Linda in the way of parables, and he was explaining to her now, not to his brother. "Once upon a time," he said, "as I came home, after a rather strength-using fight out in the world, I stopped at a castle on the road to ask for a red rose from the garden to take home with me to Her. The castle was owned by one who had put on a queer beast's head in a moment when he wanted to be something more or something less than a man. And I could not come upon him in a generous mood. So I plucked a rose from his garden of red roses and almost got away with it, but not quite. I had to pay. That is how this came upon me."

Sandy MacGrath removed his eyes from his brother's whimsical face and looked down at the floor with his brows drawn together. Then he answered, "You mean—your Beauty and Beast story means——"

"Out of several meanings," said George, "let us choose that fathers often have to pay with daughters for the things that come upon them when they try to get out of paying."

George MacGrath turned his hollowed eyes on his daughter. The red spots flared deeper in his cheeks. He put out a hand to the water on his tray and then withdrew it, closing his eyes a moment. When he opened them, he raised his head from the pillows and said abruptly:

"What have you two planned?"

"It did not," said Sandy MacGrath, "ultimately harm Beauty to go and live in the Palace of the Beast. It may be that the life in the palace actually enlarged her horizon."

George MacGrath lifted his glass of water and moistened his lips.

Sandy MacGrath frowned. "Well!" he said sharply.

"I won't do it, Sandy. I won't send her into that house. She is too young."

"She is twenty-four. How old do you want her to be? If you have not trained her by this time to face the real world— —"

"It is not the real world, this particular place. She would be as cloistered there as she would be caring for me here."

Sandy pushed his chair back from the bed. "By Gad, no," he said. And his voice was as sharp as edged steel. "Because in my house she would be earning her living. She'd have a tough job that would test her. She would be no dependent, accommodating herself to other people's peculiarities, but an executive running an establishment on a business basis, with people to work under her for whose competence she was responsible. She would meet men and women with their hands on the world's work—the world's work, not some country village's work— —"

George MacGrath sat up straight and his eyes were as cold as his brother's voice. "So you have arranged it?"

"What's in your mind, you suspicious Scotchman? Do you think your daughter has been corresponding with me for a year? I never set eyes on her or thought about her, until a half-hour ago. Or if I did think of her I thought she was ten years old and that I ought to have brought her a doll. As for a woman in my house, don't you suppose I could have had one there long ago if I had wanted one. I didn't want one until to-day. This is no deep-laid scheme that we've been waiting to spring on you until you are flat on your back."

"A Minerva of wisdom sprung full-armed from the head of Jove," scoffed George MacGrath.

Sandy rose to his feet and put his hands in his pockets. "Will you take money from me? Will you take an allowance? You know you won't get well of this in a week, and you know you won't ever get well of it here. Will you let me send you to Colorado?"

"I'll see you damned first."

"Well, I knew that. It's gracious of you, and most considerate of your daughter's welfare."

MacGrath sank back on his pillows. There was a hunted look in his brilliant eyes. “I do not have to explain such ungraciousness to you.”

“Do you have to explain it to your daughter?” Sandy MacGrath cast a thoughtful eye on Linda.

And another silence fell upon the room.

“What have you arranged,” George MacGrath asked at length.

“I told you we have arranged nothing. I have offered this young woman a job. She wants work that will pay her triple what she could make in any job here. I do not even know whether she is equal to hold the job I offer, but it seems likely that she is at least equipped to learn it swiftly. I will pay her —or rather she will earn—a salary large enough for her to undertake any outside expenditure she likes—in reason. This will not be my money but hers; and she herself will be at no expense.”

The man on the pillow fixed his hunted eyes on his brother. Slowly the red spots faded from his cheeks.

“Very well,” he said hoarsely; “if this is the thing she wants to do, she shall do it. But if anything happens to her that ought not to happen to her, if she meets with anything you would not permit your own daughter to meet, then may God have mercy on you, Sandy MacGrath. For not even this thing that is now upon me, not even death itself, if it should end in that, will keep me from you.” His eyes closed and he lay white and quiet on his pillow.

CHAPTER X

The veranda, with its long rows of steamer chairs, overlooked Saranac Lake. And beyond the fringe of dark evergreens on the opposite shore of the lake was the outline of the lower foothills and behind them old White Face capped with snow.

Linda stood at the railing, waiting for her father to come out, looking at the headlines of last night's evening paper that she had just brought from the village. Most of the owners of the steamer chairs were inside at luncheon. They were the guests whose temperatures did not rise over one degree and they were allowed to go to and fro.

In the stillness about her the noisy headlines seemed peculiarly futile. Stillness was urged on all the convalescents. They were asked not to talk much and Linda, watching the colors above the timber line on White Face, wondered if the mountains did not help the stillness. For words seemed peculiarly unexpressive in this place. The whole village was built for quiet —silent, sweet, optimistic. There was scarcely a porch that was not dotted with steamer chairs holding gay brave men and women, with books in thinned hands, and eyes bright with fever, looking out over the hills. If any one in the row of chairs was absent for a day, he found how warm were the friendships that he had made just sitting still and talking little.

These swift friendships were an unending joy to Linda; for her distress at the prospect of leaving her father increased in poignancy as each day brought it nearer. To have left him lonely, even to go forth and work for him, would have been more than she could bear. But to leave him among friends who watched over him with solicitous understanding and who were thoughtful and kind,—this was bearable.

Next to her father on the porch sat a young doctor the War had made famous. On the other side of him was a man who had been gassed in the Argonne, a man who must have been splendid to look at in the days of his strength.

Every morning this man wrote with pencil on a pad like the one her father used in his office; every noon he folded it into a long envelope just in time to catch the afternoon train to New York.

Linda used to wonder what he could possibly find to write for the newspapers there on the edge of the quiet lake. But each day he found something, his dark eyes frowning with concentration, following his rapidly moving pencil.

Sometimes, when the bright scarlet rose too hotly in his cheeks, he put his pad aside and turned his head toward her father, and they talked softly in the speech of men at whose finger tips the news of the world had vibrated for many years. The young man's voice had the soft blur Linda remembered in her mother's tones.

"Yes," said her father when she mentioned it to him, "he is Edward Lindan of Lindanburg, Virginia. I hoped we would meet him here. Indeed, I chose Saranac instead of Placid, because I had heard that he was here."

"But if he is a Lindan, Father, and from Virginia, he must be some connection of mother's."

"A kinsman, as they say there. You get your name Linda from the same source he gets his."

Lindan had not been in his steamer chair that first week Linda and her father had arrived and when he did come out to it, he had worried Linda as he wrote and sat back and rested and tried to write again, the telltale flush rising as he tried. At the end of the first day, when he dropped his pencil wearily, Linda could not keep herself from a warning.

"They'll put you to bed if you make your temperature rise, Mr. Lindan."

He looked at her whimsically. "They might as well put me back into bed, for I haven't an idea. It isn't that I am not well enough to write; it's that I have not sense enough."

"Oh, why do you do it; or why don't you wait to do it until you are well again?"

The whimsical look increased.

"It is a bad business when you are fighting this enemy to wait. If I stop writing he may trick me into permanent quiet."

"What do you have to write about to-day?" said Linda. "You know I was a reporter before I came here, and of course by this time, being a newspaper man yourself, you know all about Father."

"Oh, I knew all about him before he came here. I know his brother Sandy and I know the people he used to know in New York—the Lansells,

the Steffins—we went to the War together."

"Oh, dear!" Linda rose hastily from the little camp chair she took about with her on the piazza. For Lindan had started up in his chair and was peering over the railing, watching the postman's car with a hunger in his eyes Linda was getting familiar with. She thought if the people out in the busy world could once see that hunger, they would find time to write every day if they only wrote a line.

"Sit still, Mr. Lindan, while I run down to the office and see if you have a letter."

When she returned, her father was sitting beside Lindan.

"I am Mercury," she said gayly to Lindan. "I have brought you a message all square and white and another all crested and gray. The gray one must be from Juno herself."

Lindan sat up straight, a trifle breathless either with exertion or excitement, and Linda put a creamy square envelope into one of his outstretched hands and into the other an oblong gray one with a tiny purple crest. He let the gray one lie on his lap while he tore the creamy one with hands that wrenched the thick paper from its envelope. Across the square expanse seven short words were scrawled in letters so large that Linda, beside her father's chair, could not help but see them as she stooped to pick up the gray letter that had fallen to the floor unheeded.

She has come back. Cheer up. BERTHA.

The young man put his head on the back of the chair and shut his eyes, holding fast to the arms of the chair.

Linda's eyes met her father's. He shook his head ever so slightly. She sat down quietly on the foot of his steamer chair and waited, holding the gray letter, but looking far away from the man to whom it was addressed. After a little he opened his eyes.

"Forgive me," he said gravely, "I did not even thank you. You see, somebody I greatly cared for—a girl, an old boyhood friend—just got tired of things, tired of work she hated, and one day she ran away. It turned out that she ran away for a vacation; but I didn't know. Nobody really knew. And I was tied to this ridiculous chair."

"And they found her?" said Linda.

"That's what my letter said—that she had come back, rather than been found. Tied hand and foot this way, one worries about all kinds of things that one wouldn't worry about if one were well."

Linda rose. "I am so glad for you. I am going to the village. Shall I mail your copy?"

She came back to the veranda after she had put on her hat, but Lindan was gone.

"He went in to telegraph his answer to his letter," said her father.

"I went upstairs with his other letter. Will you give it to him, Father?"

MacGrath took the gray envelope gingerly.

"What's the matter, Father? You'd think I was giving you dynamite. Why, no, it is—I do believe it's the same envelope you used to tuck away in the locked drawer of your desk with the picture in the frame. But this hasn't a French stamp. It was mailed in America. Didn't you get one? You haven't been getting them without my knowing it, have you?"

"What's this," Lindan interrupted, strolling back to them.

He laughed at their embarrassment. Life was renewing itself in him. The worry he had kept hidden now proclaimed its magnitude by the effect of its disappearance.

"It is Romance," Linda exclaimed. "Father has been waiting for months for a letter and lo, to-day the letter came to another, and Father's only child stole the letter; but Father is honest and he insists on his only child returning it." She proffered Lindan the gray letter.

He took it with a chuckle.

"Don't tell me you know her? Is she not magnificent, the duchesse, with her purple ink and her high command? Your father's honesty shall be rewarded. If he will permit me, I will read the letter aloud."

"I will permit you if he does not. I do not know the lady but it is high time that I did."

Lindan gave another chuckle. "I proceed.

"*Bien Ami*:

"Once you advised me to ask kindness from one who had been kind to me before when I wanted something done; since one who

has been kind will be kind again, while one who has received kindness may only wish to avoid payment. So I come to you.

"Last night Sandy MacGrath gave a dinner: and since Bertha was happily in Boston with Fergus her husband—I was hostess for Sandy's dinner. Indeed, it was given in honor of my arrival on my native shore. At this dinner I heard that George MacGrath was in Saranac, but I could not tell whether he was there on a vacation or taking it as a prescription. I would not have even heard the name Saranac but for Win Steffin, who has a man's way of asking a question, and who asked Sandy where Linda Paget, daughter of George MacGrath, was living.

"So here's my request for kindness. It has been far too long since I heard from George MacGrath. Will you find out for me where he is staying in Saranac? And in return you shall ask me what you will in the way of news or gossip of any one you have ever known that I am renewing acquaintance with.

"So always and always, I am yours,

"Julie de Chevonnes."

Lindan finished the letter on a note of triumph, and he cast on George MacGrath a tolerably male glance, which MacGrath returned in much the same kind.

"I shall write her," said Lindan, "that you are happily established and will gladly welcome her whenever she will come, but I shall advise her to postpone her coming until after your daughter has left, as your daughter knows her far too well."

MacGrath's eyes twinkled. "I can't say how well I know the lady, but if I know her at all this would be a declaration of war that would bring her to our doorstep."

Lindan mused. "Well, Julie has had some war work, though it was not done outside of Paris. It was well done and the blue veil and gown were distracting with her blonde hair. She wore them even when she sang. And she sang a great deal; at all the hospitals and all the benefits. The soldiers called her Juliet."

"So does Father," Linda murmured.

"Doubtless Romeo had Scotch blood," said Lindan.

Linda looked at her father thoughtfully. It was not so difficult to think of him as Romeo to such a Juliet as she had imagined this lady to be. He was extremely good-looking and slim and tall, and now that he had been resting he looked absurdly young to be her father. She wondered if women were not less important to men than they knew. And how differently men felt about other men's relations with women. Westwin Steffin's friendships with women, no matter what they were, would lessen in no way Lindan's friendship for him. Her father's palpable embarrassment only set Lindan to grinning. And yet this lightly laughing young man had sat only an hour ago, pencil in hand, unable to concentrate enough to wring an idea from a worry-burdened brain because a girl he cared for was not to be found. And all this inability to work had disappeared like a mist under the sun at news of the girl's safety.

"Oh, oh, look at our Beauty," Lindan cried. "Some riddle is perplexing her. Come, Beauty, what question are you asking? This is our day for answering riddles."

"I was asking the riddle of the Sphinx. Women are forever asking it and getting no answer at all."

"Oh, the old question—what is man?" asked Lindan. "Man is what the woman he loves makes him."

"But he loves more than one woman."

"That is why he is remade at every age and sometimes in every mood, beginning with his mother and ending with his beloved. Some men are made generous at one age by one woman, and miserly at the next age by another."

"No wonder," said Linda, "you either have to let the riddle alone or risk your life to solve it. Before the Gates of Love must be strewn countless women who lost their lives because it was more than they could work out."

"What about the men before those gates," Lindan demanded.

"Oh, the men," scoffed Linda. "They do not have to solve the riddle. If a man loses his well-beloved because of an unsolved riddle, he builds another bridge, or buys another bond, or flirts with a widow, or marries on the rebound. Men have died but not for love."

"Rosalind was wrong—and so are you. It should be, 'Men have died without confessing it was love that killed them!' Who shall say how disappointment in a woman coming at the moment of hardest strain will topple a man's vitality over the edge? Who can measure the flow of blood that leads on to fortune and to strength that the solved riddle of love may

bring. Men *have* died of love for all that the doctors have called it by another name. And men have lived because of love; lived in the very face of death; because love, though it may not be stronger than life, is yet stronger than death."

The girl put out her hand. This thing within her that begged to live stirred in her heart.

"Oh," she whispered, "do you *know* this? Is love then so great—greater than death?"

"Why, yes, and yes." His eyes shone out on her, radiant. "Love—love is a living force, and death is but a sign. Death is a word, not a thing. Death is unproved.—It may be a sign of life, of new life. But love is proved. It lives though all things die. Women have loved men straight through the death of all but their love—the death of faith, the death of hope, the death of trust. Men have loved women dead and stayed faithful to them. Women have taken their love and recreated the one beloved—made him into real manhood. Women are the ones who know how much stronger than death is love; they who go down into the valley of death to give life because of love."

The girl was silent for a while. Then she said abruptly, "How did you learn it?"

He looked at her softly, the radiance dimmed, lowered. "I?" he said slowly, "I learned it, dying."

CHAPTER XI

The Saranac train pulled into New York at half after seven in the morning. Alexander MacGrath had written his brother that the chauffeur would wait for Linda at the taxicab entrance of the station. But she saw no private car nor any chauffeur. She waited twenty minutes and then she took a taxi to the house just off the Avenue whose address she had.

The house had an unopened appearance as if nobody had yet arisen, and she rang four times before the door was opened by a butler who put on his coat as he came to the door.

"Mr. Alexander MacGrath's house? Is he at home?"

"What name, madame?"

"Miss MacGrath."

The man sent a glance after the departing cab and then he looked at the luggage at Linda's feet. "There were orders to meet you, madame. Was the car not there?"

"No."

The man lifted her bags with reluctance. "Mr. MacGrath, madame, was called away last night, but he left particular orders." He gave her a side glance; evidently he saw no lenience in her face. "Seven-thirty is early to be about, madame; it may be the chauffeur was late."

Linda looked through the hall to what seemed to be a dining room where no table was set for breakfast. Somewhere a woman's voice was arguing. She waited in silence.

"Would you mind, madame," the man's voice was uneasy, "if I told Nora —I mean the cook—you were here before I took your bags to your room?"

"Yes, I would mind. If you will take me to my room first, you can speak to the cook afterwards."

She saw him give her another side look and straighten up from his hunching protestation against the carrying of the luggage. He led the way silently to the third floor. They passed a library on the second floor, over the dining room at the back. And her own room was over the library. It had two

long windows and a bathroom. She stood at the door and looked at the darkened windows.

"I was expected?" she asked.

"Yes, surely, madame. Mr. MacGrath gave orders."

"Orders for what?"

The man had a moment's confusion. "Lena, the chambermaid, madame, isn't here yet. I think she expected to have your room ready in time, but she went out last night—" He paused, for Linda was looking directly at him.

"You are in charge of the servants?"

"Well, madame, Lena— —"

"Never mind Lena. You can turn Lena over to me. What is your name?"

"Gaze, madame." The man spoke hastily. "Would you like your breakfast served in your room, madame?"

"Yes, but I'd like the table dusted before breakfast is put on it and the chair wiped off before I sit on it."

He looked at her perplexed. "It's not my— —"

She cut in, "Bring me a dust cloth, Gaze, before you bring my tray."

He backed away in alarm. He brought the tray fifteen minutes later, but not the dust cloth. He dusted the table with a napkin. And he said, "Have you any other orders for me, madame?"

"Yes, I wish to speak to the cook. Will you send her here as soon as I have finished my breakfast?"

But when he had gone her heart sank. Enmity within the narrow confines of a house is a subtle depressor of spirits. She looked about her room. It was as unlike anything she had expected as was possible. She had lived for years in the midst of shiny oak furniture crowded into small space. Here was spaciousness and color. To her amazement when she had pulled up her window shades, she found the furniture was apple green. The bed was curved like an Egyptian boat; the dressing table had the same curves about its mirror. In the top drawer of a low chest lay apple-green cretonnes splattered with white dogwood. It was too much for Linda. She rolled up her sleeves and looked about for a broom. An apple-green bedroom and a white tiled bathroom were things she could not suffer to be neglected. But who would have dreamed of finding them in Alexander MacGrath's house?

No broom was visible. There was a small cupboard in the bathroom that held some linen in disorderly piles. She came back into the bedroom, stepping lightly on a Persian rug of gray and green with yellow spots in it.

"Oh," she said aloud, "the dogwood has yellow leaves—if it is dogwood. I seem to remember that when dogwood blossoms it hasn't any leaves, but I suppose this dogwood had to have them to match the rug."

"Were you speaking to me, ma'am?"

At the door stood a huge figure that made Linda wonder if it could possibly come through.

"Are you Nora?"

"I'm Nora, ma'am. Is it the mister's niece?" The huge figure had an unexpectedly soft voice, and it got itself through the door with an unexpectedly soft movement. "Sure, that Lena, she had all of yesterday afternoon to fix up this room but she says she wasn't hired to wait on a—sure, ma'am, do you mind my saying—a housekeeper. She'll be out of luck, ma'am, when she sees you."

"Nora, I'd like a broom and a scrub bucket and some cloths. It's a good thing, Nora, that there's somebody in this house who works; my breakfast was delicious."

In spite of the rolls of flesh about her eyes, Nora sent a passably shrewd glance at the girl. "Sure, Miss MacGrath, wouldn't you like me to clean this room for you and you not needing to wait for Lena? Your trunk is here. 'Tis in the basement"—she threw open the closet door—"and the place too dusty to hang your clothes in."

"Well, I'd like you to help me, Nora. I'd like you to go over the house with me; you see, I don't know where anything is."

"'Tis not for the likes of you to be bothering about a broom and a bucket, ma'am. Could you not go out for a walk? 'Tis the fine day on the Avenue. If you'll put on your hat, ma'am, and take the air, I'll ask Gaze to help me with this room, and we'll have it done for you when you come back."

Linda's clear laugh almost made the bulky figure jump.

"Nora, your tongue will be frozen in your mouth if you ask Gaze to help you with this room, and the heart will be taken from you so that you'll not get your kitchen cleaned before I come back, no matter how long a walk I take."

"Oh, God love ye, 'tis Irish ye are."

"'Tis Irish I'm not, with MacGrath for a name. But I'll tell you this, Nora, there's nothing like the Scotch and Irish working together to get things done. Now look. I know this is new to you, having me here. But I'm not here to hinder you; I'm here to help you. And I know just how you feel because you're not sure that my helping won't hinder you. But I shouldn't wonder if you found it easy to understand me, and if I find it hard to understand you, Nora, it will be your fault. Because, while I'll know when a thing isn't done right, I'll know quicker when it is; and I'll be prouder of you when you do it well than you could ever be of yourself."

"Sure, ma'am, ye may think you're Scotch," Nora's brogue broadened, "but there's Irish blood in you somewhere, if the truth were known. Sure it takes the Scotch to tell you when things are wrong, but it takes the Irish to tell you when they're right."

"Well, to show you, Nora, I'm going to put on my hat and go out; and I'll be gone a couple of hours."

"Now, the Lord love ye! It's meself that will stand by you in any tight fix ye may get in and the place will be shining when ye get back. Ah, 'twas a cold welcome ye had, ma'am, and you alone in a strange place. 'Tis a shame and here's your hat, ma'am. And shall I be brushing the dust from it?"

"Nora," Linda was putting on her hat, "who thought of the colors in this room? Surely not a man."

"'Tis right ye are, ma'am. The room was a respectable room with good walnut furniture and Mrs. Lansell she brought in a party from her place on Long Island to go to the Opery and stay over night, and 'twas this room Himself gave her, and she called the walnut bed a coffin and the room a hearse. And Himself was that upset he said she could fix it up to suit, if so be she was using it often enough for it to darken her spirits if she stayed in it. And she says—anyhow that's what Gaze said she says—that if she only came once again it would kill her. And there was so much laugh about it that Himself told her to go ahead and fix it, and this is what she done."

"Well, I like it, Nora. It's the only cheerful thing besides yourself in the place."

There was a faint twinkle in Nora's eye. "'Tis not an easy color, ma'am. You see, ma'am, Mrs. Lansell is a blond and green is becoming to her, but there's hardly any other woman among them all that this green wouldn't make look sick. Ever since I saw you standing here in it, ma'am, I've been

hoping Mrs. Lansell would see the same. Look out for the telephone, ma'am; the hall is dark when you shut the door. 'Tis there, just outside your room; but there's one downstairs in the library and one on the first floor, all on the same line; and I'm bound to tell you, ma'am, if you listen in on the first floor you can hear what's being said on the third."

Linda stood a moment before the telephone, then she picked up the telephone book. "I want an address, Nora. Wait a moment before you shut the door. Where are the ten hundreds on Fifth Avenue?"

"Up by the Park, ma'am."

Linda sped down the stairs and remembered just in time to stand still while Gaze opened the door for her. She laughed a little over all the things she would have to remember, and she paused in front of the house to look at it. Red brick with white stone facings, it stood out among the brown-stone fronts. It had Tudor windows and a wrought-iron grilling before the wide front door and yes, it had an escutcheon, here in America, a nice snobbish shield with three thistles on it. She saluted it humorously.

"Greetings, Arms of Grath! I am Linda, daughter of George of Grath."

Two heads drew back from behind two windows of the House of Grath, and if two voices said the same thing in different ways of astonishment, Linda did not know it, for she was speeding toward the Avenue and under her breath she was singing a little song to keep up her courage.

It was clear and sunshiny and little wandering breezes swept across the side streets and made Linda hasten to cross them. The shops were brilliant and their windows were decked with gold and silver, purple and fine linen. There were books and she was reminded that she had seen none in the House of Grath save in the library. There were flowers and she had seen no flowers there. The Plaza loomed to one side and the Park stretched ahead. She nodded to it. "I've heard of you. I'm very glad, indeed, to meet you. Hi, I'll have to cure myself of this habit of talking to houses and trees, now that I'm in New York. Those two men nearly spoke to me."

Yet she was not so cured of her habit of making friends with the things about her that she could keep from an exclamation of approval over the Park breaking into bud. Or perhaps it was the Park who spoke to her. A little lilt of spring crept into her blood as the breeze that had swept the cross streets ran through the new-born leaves and ruffled her russet hair into curling tendrils. The breath of adventure made her loneliness more bearable; for disguise it as she might, she had never been lonelier in her life; and try as she might to exult over these new sights, it was with difficulty that she really

saw them. What she saw was a steamer chair and a loved figure whose eyes she knew were looking out over lake and mountain and finding them lonely now that she was gone. What she heard was Ned Lindan saying, "You must not be sorry for him. He has wanted a rest for a long while. For years he has wanted to read all the books in the world. He has a chance to now. For years he has wanted to think his own thoughts and not those he was ordered to think. He can do that now. He hasn't a thing in the world to worry about but you."

She checked her swinging gait before a white sandstone house with a bow window curtained with a misty texture, the color of the stone. The house had carvings of stone, and above the bow window many other shining windows that looked blankly down on her, and a marble vestibule at the top of a flight of stone steps. She wondered how long it would take her to get up and down those steps.

"I'd like to see inside that door; I would like to. I wonder what I could do? I think if I could get up the steps and nobody saw me, I could see inside."

She ran up the stone steps but evidently the manservant who opened the door without her ringing was waiting there for that purpose. He had no appearance of having recently put on a coat. On the contrary, he looked as if he had always worn his coat and always been standing at the door in it. Not so Linda; the swift opening of the door had all the effect on her of a bolt from the blue. It dissipated every newspaper instinct she had so painfully acquired and it left her bereft of any other resources than those furnished by her subconscious mind. All she could seem to fall back upon as the manservant waited for her to speak was the thing she wanted to know.

"Does Mr. Steffin live here?"

"Yes, madame." He did not appear surprised at her inquiry.

For a moment she looked back at the man as blankly as he was looking at her, then quite as blankly she asked, "Is Mrs. Steffin at home?"

"Mrs. Steffin died, madame, a year ago."

"Oh!" Linda's soft voice doubtless sounded plaintive to the manservant. To herself it sounded inept.

"Perhaps, madame," and as he answered her she caught the glint of eyes that do not look unmoved on questing beauty, "you would like to speak to young Mr. Steffin. He came in a moment, ago. He can tell you about his mother."

For a moment the softly lit hall darkened into a Rubicon, and the stone steps she had taken so gayly a moment ago were a flowing current it seemed impossible for her to ford in retreat. Then a quick step sounded on the stairway, swinging shoulders rounded a long tapestry; a presence that filled the space between the tapestry and the door loomed before her, and a gloved hand removed a hat.

In the dusk, casual eyes glanced idly at her and were suddenly arrested.

Then they glowed incandescently. There was a quick movement of the hand, and the manservant disappeared. The noon sunshine and the May breeze stirred the old tapestry as if with the breath of adventure. The gesture that had dismissed the servant expanded into a welcome and the shining head bent low.

"Sheba! I must have missed your outriders; or have you come unheralded? I welcome you as a boon long sought."

She had the feeling that the door to her heart was being turned by a bright glass knob held in that welcoming hand. She leaned against the stone balustrade and shut her eyes a moment, for the steps darkened before her. She tried to think of the reason she had fled from this man that first time he had entered her house. She tried to visualize the bitterness of the disappointment that had expressed itself in this flight. But here at his threshold, facing the direct blue look that seemed to need no explanations from her, the reasons for her flight looked suddenly flimsy.

"Why, you are all white, Sheba! The journey has been too long. The sands of the desert should not be crossed in the glare of the sun without resting." He gave her no chance for embarrassment. The pleasant voice filled the blank spaces of her self-consciousness. "Did you have water for the camels and where was your last stop?"

The darkness was vanishing from the steps. She drew about her the robe of fantasy he had so gayly offered her and felt the relief of its covering.

"Oh, Solomon," she said, "it is the change in you that I reflect, not the sun. In your kingly robes you are different than you were in my country, a passing traveler."

He looked her very straight in the eyes. "No, I have not changed—not in any way."

The glass knob of the door to her heart rattled.

"Oh, Solomon, how strange your words are."

"I bring back every scattered word to fit them to your fancy, Sheba." He took her hand and unclasped it. She had not known it was clenched until he did. He seemed to fill it with shining bits of light plucked from the air. "Hold them gently, Sheba. They are only words, but they are my heart's jewels, for somewhere among them is the word 'love.'"

If the hand he was not holding went to her heart he did not seem to see. If there was the roar of rushing water in her ears he could only guess it by that white look that had not yet left her face.

"I had no wisdom," he said quietly, "when first I spoke the word to you. I wooed you as a shepherd girl, and it did not go well with my wooing. Now, being wiser with ceaseless questioning where no answer came, I know that queens cannot be won that way. I question no more. Now, it shall be in all state."

Somewhere in the back of her mind was perception of the perfection of this speech for the situation in which she found herself. But she could think of no answer, and so, standing stolidly, she said the most ordinary thing it was possible to say:

"I am walking home. I live only a little way from you."

"Sometimes to hope for a thing brings it to pass. I have hoped for this. Where are you living?"

"In the fifties, with my uncle."

"Not with your father?"

"I have left my father in Saranac. He is ill."

"Then you are here only for a few days?"

"No. I am going to stay here and work. I am taking over the management of Uncle Sandy's house." She moved down the steps of his house to the street and he swung in beside her. He did not speak at once and when he did it was with a certain hesitancy.

"Sometimes I think just to wait is the hardest thing of all. One learns to wait in Saranac. The most delightful man I know is doing that there. I went through the War with him. He never waited in his life, and now he does nothing else."

"He sits next to my father on the sanitarium veranda. You mean Mr. Lindan, don't you?"

He gave her a quick look. “But, of course, you two would be bound to meet. Did you like him?”

“More than that. I don’t see how I could have left my father but for him. I have never seen any man with such ability to shed light—light on anything. He has but to look and the thing grows clearer. Is it not strange how this thing seizes on our best—this illness?”

“It is so curable now. If Lindan can learn to wait he will get well—and of course your father will. Just a second—here’s the place where the first violets grow.”

He opened the door of the florist shop across from the Plaza. “No,” he said to the salesman, “single violets, not double ones, and give me the pin.”

He pinned them on her and held the door for her to pass through. “What good luck; had I come out of that door five minutes earlier or five minutes later, I would have missed you. It isn’t often things go like this. Did you not tell me that you had never been in New York?”

“Yes, this is almost my first hour; it is my first walk in New York.”

“Then if there’s a hansom cab left in the world, let me take you on your first ride in New York. We’ll drive slowly to Washington Square and back again and through the Park. I’d like to take you to Brooklyn Bridge. I’d like to take you to four of the new plays. I’d like to take you to lunch every day for a week.”

“But I’m working for a living; aren’t you?”

“Some of the time. You have days off, do you not?”

“Well, mine is a funny job; I don’t know yet how much time its going to take; and I want to ask you something. I want to ask you about housekeeping.”

“The deuce you do! What makes you think I know anything about it?”

“Oh, the funniest little thing; the way your doorman disappeared when you waved your hand. What would you do if a butler did not obey your order?”

“It never happened to me.”

“Why, you arrogant thing; what if he did not carry out your orders while you were away?”

“I cannot imagine it. I wouldn’t have it, that’s all.”

“Imagine it and give me counsel. This morning my new butler refused to dust the chair on which I must sit to eat my breakfast.”

“I would have a newer one before dinner.”

“He implied it wasn’t his work.”

“But it was your order.”

“Well, there I am. I cannot make a royal gesture and I am not sure enough what a butler’s work is to order him about nonchalantly. Exactly what does a butler do?”

He considered this a moment.

“I’ll tell you all those things as we ride to Washington Square. A butler has to answer the door unless there is another servant for that purpose; he has to wait on the table, keep the silver clean, answer the telephone, and manage the servants.”

“Well, he has the easiest job in New York then. I’ll bet my butler will do more than yours and I can’t go any farther than Fiftieth Street with you this morning. I have to go back and see what Nora has done to the House of Grath.”

It seemed so incredible that Steffin did not believe it until Linda turned into Fifty-third Street and stopped before her uncle’s house.

He made one last protest. “What does your father think about your being here alone with problems that are hard to handle?”

She bridled. “He would think I ought to learn to handle them. Any woman who falls down running a house might as well pick herself up and learn how to do it as fast as she can. As for being here alone—I’m not.”

He looked up at MacGrath’s house. “Who chaperones you?”

“But I’m the housekeeper. Housekeepers don’t need chaperones.”

She mounted the steps and he rang the doorbell for her.

“I am coming for you to-morrow,” he said, “to take you to luncheon and then to the Metropolitan Gallery to look at the sunshine in the Monets and compare it with the sunshine in the Park.” He rang the doorbell again.

There was a faint flicker of Gaze’s eyes as they fell on Steffin. For Steffin leaned forward and rang the bell and listened to it as Gaze stood in the open door.

“There doesn’t seem to be anything the matter with the bell,” said Steffin. Then he looked at Gaze. There was another flicker of Gaze’s eyes. “I shall keep on ringing when I come to-morrow.”

CHAPTER XII

Linda could not have said just why she wanted to be downstairs in the drawing-room when her uncle came home. She was a little loath to admit that she wanted to be there for the childish reason of telling her story to her uncle before the butler told his.

"Probably," she said to herself, as she put the last pin in her hair, "Uncle Sandy doesn't permit his butler to confide in him. There's a good deal I don't know about all this."

For she had spent the afternoon with Nora opening every cupboard door and listing linen and silver, and there were many things on her mind that she wished to consult her uncle about and many things she hoped he would have the patience to hear. As the things she found she must attend to increased in number, they had driven out of her mind the remembrance of the dinner hour.

"Since I want to be downstairs when Uncle Sandy comes in, I might as well get there as soon as I can anyhow," she decided. "What on earth does one wear at dinner with one's uncle as a paid household functionary? I suppose it will have to be the 'trump.'"

The "trump" was a black velvet dress made over from one of her mother's that had gained its name from, "When in doubt lead trumps." And it gave her no particular satisfaction to see herself in it, though it was impossible for her to have regarded the figure in the mirror with anything but a feminine eye. The russet hair clouding about the white forehead, the brilliant color, the shapely white arms that the black velvet framed to perfection were things so familiar to her that she did not consider them as assets. She merely wondered if she would have to buy a new evening gown and whether she could wait for her uncle in the library or downstairs in the drawing-room.

She stood a moment at the doorway of the library in surprise. For a man sat on the couch under the light and it was not MacGrath. It must have been the one time that Gaze was standing at the door, for Linda, listening for her uncle, had heard no ring.

The glow of the lamp shone on heavy black hair plastered down as if it were paste on a forehead with black brows over full eyes—eyes like those of

the busts of the Cæsars, full in the lids. The nose and chin supported this fullness of the eyes; the nose was large and the chin heavy. She looked at the mouth and something stirred in her mind, something that recognized power and tried to name it. It was a power for which she had no name and the admission worried her. It was not in the full red underlip nor yet in the short arrogant upper lip, but it was there.

Subconsciously she drew her black lace scarf over her neck; and as if at some faint stir of air or some alien breath, the man moved. He laid down the paper he was reading and crossed his long legs with a movement at once light and heavy, as of perfect coördinating muscles moving indolently. He looked up at the painting above the hearth; a painting in gray-blues of dancing nymphs; then turned his head and met the girl's eyes as she stood in the doorway.

For a moment he did not move. Not even the expression with which he had regarded the dancing nymphs changed and under the unguarded look Linda's color rose. Slowly he rose to his feet and stood on the hearth, facing her.

"Ah," he said, and his voice was full like his eyes, "have I perhaps come on the wrong night?"

The sentence was so short and the words so harmless Linda was at a loss to know why the color flooded her face. Again the man's head bent forward.

"Won't you come in? I'm sorry if I intrude. Gaze should have told me." He hesitated the barest instant and then added, "Or does Gaze know you are here?"

Linda found her voice. "Why, of course," and she took a step into the room.

"Do come in. The fire is pleasant, for all the warmth of the day. Do you live in New York?"

"I live here," said Linda.

An amused flicker lightened the full eyes. "Indeed! I hope you don't mind my assumption that you are not a New Yorker—so few people are—but no New York woman can blush and unblush so readily."

The impulse of flight was so strong upon Linda that she checked it by moving toward the hearth. "I have never heard of this especial color line in New York," she said.

He did not answer for a moment; then, "Have you a name," he asked suddenly.

"I have more than one name."

"Of course; DuBarry or Pompadour?"

"How unflattering! Why not Poppæa?"

"Ah, the distinction is very subtle." He considered her with more deliberation. "She had a rather deadly intelligence behind her child's face—Poppæa."

"Does one always assume naïveté because of an unlined forehead?"

"One assumes nothing with a Poppæa." He paused and laughed. "The curious part about it is that though I have words to tell you why that is not your name I find I cannot use them readily enough."

The noiseless opening of the front door made the footsteps that suddenly sounded in the hall as surprising as a crash. Sandy MacGrath stood in the library door, and now spoke crisply.

"You have met my niece, Shelburn?"

"Ah," said Shelburn. He did not turn to look at MacGrath. He looked at Linda and his eyes narrowed. "No, I have not met your niece. What is her name?"

"Her name is Linda MacGrath."

With a quick movement Shelburn lifted Linda's hand. "It is not surprising that I did not recognize you at once, Miss MacGrath."

As she drew her hand away he sent a swift look at his host. The two men looked at each other a moment in silence. Then the head of the House of Grath turned to the woman on his hearth.

"I am sorry not to have been here when you came, Linda. Did the day go well?"

"It went thrillingly, Uncle Sandy. I heard the footsteps of my ancestors go before me as I went about the house. There was linen that must have been woven in Scotland centuries ago. There are lovely old portraits and silver—I ordered all the silver to be shined. I even found marks of my father."

"How did you leave your father?"

"I wish he had gone there a year ago. But I found that wish everywhere in Saranac."

MacGrath turned to Shelburn. “Linda is George MacGrath’s daughter.”

Shelburn frowned. “George MacGrath!” There was incredulity in his exclamation. He turned on Linda. “Do you mean to tell me you have been in Springfield all this time—my editor’s daughter—and I have never seen you.”

“He is no longer your editor, Mr. Shelburn.”

MacGrath smiled faintly.

“Why not,” said Shelburn crisply.

“You discharged him.”

“Does he wish to go on with his work when he is well?”

“I do not think he should go back to Springfield when he gets well. But I cannot answer for him.”

“Perhaps we can arrange it.”

She had a moment’s panic, thinking of her father’s need for work when he got well. Then there came to her the picture of Steffin standing at his own door and dismissing his manservant with a gesture. Almost automatically her hand moved.

“Ah,” said Sandy MacGrath.

“Mr. MacGrath, dinner is served,” said Gaze at the door.

Not once since her little gesture of dismissal had Shelburn looked at Linda. But the two men were much absorbed and the talk flowed steadily into channels that entirely eliminated Linda. They became automatons of discussion. If Shelburn’s eyes rested on the girl while MacGrath explained to her that he had come with information Shelburn was waiting impatiently for and that must be discussed before their evening engagements, his look was in no way different from the way he looked at Gaze changing the plates.

Linda watched the butler’s service; she examined the silver that still needed shining; she poured the coffee. She listened to her uncle’s narration, impatiently interrupted by the other man in his desire to get at the gist of the story without the labor of too much concentration.

“The Lindan property,” her uncle said, “ought to be bought outright. This is no longer an experiment. The forty acres that Lindan bought a few years ago, the property that joins his estate on the south and that he leased to us, has proved that. The wells we dug there are the best we have and I think

we'll strike oil in addition to gas on those forty acres, if we go deep enough. I'm sure of it on that tract north, clear up to the old Lindan homestead."

"Lindan won't sell," said Shelburn. "He won't even lease. He has enough money to live on from the lease of this forty acres, or he says he has, and the rest is his ancestral something-or-other and he wants to keep it in the family. God knows why! He hasn't a family; he hasn't a relative in the world and it doesn't look to me as if he is going to marry and found a family."

"He must have relatives. It's an old Virginia family."

"One of those old ones that has died of dry rot, then. I saw Doctor Lansell last night when I went down to my Long Island place and he said if Lindan didn't take care of himself he wouldn't live four months."

"Why do you harp on that? This standing around waiting for a man to die——"

"Because then this property won't be the ancestral acres of whomever it goes to, and they can probably be persuaded to sell it at a reasonable price."

"Yes, and it might be divided among forty remote heirs and some of these heirs might have energetic blood in them. You'll wake up some day and find a rival gas company in full blast."

"Wouldn't do them any good! We have the pipe lines and the branch railroads and the company store and the organization. They'd have to sell out to us."

"Yes, and we have a board of directors and a bunch of stockholders they might interest. About those pipe lines, Shelburn. Steffin came back from Middletown the other day and on his way back he saw the Midvale people and looked over their estimate. It is ten per cent. less than the price the company paid for the piping your Middletown mills furnished it."

"Our piping is better. What made Steffin go to Middletown?"

"I didn't know he was going. Perhaps he went to hunt this up."

"Well, if he doesn't like what he found, let him talk with me."

"You agreed to make this piping as low as anybody else, Shelburn."

"The quotations were taken to you, MacGrath, and you approved the bills."

"I didn't check up your price until Steffin came back. You've overcharged. You'll have to do something about it. You can't be buyer and

seller too, in your own company, and you know it."

There was a silence while Shelburn spread his cheese on his biscuit, staring down at it with concentration that had the effect of heaviness in his face.

"Very well," he said at length. "I'll see what can be done. Now about this Lindan thing. I'll have Lindan down here and see if we can't put it through."

A faint exclamation broke from Linda and both men looked at her.

"Oh," said Linda, "I hope you don't mind my intrusion, but Mr. Lindan ought not to leave Saranac. I heard his doctor tell him the other day that he was on the edge where a push in either direction would send him either up or down."

There was a pause. MacGrath frowned. "Oh, you know him?"

"He sits next to my father on the porch at the sanitarium."

Shelburn spoke to MacGrath. "Well, there you are; you see I'm right. He won't live long."

Linda leaned forward with a white face and in her eyes there was something deadly. It caught the man's look and held it as no complaisance would have done.

In a moment she drew back. "Do you mind, Uncle Sandy, if I leave you men to your talk now that dinner is over?"

Shelburn rose and opened the door for her, looking at her curiously.

CHAPTER XIII

Gaze had poured Sandy MacGrath's breakfast coffee for so long that it took MacGrath some days to become accustomed to Linda behind the coffee urn. But at the end of the second week he had reached the stage of approval of the way she filled his second cup so that he even inquired if she were lonely and if she wanted to ask anybody to visit her.

"That would be great fun after I've learned my job a little better. I know one or two people in Springfield who would think a few days in this house a glimpse of heaven; but I'd rather wait until I'm no longer an amateur."

"You must have in mind pretty good housekeepers."

"There are two women I should like to ask here some day, and both of them are smart enough to know whether or not I am making a mess of things."

"But you are not," said MacGrath. "Who are your two?"

"Mrs. Gazann and——"

"Oh, the gaunt woman who kept watch over George and would not have his furniture and books stored. She deserves something for holding his room at a loss. What would her boarding house do while she was gone?"

"If it went to pieces altogether she has made enough money to stop working."

"And who is your other one?"

"Susie Ryland. She's young and pretty—very pretty. And she's never seen New York."

MacGrath held his cup suspended a moment. "Ryland—Ryland. That's the young woman who telegraphed me about George. Wait a minute. Shelburn has a new secretary—his nephew, I believe; and I heard him telephoning yesterday to some one he called Susie. Of course New York is full of Susies, but their names are not often used over Shelburn's private telephone."

"Oh, it's Ollie Knox, Uncle Sandy! I wonder if I could ask him if it's my Susie?"

"There's nothing to hinder you."

"I shouldn't like to call Mr. Shelburn's office. I wonder where Ollie is living."

"He's probably living at Shelburn's house. Do you want to call Shelburn's house?"

"I do not."

MacGrath stirred the sugar in his cup with a faint smile. "Get Gaze to do it for you. You mustn't let your impulses carry you away with this man. He is president of the company in which I am vice-president and he comes here frequently. His friends are my friends. He has asked both you and me to his Long Island place over Decoration Day week-end."

"You are going?"

He drank his coffee, then casually, "Oh, yes, and you too. You'll like it. We are not the only guests, and you won't run into your host personally. On the contrary he will be much absorbed."

Linda bent her head over her plate. This was evidently a thing she would be expected to do whether she liked it or not; part of her job that she must look at impersonally.

Her uncle rose.

"Uncle Sandy, will you let me take the house accounts in charge? You have no idea how much is being wasted." She looked over her shoulder to be sure that Gaze was not at her elbow. "Sometimes I think there's a rake-off; whoever does the ordering gets it. I wish you'd let me change the grocer and do the ordering myself."

"You'll let yourself in for a good deal of trouble."

"Yes, I know. Nora will probably say that the things I order are no good. And Gaze will let them get cold before he brings them to you to prove it. They may even be cooked badly to show you what a poor housekeeper I am. Can you stand it?"

"Not for long; I'd rather pay the rake-off."

"Could you stand it for just one day? I think I could manage it if they thought you were standing behind me. It seems so thriftless to have this money wasted this way."

He gave her an approving look. Already in these few weeks his house had become more habitable and he was getting more for his money. It was not only that this young girl with her grace and beauty had become a

pleasant thing to return to from days that held neither grace nor beauty, but she kept quiet when neither of them had anything to say, and she was extremely intelligent about a thousand small things whose pleasantness he had almost forgotten. There were flowers on the table, but never too many; there was silver that shone; and on the rainy days that still held a chill, fires burned on hearths that had been cold. He found his handkerchiefs in a box that opened easily on his dresser. He found his buttons where they were intended to be.

MacGrath was getting accustomed to the soft "Welcome home" at night that had at first embarrassed him. But he held himself from liking it too well. She was far too beautiful for him to suppose that he could keep her there for long, nor was he anxious to throw her among his friends so soon. They would laugh at the housekeeper side of his arrangement and invite his niece to long visits. So he had foregone his usual little dinner parties before the theater. The theater was one of the few things MacGrath liked and he liked to dine well before and after it.

"What do you want me to do, Linda; make you out a budget and give you an allowance?"

She laughed up at him. "Well, you see, Uncle Sandy, if there's a fortune being made out of running your house, I think it should stay in the family."

"Why, you grafter! That's an entirely different matter. If you want the loot——"

"What would you say if I ran your house as well as it is now run—perhaps better, if your comfort was in no way interfered with and your food as good at only half what it is now costing you?"

"I would say you deserved what you saved, or at least a part of it. But until you do it, you must permit me to doubt its possibility."

"Well, you know, Uncle Sandy, I fired that housemaid after you told me I might, and the new one has done much better. As long as I keep Gaze you wouldn't mind who else I fired, would you?"

"As I told you, I will stand it one day if you fire them all."

"Well, I don't think I'll have to fire them. It's not my idea of household success to discard useful things. If it is possible to succeed with what you have at hand you gain stability. All I want to know is that I can discharge these servants if they do not obey my orders."

Gaze came into the dining room and paused.

"You can fire anybody in the house you like." MacGrath turned to Gaze. "Gaze, Miss MacGrath wants you to telephone Mr. Shelburn's office and ask if there is a Mr. Knox there—it is Knox, is it not, Linda? If he is there, she will talk to him. If he is engaged, ask him to call her. Linda, how are your clothes for Shelburn's house party?"

"Why, I've no more idea, Uncle Sandy, than a Fiji Islander what you wear at a house party. How long will it last?"

"It will last four days and you wear sports clothes in the daytime and evening dresses for dinner."

"Sports clothes are easy. Mrs. Vanderbilt cannot wear any better sports clothes than I can, though hers might be made better. But evening clothes—I think I can last four days if I can wear one evening gown twice."

"Suppose you order yourself a new evening gown. No, this does not come out of your salary. I've a business reason for taking you to Long Island. I will give you a hundred dollars for your dress."

She cast a humorous eye on him. "I know you want me to see how a house like this is run. Uncle Sandy, if I get this dress for fifty dollars can I have the other fifty?"

"It is not agreeable to me to answer that question. But I will say this: If you are given a hundred dollars to buy a dress by any man, and save fifty, the fifty-dollar dress must look as if it cost a hundred."

"Will you know, Uncle Sandy, whether it looks as if it cost a hundred?"

He gave her a shrewd look. "I'm wondering if you have me there, accidentally or intentionally?"

She chuckled. "Never mind, when I have bought this gown I shall be answered."

He put his hand in his pocket for his check book. "Well, for four weeks I've wondered what George said to you by way of instruction before he let you come here. I wonder no longer. George probably said nothing at all, knowing the thing he has trained."

Her eyes twinkled at him impudently. "Why, I am Linda of the House of Grath; what should one son say against another to the daughter of the house. He knew I should like it here. He has lived here himself."

He flushed a little, to her surprise. But there was a certain pride in his look at her.

"Admirably answered," he conceded. "I have known George to change his barber because he said more than 'Good morning' to him. And yet he has lived for years in a noisy boarding house run by a woman who scarcely troubles to knock at his door. I do not understand it."

"Oh, father said you wouldn't. But Mrs. Gazann is a friend—she's not like the barber. Mrs. Gazann——"

Gaze had come back into the room, and he stood looking at Linda as if he had never seen her before.

"Well, what is it, Gaze," said MacGrath impatiently.

For a moment Gaze seemed to have difficulty in speaking. Then he said, "Mr. Knox is on the line, sir, for Miss MacGrath."

But Linda was looking at Gaze straighter than she had looked at him since she had been in the house. There had been something in his face as he waited for her to finish talking to her uncle, some astonishment or vacuity, that reminded her of something that she struggled in vain to recapture.

"Tell him to hold the line," said MacGrath, watching Gaze as he left the room. "What ails him?"

"Oh," said Linda. "Oh, I have it! It's the name Gazann. I said it twice as he came into the room and there's no other such name in the world. Oh, dear!"

For one moment Sandy MacGrath thought his niece was ill. He flung out an arm and caught her as she shook, and his feeling when she raised her face to him radiant with laughter was entirely new to him.

"Oh," gasped Linda, holding to MacGrath's coat with an abandonment he liked. "Gazann isn't really a suitable name for a butler; it would make guests stare so. He would want to abbreviate it." She lowered her voice. "He is Mrs. Gazann's long-lost lover. I've seen his picture a hundred times; only he wore a mustache and smirked. Listen, Uncle Sandy; do let me ask Mrs. Gazann for a visit. Let me spend that other fifty dollars getting her a dress that looks like a hundred dollars and spring her on Gaze as a guest of the house—oh, will you?"

"For heaven's sake, how old do you think I am!"

CHAPTER XIV

"Ollie Knox," said Linda at the telephone, "have you been in this city more than one day without calling me by telephone?"

"Say, listen, Linda; the first week I got here I was just a shuttle from Wall Street to Long Island. In Wall Street I prepared all the checks for everybody in Springfield that had anything to do with the Shelburn *Morning Sun*. And on Long Island I helped the morning sun to rise and swept the sand out of its path. But I thought of you night and day. I thought of you every time I drew a check and I thought of you every time I held a broom. I thought about how much better I could do the one thing than you and how much better you could do the other thing than me. But I did telephone you. Say, who's the frosty guy you keep on the other end of your telephone line, and do you live at the top of your house and is he afraid of steps?"

"Oh, Ollie, when you hear who this frosty guy is, you could roll down all my steps with frisky glee."

"This is a lure to bring me to your house. But here's the point: When I finally used my interviewing arts on that frozen turnip that won't mount your steps to call you down, he said you were out with another man. No, don't you fire him; it was my art that extracted the information, not his artlessness. And then I called you up again at an hour when I thought you might be downstairs in the dining room and he said the same thing; and when I asked him if it was the same man——"

"Ollie, I'm glad you're not my private secretary. I wouldn't have any privacy at all. I called you up for a reason. Would you kindly let me state it?"

"Not kindly, but fire away."

"Ollie, you were heard in your private office, over your private telephone, to call up a girl named Susie. Is there any beautiful chance of Susie Ryland being in New York?"

"There sure is. Susie's staying at the Y.W.C.A. while she's hunting a job on the New York newspapers and trying to convince city editors that all good presidents of the United States and all good reporters come from Ohio small-town newspapers."

"Has she had any success?"

"I don't believe she has, because she said last night she guessed she'd have to get married."

"You aren't by any chance engaged to her this morning, are you, Ollie?"

"No, she loves me madly and she's followed me to New York; but you know how it is, Ethelinda, with these women that follow you about—if you're a gentleman you speak to them kindly, but you can't seem to want to marry them."

"Ollie, I wish Susie had come into your office then. I'm going to ask her to visit me."

"Say, Linda, honestly, I think Susie is pretty low in her mind, and your idea would be like an answer to—well you know—an answer to 'please help the blind.'"

"Oh, Ollie, you old sweet thing; you can't fool me."

"Well, say, Linda, don't you tell her I said anything. But she came on here with only a week's extra wages; and she didn't know that there were ninety thousand New York girls trying to pick up a job in New York and as many more coming from small towns every week. And she thought she had to put up a good front to make the public press want her for a society reporter, and she went to a big hotel so she could have a good address when the editor said he'd send around for her. And now she's at the Y.W.C.A. at night time, like I told you, and in the daytime she wishes she was a swan in the lake at Central Park because school children feed them bread."

"Oh, Ollie, why didn't you think of me sooner?"

"Well, Belinda, when Susie puts up a front she does it better than anybody I know. I hadn't any idea it was like that. That's how I know how good a front she put up. It wasn't until she went to the Y.W. that I 'got on' and then I did call you up. If I were you and had the time to spare, I'd go after her, because I don't know whether she's got carfare or not, and it's a long way to walk to your house on an empty stomach."

"Oh, Ollie, I have an automobile and a chauffeur at my disposal. I won't even wait to telephone. I'll go for her at once."

"Better telephone first, Linda. This is a game you haven't been up against. Maybe she'd rather meet you at the front door."

"Why, I've been poor all my life, Ollie. I've walked on worn-out shoes hundreds of times to save carfare and Susie knows it."

"Well, you beat it down there. I'll 'phone her to meet you in the parlor in half an hour, and if she isn't there I'll meet you there myself. I'm the best Y.W.C.A. parlor pussy cat you ever saw."

"If she isn't there, Ollie, you'll find her while I wait for her."

"Right. Good-by."

Bare hall rooms were not unknown to Linda MacGrath. From time to time she had been shifted around among Mrs. Gazann's cheaper rooms, since she used her bedroom merely to sleep in and her father's room for living purposes. So the little mustard-colored room with its iron cot and one straight chair where Linda found Susie Ryland seemed neither unusual nor a hardship, even after her month in her apple-green room with its long windows. What did arrest her attention was the whiteness of Susie's face that had always been brilliantly colored and the look behind Susie's eyes. Failure was a new thing to Susie.

"You see, Linda, of course I've fallen down on lots of things. I'm one of a family of eight. But I never fell down in such a lonely place. If you break your leg in your own back yard, somebody will come out and help you in. But, honestly, nobody was meant to feel so unimportant as you feel in this city where not a living soul would know whether you starved to death or not."

"Well, what's the matter with your voice, Susie, that you couldn't call it to their attention? I never knew you not to raise your voice before when you wanted anything. Anybody's entitled to call out for help."

"Funny about that; I could do it at home. But I just couldn't write that home from here. You know I was hunting last night for the word that would fit what this place did to me in one week's time. It cowed me."

"Are you all ready? Here, give me your bag; I'll let you carry it after you've had your breakfast."

"They won't let me out of here with my bag."

"Oh, I paid that before I came upstairs."

"Well, my heavens, how did you know so much? Has New York taught you that in a month?"

"Not on your life! New York is thriving on what was learned back home. I've been brought up in a boarding house."

"It's an education that should fit you for better things. It looks as if it had. Don't tell me this elegant equipage is yours, and that I get in it."

Linda looked out of the window of the car as she replied to give Susie a chance to wipe the tears from her eyes with the handkerchief that had been dried on the window pane.

"I only had enough left for a stamp to write home," said Susie, "after my fool pride had been starved into sensibility, which would have taken another day or two, and even at that I would have had to go to a hotel to use their paper."

As the car swung in and stopped before the MacGrath house, Susie gripped Linda's arm. "Linda, this isn't where you live, is it? Good heavens, look at the armorial bearings."

Linda gave an anxious eye to the little touch of gray creeping over the pallor of Susie's face. "Gaze," she said at the front door, "I want coffee in the drawing-room in about three seconds. Miss Ryland feels faint. Bring me the coffee first; I'm in a hurry. And after that, eggs and toast."

Susie leaned back among the couch pillows and shut her eyes. "For heaven's sake, don't wake me up, Linda, especially if I have to see that man."

"You know what I'm going to do with you, Susie," said Linda, after the disappearance of the fourth piece of toast and the third cup of coffee. "I'm going to take you upstairs and put you to bed for the day. In a little while you are going to have your luncheon in bed and in another little while you are going to have your dinner in bed and then——"

"You mean if I feel like bed or sleeping. Listen, that would be all right if I were feeble-bodied or feeble-minded, but I'm neither. I'm going to sit right here, if you don't mind, for ten minutes longer, and then I want to look around this house with you, and if you're going out again in that padded cell with that uniformed doorkeeper, I want to go, too."

"To-morrow, not to-day. To-morrow I'll send for Ollie Knox and we'll ride in that equipage to the newspaper offices you want to invade. And Ollie shall bring a letter of introduction from John Oliver Shelburn, and you shall give this address in case the city editor cannot make up his mind immediately, and Gaze shall answer the telephone if two or three of them want you at once. But now it's bed for you—a nice four-poster bed, ugly but elegant and colonial. There's only one adventuress room in this house and

I'm occupying it. You can have the chaste bedroom opposite my apple orchard."

"There's something about apple orchards," said Susie, rising valiantly, "in the heart of New York and in the middle of a well-known bachelor's house that does suggest adventure. Who do you suppose you are disconcerting—not to say supplanting?"

"I wonder," said Linda, opening the door of her apple-green bedroom. "What do you suppose had occurred in Alexander MacGrath's orderly life to make my appeal to him inspired?"

A faint color had come back into Susie's face and a faint light to her dark eyes. The eyes brightened as they darted about the room. "Oh, ho, ho!" she chortled. "He had sawed off the limb of the apple tree he was sitting on between himself and the trunk and he hadn't enough experience to grasp at an upper limb when he heard the lower one cracking."

"I haven't the least idea what you mean."

"If you'd been a society reporter as long as I have, you'd find the language of allegory was the only fit language for a situation you can merely guess at. What do you think yourself, Linda?"

"I think he was pursued by a very artful lady whom he liked well enough not to wish to openly offend. He may have left home suddenly, as the result of your telegram, with a developing situation behind him."

"What makes you think it?"

"Why, because nothing has happened since I got here. Uncle Sandy hates hotels and restaurants. He likes his own house and his own cook. His idea of entertaining himself is to have the people he wants to talk to at his own table and maybe the theater afterwards or the opera, for the one part of it he wants to hear."

"How do you know this?"

"Some of it he told me, and some of it Nora, the cook, told me. Yes, I gossip with the cook; sure I do, when it consists of listening to what I want to know, and besides, there are some things Nora knows more about in five minutes than I'll know in five years. Now since I've been here, there have been no little dinners, though there used to be two or three a week. There have been telephone calls but Gaze has answered them; and he has said—because I heard him—'Is it Miss MacGrath you wish to speak to?' And then he has had to explain the Miss MacGrath."

"Um! Well, if I were the lady, it *would* be Miss MacGrath I wished to speak to."

"Well, you see, Susie, you and I are used to direct methods. We're working women. These other women——"

"Now, listen here, I may be a working woman, but I'm a society reporter, and you don't have to tell me how these other women act. They act the same way in Springfield as they do in New York, only on a smaller scale.

"Don't you remember that good-looking rector of the society church in Springfield who couldn't understand why the women of his congregation were always leaving their rubbers even in dry weather and coming back for them after the service was over? I tell you it's the same in Springfield as here, only it's rubbers and church service one place, and a house with a butler the other place. If a man won't come to see you when you want to see him, you can call him by telephone twice, and you can write him maybe three times; after that, you've *got* to leave your fan or your rubbers and go and get them. Have you looked around this house for a fan?"

"Where would you look, Susie?"

"Gee, that's a delicate question. I can see you haven't found anything. Well, I'm all for helping out Uncle Sandy's game. He should give some of those little dinners for us. Come, now!"

"It's up to you, Susie. Have you got an evening dress?"

"Not one that would do for an intimate little dinner in a house like this. But I know where I can get one. There's a place down beyond Washington Square where you can rent them for the evening—stunning ones sold by the maids of the newly rich. I went there with a young lady who got her first engagement to sing after she had pawned everything she had, and they fitted her out for the concert and sent somebody along with her to take the things away from her before she left the concert hall. Sure, New York's full of those things."

"To make the picture complete, Susie, the gown should belong to the lady I am supplanting. Be careful not to select a green gown that a tall blonde might have worn."

Susie looked about the room. "Sure, she would be blonde, wouldn't she?"

"This, I suppose," said Susie, pausing on the second floor the next morning on her way to breakfast with Linda, "is a gentleman's suite."

"No, it's Uncle Sandy's library, where he receives the people he wants to talk to. The others use the drawing-rooms downstairs."

"But there's that Dutch sitting room, or whatever you call it, on our floor and up on the fourth floor there's another one."

"That's the maid's sewing room. There's an office besides, and in the basement there's a billiard room and a smoking room, but nobody goes there to smoke. So I suppose Gaze uses it for his drawing-room."

"Where do you suppose this marble foyer came from—Italy? Oh, there's Mr. MacGrath." She sent the fleetest of glances to the figure of Gaze halting in the background and then disappearing behind a portière. "Do you know something is the matter with your butler's right arm, Mr. MacGrath, and I believe he won't tell you about it."

Sandy MacGrath had had one dinner with Susie and one evening at the theater, and it had resulted in his giving her simplest utterances a moment's thought before he answered them, to find the trap in them.

"It's to Linda you must apply for sympathy for Gaze's ailments," said Sandy, heading for the breakfast table.

"I have called Gaze's ailment to Linda's attention; but she thinks menservants ought to work with their left arms when their right ones are paralyzed."

"Paralyzed? Gaze's right arm paralyzed?"

"In spots. When I approach a door where Gaze is standing, he is absolutely unable to open it for me. At first I thought it was his eyesight. I thought he ought to wear glasses until I saw he had no difficulty in seeing you or Linda."

Gaze came in with the hot bread.

"I'll have the matter investigated," said MacGrath, with thoughtful eyes on his butler. "Sometimes these things disappear without the need of treatment. What are you young ladies doing this morning?"

"After I help Linda buy a dress," said Susie, "I'm conferring with a city editor to prove my insinuousness."

"For heaven's sake," said MacGrath.

"Don't be alarmed; it isn't catching. You see, I've been a society reporter for so long that insinuating is the thing I do best. I insinuate myself into strange households and into strange ladies' confidences and from their heart

of hearts I extract the dramatic incidents of their daily pursuit of pleasure. But I have to prove that I can do this as well in New York as I did it in Springfield. Of course, *I* know the process does not change with latitude and longitude, but maybe the editor doesn't know that."

MacGrath sent her a slanting look. "Do you need introductions? I will take for granted all that you have asserted and vouch for it to a couple of the newspaper men I know."

The color flooded Susie's sensitive face. "How kind of you to make such an answer to my chatter. Mr. MacGrath, I will be so glad to have letters of introduction."

"How did Shelburn happen to let you go? Was there a reason for your leaving?" asked MacGrath.

There was a silent moment while Susie seemed to draw herself together; then she said, "May I tell you exactly why I left? Of course, I had the general idea that New York was the place for me. If you lose your job in Springfield where there are only two newspapers, you have a slim chance of getting another. But the real reason I left, Mr. MacGrath, was Mr. Shelburn himself. I don't know whether I can make it clear or not, but even if you are working with a man every day you do not always get to know him. It is only by little chance illuminations that throw light on him, often unexpectedly. When I went into the office of the *Springfield Sun* I was straight from high school, and about all I knew was the difference between a subject and a predicate and an object. And the man who made a newspaper woman out of me was your brother George MacGrath. There wasn't a thing I couldn't ask him to explain; there wasn't a thing any of the cubs in the place couldn't ask him about. And he never told us these things as if we were ignorant and he the big Know-It-All. He told them to us as if he were reminding us of things we had forgotten. George MacGrath gave and gave and gave. He gave advice, he gave help, he gave money. Why, when he fell ill himself, we could have taken a huge cash collection for him, that would have been only a just repayment, but he wouldn't stand for it.

"He made that paper a thing people wanted. And do you think Oliver Shelburn saw this? Well, if he did, it was only to use as much of it as he could and pay as little as possible for it. You may think he's a smart business man but he wasn't even smart enough to keep from killing the goose that laid his golden egg. And the day came when I said to myself, 'If the man that owns this paper cannot see the quality of the man who is running it, what is there in it for me?'

"If Shelburn had let George MacGrath sign his editorials he'd have had a market for them to-day. They were wonders. I suppose Shelburn wanted the world to think they were his, because his name is at the top of the editorial column. You mayn't call that crooked, but I say that a man is just as crooked when he steals another man's reputation and brains without paying for them as if he stole bonds. Besides, this man is crooked with women; and while I know the world's full of men in high places who never think of being straight with women, all the same they're crooks.

"Well, then, George MacGrath left. He wouldn't have had tuberculosis if he'd had a decent chance to rest once in a while. An editor on a morning paper doesn't have any Sundays or holidays and if he's working for a man like Shelburn who wants all he can get out of him, something is due to break. And what happened when it broke here? Shelburn fired him. And I say I won't work for a man like that. What happened to Mr. MacGrath would happen to me. And besides, crooks can go along for a long time succeeding, but they are on the edge of failure all the time, even when they don't know it. It's a risky business to work for a crook."

CHAPTER XV

Susie Ryland stood on the hearth of MacGrath's drawing-room and looked up at the painting of the nymphs dancing in the blue haze. For one week she had been general utility helper on the woman's page of a newspaper whose editor knew both George MacGrath and Alexander, his brother. For another week she had possessed the proud title of Associate Editor of the woman's page of the Sunday edition. She was very content. She had written George MacGrath a glowing and grateful letter from which all the adjectives had not been extracted. But her gratitude to Alexander was being expressed more subtly.

Susie's new salary had seemed more munificent to her than it really was, and in the first glow of receiving it she had taken a room in a brown-stone house about four squares from Linda. She was now wondering how she could pay for it, and have enough left for new clothes. The brown-stone front was not very different from Mrs. Gazann's and so Susie looked about Sandy MacGrath's drawing-room with relief.

Gaze had reluctantly told her that Miss MacGrath had gone to the station to meet a friend and would be back shortly. Susie had attempted quite in vain to find out how shortly. She looked up at the nymphs over the hearth and frowned.

"I don't like that man Gaze," she thought, "and that isn't a circumstance to how he feels about me. He's as pleased as punch right this minute because he's keeping something from me, and he's going by this drawing-room door every four minutes to glut himself with my impatience. There he goes to the front door now. Register beatitude, Susie. Look as if you were having the choicest rest of your life."

Susie sank down on the couch and closed her eyes. She even took off her hat and rested her head contentedly on the pillow. But Susie was unable to keep her eyes shut when she became aware that a perfume that Linda did not use was being wafted toward her, and that somebody stood in front of the couch looking at her.

Susie sat up straight and her face took on the look the fox must have had when he saw the bunch of grapes and discovered they were luscious. For the lady looking down at Susie could only be described as luscious—an adjective Susie had long since learned to strike out of the society column.

The lady wore a caramel-colored crêpe frock embroidered in brown, but her hat, as Susie's trained eye saw in the same glance that took in her gown, was of various shades of gold; and the hair underneath the hat was still another shade of gold.

"Shaded to match her clothes," said Susie to herself. "Expensive blonde! She has cost some man a lot. I wonder if apple-green is becoming to her?"

"Are you Miss MacGrath?" The voice also might be called luscious.

Susie did not move. "Why, no. Miss MacGrath is not here now."

"You mean——"

"I mean," said Susie, and the innocence of her face ought to have appealed to a wooden image. "I mean I am here."

Evidently the luscious lady was at a loss, or perhaps appealing innocence was not in her line for she answered rather sharply, "I see you are."

Susie's wide childish eyes took on sweetness. "And now you are here."

The luscious lady seemed to become only too conscious of this fact. Perhaps she did not know what to do with it, for there was nothing sweet in her eyes as she glanced about the room, letting her look come to rest on the flowers so beautifully arranged on the table behind the couch.

"Can I do anything for you?" Susie inquired politely.

The lady's glance had passed from the flowers to the books piled up on the table. She now brought it sharply back to Susie. "Have you been here long?"

"It hasn't seemed long."

The lady's voice took on the sharp edge of one who has plucked a sword from a scabbard. "I mean do you live here?"

"I did for a while," said Susie.

Evidently the lady felt the handle of her sword turn in her fingers. She made a visible effort for calmness of speech. "Do you mind telling me who you are?" she said suavely.

"I suppose you mean what I am—because if I said I was Mary Smith or Jane Brown, it wouldn't mean anything to you, would it? Would it mean more if I said that Mr. MacGrath is giving an important dinner to-night and I have to have the details before my paper goes to press? Perhaps you know the details. If you do, won't you sit down and may I have your photograph?"

About the luscious lady's penciled eyes, in spite of the assistance art had given to their really lovely lines, there were certain marks that usually come only as the result of secretiveness. It is possible that the lady herself did not know these lines were there; but Susie's ways had often lain among those who depended on their wits and not on their brains for a living, and she had recognized these delicate markings instantly.

"An adventuress is an adventuress," Susie was saying to herself at that moment, "whether she's high-class or middle-class or a guttersnipe, and whether she has a chance for adventure or not; and they live in Springfield as well as in New York, though they don't often find out in Springfield whether apple-green furniture is becoming to them or not."

"No, I can't give you the details of any dinner," the lady was saying, while Susie's comment to herself ran its course. "Who is Mr. MacGrath inviting?"

From the tail of her eye Susie saw Gaze once more pass through the hall to the front door. "Why, that's what I've come to see. He's keeping it pretty quiet because even the butler doesn't know." Susie recognized an expression in the lady's face that, as a society reporter, she was entirely familiar with—the expression of the woman who has not been invited.

Gaze opened the front door and his voice could be heard in tones no longer lowered. "Miss MacGrath, Mrs. Fergus Lansell is in the drawing-room."

Susie hunched herself up into the corner of the couch and let the wideness disappear from her eyes as she watched Linda's greeting of the lady in gold and brown.

"Won't you sit down, Mrs. Lansell? How good of you to come."

"Oh, I would have come when first I heard that your uncle had a guest, but your uncle has kept you so secreted that we, who have been his closest friends for some years, didn't know just what to do about it."

Linda laughed gayly. "Perhaps, Mrs. Lansell, it was just because I've kept him so busy with all my new ways of running his house. He may have wanted to get used to my ways before he asked his friends in. Or maybe he didn't think about it."

"Well, I'm not going to be offended by it," said Mrs. Lansell sweetly, almost too sweetly. "And I've come this morning with coals of fire especially adapted for a Scotch head. May I leave them with you? Mr. Shelburn is having a house party at his place on Long Island—The Crest—

over Decoration Day. I have the place next to his, and I'm going to ask a few people down for the same time. It will be warm enough to sail and swim, I think, if this weather holds. Won't you and your uncle be my guests for that week-end?"

"Mrs. Lansell, I should be charmed and I know Uncle Sandy would, but he has already accepted Mr. Shelburn's invitation."

"Ah, for you too?"

"For me too."

"Well, then, I shall see you there." Mrs. Lansell gave a fleeting glance at Susie. "I understand your uncle is giving a dinner of ceremony to-night."

Linda took a second to think, then she answered, "I do believe little dinners of ceremony are Uncle Sandy's obsession. But, of course, all of you know as much about that as I do."

"More," said the lady, a trifle absently. If she was wondering why her questions got such small results she did not show it. "I'm sorry not to have secured you for my party. Will you tell your uncle that Fergus hopes to sail with him? Your uncle is as obsessed by sailing as he is by dining. Fergus is my husband."

"I know of Doctor Lansell. The whole country knows of him. Way up at Saranac there was a man who had been gassed in the War who was still living because of your husband."

"You must mean Ned Lindan. All those men went over together. They live out our way and were in the same regiment. Good-by, Miss MacGrath."

She hesitated the barest second with another quick look at Susie and then moved to the door. Gaze opened the front door with a low-toned, "Madame!"

Linda clutched Susie's shoulder. "Why didn't you stay in your boarding house when I sent you word to wait for me there?"

"I thought you wanted me to wait for you here. I heaved myself out of bed an hour earlier than I ought to and beat it over here, only to be told by Gaze that you were bringing some one from the railroad station."

"Susie, Gaze didn't say I was bringing any one here."

"No, he only implied it. Gaze doesn't use words with me. He talks in signs."

"Because I left that some one over in your rooms and she's waiting there and I've got to go right back. That's what I wanted you for. It's lucky your room door wasn't locked."

Susie sat up straight. "Well, why didn't you give me advance notice? What have you got over there?"

"I couldn't give you notice because I only got the wire late last night. I couldn't get you then, so I left a message this morning. Listen, come closer. It's Mrs. Gazann, and I have to keep her at your place until I get her dyed and marcelled."

"Great grief." Susie's eyes began to shine. She shut them. "Say, I can see that woman clothed so that she looks like the real thing. Come on. I feel the creative instinct surging. Have you got any money?"

"No, but she has the accumulated savings of a life of virtue."

"I said Alexander MacGrath was going to give a dinner to distinguished guests. Now here they are. Is she willing to spend her savings? Oh, my sainted aunt, will I live through the day until I see my friend Gaze waiting on Mrs. Gazann, and trying to be good enough as a butler not to get fired!"

As the MacGrath automobile stopped before the brown-stone front where Susie lived, she grasped her friend's arm. "Did the Laird of Grath say you might give a dinner for the Countess de Gazann?"

"Yes, he did, Susie; but he didn't tell me to ask any of his high-born friends, and I want a man for her."

"Well, well, there's Ollie Knox; he knows the lady and will play up fine. What's the matter with the man Ollie says has been occupying all your attention? Ah, I see by your expression you wouldn't like to spring the Countess de Gazann on him."

"No such thing. I'll ask Mr. Steffin."

They had been taking the steps at a run and they stopped to get their breath on the landing.

"Did you tell Mrs. Gazann why you didn't take her straight to your house, Linda? If you told her about her husband without my being there, I'll skin you alive."

"I wrote her that we knew where her husband was, here in New York; and she came the day after she received my letter. She thinks it's a perfectly

simple matter to catch up with anybody in New York if you know where they are."

"I once thought the same thing. I suppose you didn't delicately suggest to her that she must get new clothes."

"I didn't have to. The first thing she said to me at the station was, 'I'm going to check my bag here and buy myself a dress and hat before I come to your house.' That's how I thought of you, Susie; I thought you'd be home to receive us and maybe you could go along to help get her dressed up."

Susie threw open her door. Mrs. Gazann was immersed in all the advertisements of all the department stores in all the five newspapers on Susie's desk, and her eyes shone as Linda had never seen them shine in the Park View Inn.

"My, but you two girls do look metropolitan," she cried, after she had greeted Susie.

"Do you think I can get a silk dress that looks like the one in this advertisement for twenty-one dollars?"

"Now listen, Mrs. Gazann," said Susie, "I have been studying your salient points for a long time. Would you mind slipping off your waist so that I can see if your neck is as bony as I expect it to be? You'll have to wear an evening dress to-night, all shiny and svelte—let's see what color. Gazann goes well with blue. Look, Linda, her neck is not so bad. Would you believe anybody could be that thin and have as good-looking arms and neck? You don't get any sleeves on this dress, Countess."

"Mrs. Gazann," said Linda, "perhaps your husband did have a title. You told me once that Gazann was Jugo-Slovak."

"Well, nobody is going to Jugo-Slovakia to find out. But if you like my maiden name better, it is Alison."

"We like it much better," said Susie, "if we can only remember to use it. What color do you prefer your hair, Countess? What color was it? Now don't tell me red, because you can't have it red now. What do you think of a nice chestnut color, Linda?"

Mrs. Gazann surveyed her hair in Susie's glass. "I never saw anybody yet whose hair didn't show that it had been dyed."

"Oh, that's because it was dyed in Springfield. They dye it in the wool here, before it's done up, not afterwards. We'll make this our business and I know where to go. With chestnut-colored hair, marcelled and fluffed, and a

blue glittery dress and some of the rings and things you can get on Broadway inside of five dollars—the Gazann heirlooms—honestly, Mrs. Gazann, you won't know yourself. Do you want to buy your evening dress or rent it?"

For the first time in many years Mrs. Gazann laughed out loud. "I think I'll buy this dress, Susie. I haven't owned an evening dress for fifteen years."

"Linda," Susie cried, "what are you so serious about? Don't you think chestnut is the right color for her hair?"

"Why, I'm thinking we ought to tell Mrs. Gazann what's before her so she can practise the part a little. Surprises are all right if they don't make you scream."

"But Mrs. Gazann never screamed in her life. There's nothing like ten years in a boarding house to give a woman poise."

"See here, Mrs. Gazann, Linda is trying to ask you if you're likely to scream if you come on your Slovakian lover suddenly—say at the dinner party to-night?"

Mrs. Gazann leaned forward, the weight of her thin body on the hands with which she clenched the arms of her chair. "No," she said slowly, "I will not scream." There was a silence that both girls respected. Then Mrs. Gazann spoke again and her voice had lowered. "I loved that man. I worked for him and saved for him and waited on him. I suppose if I had spent some of the time I spent waiting on him in curling my hair, and if I had spent some of the money I spent on him buying an evening dress, he'd have stuck to me. And it wasn't his deserting me that hit me. I could have stood that. If he had come to me straight and said, 'I'm going to leave you,' well that would have been up to him. That's a risk you take when you marry. But he went away and didn't tell me he wasn't coming back. I watched three times a day for the postman to come. I jumped out of bed in the middle of the night, when the wind rattled the window panes, to let him in. That's what turns your hair gray—the long wait; the getting advertisements from the postman when you're looking for just one letter. And one day I found my cheeks all hollow and my eyes all dull. But I found that I had been getting along as well without him as with him. I really got along better. It was all this watching and this uncertainty that was finishing me. And that day I said, 'You can't run a boarding house with this on your chest. There's enough uncertainty in your job. It's nothing to you now if he comes back or if he doesn't; you're through.' No, I won't scream."

“Linda,” said Susie. Neither girl was looking at Mrs. Gazann—“I have an idea that with her hair colored and that blue dress, the late Mr. Gazann won’t know her when he sees her, not enough to be sure of her, especially if we introduce her as Alison. And that will give her a chance to give him the once over, straight in the face, without his even knowing it. And then Mrs. Gazann, if you don’t want him to know, it’s up to you. You can keep track of him after this without ever having to wait for him again. What do you see, Linda, out that back window?”

But Linda did not see the brick walls beyond Susie’s window. She was thinking of Mrs. Gazann’s long years of desperate fighting and loneliness. She was looking at a tree of white plum-blossoms behind a gate that was hard to open, stirred by the wind to shining splendour, blossoms that had whispered to her of life and death and love, and the gates through which one passes to the three great ways of the world.

CHAPTER XVI

Gaze, busy in the butler's pantry with the exigencies of a sudden dinner party, permitted the housemaid to answer the doorbell, when Susie Ryland rang it. Linda, who had been hanging over the banister, saw with satisfaction that Susie's companion wore a fur-collared evening coat and a veil to protect her coiffure.

"Come up into my apple orchard," murmured Linda.

"Look at Linda sleuthing it down the stairs, Mrs. Alison," bubbled Susie. "Here, careful with that veil! Let me take it off."

Linda sighed with satisfaction at the picture which emerged; a face of decided contours, straight nose and well-cut chin, and forehead delicately softened by waves of chestnut hair, that in the green background of Linda's room, showed glints of dull gold. A figure so slim it was girlish, emerged from the enshrouding coat, clothed in cobalt satin, embroidered in something that glittered here and there too heavily for a young girl's gown, but admirable for a woman near forty. There were jeweled buckles on the toes of satin slippers and on that portion of the thin neck that needed a little filling lay a necklace of blue stones that had not enough brilliance to dull the carefully tinted skin.

"Oh," said Linda, in amazement. "I wouldn't have believed it. Truly, I wouldn't have believed it. Wouldn't they gape in Springfield, Mrs. Gazann?"

"Nobody would know her in Springfield," said Susie. "Her own husband won't know her, you'll see."

"I didn't know myself," said Mrs. Gazann.

"You don't by any chance look as you did when Mr. Gazann left you," asked Linda, anxious.

"No, I don't. My hair was almost black, streaked with gray; you wouldn't have thought it hair, and I just did it up out of my way; and I hadn't any color in my face."

She looked at herself wistfully. The color, put delicately on her cheeks, had deepened the hazel of her eyes to the new color of her hair. "It is very strange what a change in color does to your face. I wish I had known this long ago."

"It's just as strange," said Susie, "what good clothes do to your shape. You ought to see her, Linda, in the three-piece suit we bought. It's black and bronze, with the smartest little black hat, with bronze wings, and a dotted veil. She looks like a young widow, who has just added a little color to her black. Say, Mrs. Gazann, if you had divorced that man a long while ago, you could marry anybody now."

"Well, I could have married again a long time ago, but what's the use of another husband to me, or a divorce either. What I ought to have done was to buy clothes like this long ago. I had the money to, but I hadn't the sense. I could have made my boarders pay lots more, if I'd been dressed like this; enough to pay for the clothes and they'd have treated me better."

"Well, there you are," said Susie, powdering the tip of her tilted nose. "It used to be her sentimental losses that distressed Mrs. Gazann, but now, on the day she has recaptured her lost youth, it's her business losses. Linda, don't put that thing in your hair. Things in the hair are for straight-haired women."

"Susie, there's the doorbell; open my door and listen."

"The acoustics of this house are not all they ought to be, but I believe that's Ollie, and I'm going down. Has your uncle come?"

"I think so. Let's all go down. I'm going to practise on the name Alison all the way." The two girls floated lightly down the steps, but Mrs. Gazann moved more slowly, and a little heavily.

"Hello, Ollie," called Susie, from the stairway, "you've had your hair cut." Then Susie's practised eyes passed beyond Knox and caught the approving look of Sandy MacGrath.

"May I present Mr. Knox and Mr. Steffin, Mrs. Alison and Miss Ryland?" said Linda. "I believe you know my uncle, Mrs. Alison."

For one moment Oliver Knox hesitated before the woman in blue, and, hesitating, he was lost. "I hope you'll forgive me, Mrs. Alison, but you gave me the kind of start a man must get when he sees the spirit of an old friend; the celestial improvement must be so startling. You look very much like somebody I had known for a long time."

"Who does she look like, Ollie?" asked Susie.

"You wouldn't believe it, Susie, but she reminds me of Mrs. Gazann."

"Oh, yes, I'd believe that, especially if you left without paying your board bill."

"Ah," said Ollie thoughtfully. "These old memories!"

But Susie had stopped listening to Ollie; she was holding out her hand to MacGrath, on the hearth.

Gaze, at the drawing-room door, began in his sonorous voice the thousand-year-old formula, "Dinner is—" His blank eyes, that had swept the little company with his first word, came suddenly to life with his startled pause. For at the first sound of that sonorous voice the lady in blue had turned her dull gold head and stood, her feather fan arrested in its sweep, her eyes creeping from Gaze's decorous face down over his well-pressed livery to his carefully brushed shoes.

"Dinner is served." Gaze completed the announcement more securely, his relieved second glance having taken in the expensive details of the shining blue costume and the blue stones on the neck.

"The butler," said Ollie, in Susie's ear, as they moved to the dining room, "seems also to have seen a ghost."

"Maybe he also owes Mrs. Gazann money."

For one moment Ollie Knox stared at Susie with the look Aladdin must have had when he rubbed the lamp.

"I've got it!" he murmured. "Susie, hold my hand, I'm about to faint."

But Susie was looking at Alexander MacGrath, who, with the lady in blue, was turning the curve of the stairway and looking back at Ollie in the act of seizing Susie's hand.

Susie bent her head close to Ollie's face. "I can tell you this, Ollie, you can just come across with that board bill, 'cause we're going to need it for Mrs. Alison."

"Come across! Say, either put your face closer, or take it away; your host is watching you."

"It's you he's watching, Ollie; prepare to receive my face."

Ollie's aspect took on an entranced and ecstatic appearance. "Is this what you mean, Susie?"

"Yes, go on, Ollie." Susie smiled softly.

"Food," said Ollie, seating Susie, "is the best substitute for conversation that there is."

"It's because you use your mouth in almost the same motions," said Susie.

Contrary to his usual habit, Ollie did not take this silver opportunity for speech. His eyes were following Gaze, as he served the guests. Gaze was now putting caviare before MacGrath.

"Say, Susie," murmured Ollie, "you didn't do me any good with the Scottish Chief, when you introduced me as your childhood friend. He hasn't given me a kind look since."

"I wonder why," said Susie, sweetly.

"I don't like the way that man tries to overhear me. How long has it been, Susie, since you've had desperate love made to you? I'm going to make love to you during this dinner, better than it has ever been made to you before. It isn't often that I have so interested an audience for the thing I do best."

"Give it variety; let it go from subtlety to conspicuousness."

"I wish you wouldn't fire my imagination this way, Susie. You know when Gentleman George taught you two-syllable words he didn't mean you to use them in private conversation. If you go on like this I can't make love to you in any language you'll understand."

"You can't make love to me in any language I won't understand."

"I can try signs. Dare I kiss you at the table?"

"Dare you kiss me any place! You know you dare not."

"The very minute we leave this dining room! The very minute! And if you think you're going to leave it with anybody but me, you've got another think. Right out there by that portière in the hall, that's where I kiss you in about forty minutes. Look out, the Scottish Chief sees all that color that's making your face look like a beet."

"Why don't you say like a flower?"

"That's not the language I'm making love in. I don't have to say it with flowers. Plain vegetable love-making at the table; but it won't be a vegetable kiss in the hall."

"A flower kiss?"

"Gosh, old fish-eyes got that! What about all this talk about honey and *kisses*? Don't you know honey comes from flowers?"

"For heaven's sake, Ollie, I'm losing my appetite. If I look at the Head-of-the-Table——"

"Well, don't; you'll give yourself away. Look at Gaze. He's congealing in his insides right now, and he wonders whether he's drunk or childish every time he looks at the Blue Lady. Twice I've seen him jerk himself together. He actually sniffed then. Is she wearing perfume unfamiliar to him?"

"Unfamiliar even to her. That's why you have to pay your board bill. You see, she didn't quite expect this. She's carrying it off pretty well, I think. You must remember she loved him."

"Well, that woman is kicking herself all over the place to think of the years of agony she spent waiting for what she now sees before her. Gee, Susie, how would you like to let your hair get gray and your blood rusty, longing for a thing that turned out to be a cold fish when you got it?"

Susie's eyes softened. "I suppose it's the longing that counts, Ollie, and not the person you long for. And when it has you—this longing—it blinds you. Even a flower-man may really be fishy underneath the rose leaves, but you would not see it—not in time."

Ollie gave her a thoroughly male look. "I gather you are already worrying about that kiss."

Susie's gay little laugh rippled across the table. "Oh, yes, you bet I'm worrying. You can long for a flower, hope for it and work for it, and go without it for weeks and months; you can fill in with other things and get along without it, and then some day your wanting and your hoping may bring it to you. And then it's not a flower at all; it's fat, or fishy, or weedy, and you don't want it."

Ollie Knox turned around in his chair and almost upset the dish Gaze was offering him. He waved the dish aside.

"Say, where was I," Ollie's voice was perfectly audible, "where was I when you were longing and hoping for my kiss; and where, oh, where was I when you were working for it?"

Susie choked over her salad. "You were not at Alexander MacGrath's table where every few words he can hear the word 'kiss.'"

"You little actress, you. Is all of this put on for another man?"

"Don't you know?" Susie turned her head to one side and looked up at him.

"I know about as much as a man walking a tight rope. But I'm getting right off this rope, and I'm fixing my eyes on the scenery. It seems to be standing pretty straight."

"What do you see?"

Ollie looked about the table. "I see a man who looked once at Linda when he came into the house, and who hasn't looked at her since. He's looked all around each room she's been in, at the flowers and the books and the floor. I think he also feels the need for scenery—stationary scenery—that I feel."

Susie's eyes softened. "You mean Westwin Steffin. He's seeing the difference in the house since Linda came."

Gaze had left the room at the sound of the doorbell downstairs.

Linda leaned across her uncle and spoke to the lady in blue. "All right?" she asked.

"I have gone blind," said the lady succinctly.

Gaze stood in the door and behind him came a chatter of soft voices.

"Mr. MacGrath," said Gaze, "Doctor and Mrs. Lansell, and Miss Brinsley. Mrs. Lansell said she would not wait as she only wished to have a word with you. They are coming up the stairs."

"Take them into the drawing-room," said Sandy. "We are finishing."

"Now, Susie," murmured Ollie, "you pay your debts."

The girl rose, but even as Ollie's hand was lifted to her arm, Sandy MacGrath reached her side, with a straight look into her dancing eyes.

"Mrs. Alison," said Sandy, "thinks she has met Mr. Knox before."

"Ask her where, Ollie," said Susie, slipping her arm from Ollie's closing hand.

"A hundred-to-one shot, by Jack," said Ollie, with a swift look of acknowledgment of the tactics Susie was employing. "Won't do you any good, Sue."

But Susie had slipped her released hand under Sandy's arm, and as she passed the portière she looked back over her shoulder at Ollie escorting Mrs. Gazann and she laughed at him.

"She has cheated me, madame," said Ollie to Mrs. Gazann. "She has declined to pay me what she owes me."

"It is dreadful of debtors to do that," said Mrs. Gazann, "especially when they could pay."

Ollie bent to her ear. "You are wonderful," he murmured. "And I am going to pay you. You let me go away without paying you because you have the kindest heart in the world and you knew I had to have clothes to live in this rich man's house. I shall never forget it. It wasn't the extra money, though God knows I needed it; it was the humiliation you saved me from. And I don't want to pay you in money alone, though I shall pay you that to-night, as soon as I get back to my check book; for I have the money for you, that I've saved since I got here. I'd like to pay the extra thing that you put into your loan. I wish there was something I might save you from."

"Oh, you nice boy," she said softly. "I've run a boarding house for years and it's the first time anybody except Miss Linda and her father have ever shown any gratitude. Usually when people owe you money they hate you for it."

The lad's eyes softened. "Oh, you feel that way, because you are specially up against ingratitude in its crudest form to-night. What are you going to do with him, Mrs. Gazann?"

His eyes passed on to Gaze, ushering the newly arrived guests into the drawing-room. Gaze's movements were stately; his appearance was flawless.

"I have been wondering. Wait—" Mrs. Gazann peered beyond her into the drawing-room. "Why, look! There is the girl Mr. George MacGrath persuaded to leave my house six weeks ago."

Ollie had a moment's blankness. Then, "Well, if your husband didn't know you, Mrs. Gazann, she won't. Look at Linda; she's as surprised as you."

For Linda had gone forward to greet Mrs. Lansell and then she had stopped, a little breathless, while Mrs. Lansell presented Miss Brinsley, and her husband, Doctor Lansell.

Miss Brinsley wore coral velvet, and her lips were a little too red, even for coral, and the rouge on her cheeks had too much crimson in it for the coral earrings that swept them. She met Linda's eyes squarely.

"I know Miss MacGrath," she said evenly and Linda had a faint shock. She had not expected it.

Here was the girl whose tear-choked voice had begged Westwin Steffin over the telephone not to leave her lonely in a strange place; the girl her father had known when she was a little girl of ten; the girl whose gift of white blossoms had been put close to dying eyes that Linda loved. And here too was this intolerable pain in her heart. If it had not been for this girl looking at her so quietly, this pain in her heart might have been a living joy. She drew back to watch Steffin's greeting of Valentine Brinsley. After all, so far as Linda knew, Miss Brinsley had not even seen the man she came to meet. She had run away from him. That ought to be enough to clear him. But even as she said it to herself, she knew it wasn't enough—not enough for him, or for her.

Steffin gave Miss Brinsley the briefest of acknowledgments. He stood at Fergus Lansell's side and frowned as he watched Linda speak to Valentine.

"You live here in New York, Miss Brinsley?" Linda was saying automatically.

"I live on Long Island with Mrs. Lansell. I am her secretary."

"Bertha," said Sandy MacGrath at their side, "let me present Miss Ryland."

"I have met Miss Ryland here before," said Bertha. Nobody knew better than Bertha how to infuse into a few words a really wordless doubt. She included Linda in her doubtful glance.

But Linda did not even see her; she was visualizing a creamy square letter from Long Island, signed "Bertha," that had been an elixir to Ned Lindan at Saranac. She recalled its few words, "She has come back. Cheer up." It could not then be because of Bertha herself, the Bertha who signed the letter that Lindan was so relieved. It was because of some one Bertha knew who had been away. Linda turned to look at Valentine, dull-eyed and distracted. Surely, oh, surely it could not be this stranger-woman whom a man so lovable as Lindan cared for so deeply that it made all the difference of a happy day if he heard good news of her. What was there in her brooding passionate face to hold two men like Lindan and Steffin? Or was she the kind of woman who, since the man she cared for was away and unlikely to come to her for weeks and months, filled in the absence with another.

"Love," Lindan had said, "lives through the death of faith and the death of trust."

This thing begging to live in her heart had lived in spite of her, was now living in spite of her lack of faith, stood waiting to build a higher faith,

grasped at the chance to say it did not matter what other women were in his life. Many women sometimes prepared a man for one only. What woman loved a man untrammelled by other loves. The most a woman could do was to hold him after she won him; and the winning was often from another memory, even if it were not from an actual woman.

She saw the coral earrings swing and the restless dark eyes above them seek out Steffin furtively. She saw him meet the look with one she could not interpret. And all her mind seemed to draw back. What could she do with a love built on another woman's sobbing entreaty not to be left alone. She had heard this woman make it. She looked down at her hand pressing against her heart. The pain there was no sorrow over something that had died. She had put her hand to her heart to hold back the flutter of a living thing; to still wings that were stirring, not wings that were folded. She wanted all this man's heart; she wanted to weave her new love with shining new threads straight from the reel. She, who had loved no other man, knew not what to do with these tarnished threads unraveled from a design that would not fit in. Lover of one woman. Were there no such men left in the world? Ned Lindan, yes, but he was not in the world. He held the key to the closed gates and he could unlock them and look through to a world where he saw love as something so fine and so great that it had the strength of Truth itself. Why, that was what her pain meant; this love she wanted was not concerned with truth. Dimly she saw truth as the very breath of love.

She looked at Bertha Lansell, gazing innocently out over the book-lined room, but hurrying through rapid words that Sandy MacGrath heard with impatience while he watched Ollie Knox recapture Susie. She looked at Susie. Apparently Susie did not mind Bertha, for she had grinned a little when Bertha engaged MacGrath in the flow of her quick words, and Ollie had slipped into his host's place. But for all that Susie's ear was given to Oliver, her eyes were not missing Bertha's innocent wide eyes or MacGrath's impatience.

Her eyes dwelt on the coral figure standing a little withdrawn.

"Who would have thought," said Mrs. Gazann, "that I'd ever meet her again and in this way. You take my word for it, that girl is desperate. She's waited for some man she loves all she can wait. I know. I know the look; I should know it."

Linda looked fearfully at the too-red mouth quivering a little as Fergus Lansell included her in his talk with Steffin.

“Some one should look after her,” said Mrs. Gazann. “I’ve had ’em turn on the gas jet in my house, with that look.”

“But we have two opera boxes,” Bertha Lansell was saying. “Shelly gave us his and there’s room enough for all of us. It’s a shame to waste boxes when they’re so hard to get. It’s why I came myself instead of telephoning. Shelly only gave me the box a half-hour ago. Ask your guests if they don’t want to go.”

Mrs. Gazann looked about at the undecided faces with concern.

“I should like to go,” she said, with a glance at her shining gown and her jeweled shoes. “You know I am a stranger here. I’ve never been to the opera.”

Mrs. Lansell sent her a glance almost grateful.

“Oh, do let’s go,” added Susie.

“We will accept with pleasure,” said MacGrath stiffly. “The car, Gaze; and the ladies’ wraps.”

Susie bent over Linda. “Mrs. Gazann will come home with me; she has taken a room at my house. She wants to stay here a week or so and see New York. I don’t think she’s made up her mind about her Slovakian lover.”

Ollie joined them. “Susie, I came here in Uncle Oliver’s little coupe and I am driving you to the opera, and believe me, this time no host will save you.”

“Save her from what, Ollie,” asked Linda.

Ollie did not take his eyes from Susie. “She knows. She is greatly indebted to me. She pays her debt before she gets into that box at the opera.”

Susie looked up at the lad and for a moment he stood speechless, so lovely and so flowing was the look. Then Susie turned away toward her host. “Boaster!” she said derisively.

But Ollie Knox made no answer. He took her coat from Gaze and wrapped her in it with a care that sat curiously on his young awkwardness and his young face flushed as he gathered her to his side and followed Mrs. Lansell to the door.

“Madame, your coat!” said Gaze, behind Mrs. Gazann.

Mrs. Gazann stood very still while Sandy MacGrath’s butler draped her new velvet cloak over her tinted thin shoulders.

CHAPTER XVII

"A house party," Susie Ryland said to Linda, while she was packing her trunk, "is an affair of intimacy."

But to Linda it remained an affair of fiction. She knew of people in Springfield who talked of house parties, but she herself had never been included in one.

The smart automobile that met Linda and her uncle at the Port Washington station drove through sunny streets that curved about a sandy bay to a road that ascended limestone bluffs and wound through mountain laurel to the edge of a low cliff. Beyond the cliff the blue ripples of the Sound ran glittering to the Connecticut shore.

Linda sighed with joy. She had not realized how hungry she was for green silences and rippling water and the sunshine on flowers, after these long weeks of brown-stone and asphalt and plate-glass windows.

The car turned into a private road and paused at a lodge for the gate to be unlocked.

"Uncle Sandy, look! Does that wall go clear over the horizon? What a costly wall." For the wall was of stone and brick and had been carefully planted with ivy that was just beginning to cover it.

"Exclusiveness is costly. Maybe some of George's work went into this wall."

Her face shadowed. "Uncle Sandy, do you agree with Susie about this man?"

"Eh." MacGrath looked off to the horizon where the wall ended. "No, she's emotional. If men felt things as personally as women do walls wouldn't get built or newspapers run. A man isn't a crook because he hasn't your brand of sensitiveness. As for Miss Ryland's personal prejudice against Shelburn—she has a right to that, but it has made her use the wrong term. Shelburn isn't crooked because he is shrewd; on the contrary if a man can get what he wants because he is smarter than the other man, he doesn't steal what he wants—there's no occasion for it."

"Just offhand, Uncle Sandy, I'd say that even if there were occasion for you to cheat, you wouldn't."

"But you're not prepared to say that about your host? Well, it doesn't do to stamp a man as untrustworthy merely because he's been ungenerous. He will probably be generous enough with the woman he marries and trustworthy enough if he marries a clever one."

"Why, what has that to do with it, Uncle Sandy?"

The gables of a green roof began to show through the trees. "Nothing, save I thought you were being influenced by Miss Susie's assertion that Shelburn was what she called crooked."

They were approaching a house of field stone and stucco that stood on a bluff overlooking the Sound. Broad terraces hung over little wooded paths that crept down the side of the hill to the beach through masses of mountain laurel in its first pink bloom. Long French windows, open to the warm May air, promised spacious protection inside.

"Where," asked Linda, "did Mr. Shelburn get his two, ten or twenty million that made such a place possible?"

"He hasn't that much; his wealth has been overrated. He was land poor for a while until he sold part of this property to Steffin and Lansell and that crowd, and started a country club. His father left him this tract of land and the Springfield paper and the Middletown Mills. The old man was a wizard in business affairs, and Shelburn was pretty well trained by his father. In judging a man you must consider his abilities as well as his inabilities. Look at this house; this represents ability."

There was no reluctant butler at this door. It was opened by a man in livery who took them to their rooms as if he had been waiting for hours to do it.

"Tea will be served on the terrace in about twenty minutes, madame," he said. "Will you come down or would you prefer it here?"

"Oh, I'll come down," Linda murmured, and wondered whether, if she changed her suit to the pongee sport frock she had put in her bag, she would be all right.

She looked about her room. It was yellow and gray, the hangings covered with yellow roses and gray-green leaves, the cushioned chairs bowers of yellow rose leaves. The bathroom held towels embroidered in yellow and even the racks for the dresses in the closet were yellow. The room was indescribably gay, but there was something about it that made Linda wonder if the same taste had not selected the cretonne in her apple-green room. She laughed as she thought of it.

She went downstairs, wondering how much a house like this was the expression of a man's character, or even of his taste. The hall had tapestries that, since they were blue in their predominant color, she supposed were Gobelin; though she wouldn't have known a Gobelin tapestry had she seen it. The rugs were blue Chinese ones; that she did know. Beyond the window was a glimpse of blue sea. It was the most perfect hall she had ever entered and Shelburn, as he came in from the terrace to greet her, fitted into it with equal perfection. The dull blue toned down his too pronounced color; the long tapestries with their life-sized figures gave his heavy shoulders better proportion.

"I am glad you are here," he said a little heavily. He looked down at her, at the thin silken blouse of white with its yellow collar, at her pleated white skirt, and her yellow belt. "The place needs orange blossoms."

She glanced about her, through curtained doors, to drawing-room and terrace. "It does not look as if it needed anything. How does one learn to create a place like this?"

He shrugged. He did not often find it necessary to answer women; but he was sensitive to voices. In his experience a beautiful speaking voice was far more rare than a beautiful singing voice, and here was one of the rarest of them.

"Perhaps," he said indolently, "you learn the way you learn everything else—by doing it."

He wondered if this kind of talk was what a girl brought up by George MacGrath expected. It was a pity for anything so good-looking to be made *precieuse*. He moved out on the terrace and saw that there was a pause in the chatter of the group assembled there, as they watched them, and he turned and looked at her again.

The color rose above the thin blouse and up to the feathery hair on her forehead, as she realized they were watching her. And he took the moment of her confusion to present her to Julie de Chevonnes.

The knowledge that she did not in the least know how to address a duchess added to Linda's confusion so that she found herself catching her breath as the loveliest mouth in France pronounced her name.

The woman before her had been acclaimed lovely by the greatest painters of a country to whom loveliness is worthy of homage. She had been painted a hundred times, and the Thaïs and the Juliet had won fame for the painters. Linda had not time to see whether this loveliness was more than

featured regularity. Its color was not to be discerned under so much powder and rouge; even the golden hair looked designed for the embroidered gown it made perfect. But she did see the artistry of the whole; its careful setting that only Paris could produce. And she had a swift conviction that with such perfection of artifice naturalness was all she could hope to use successfully.

"You are the first duchess I have ever met," said Linda softly. "And I do not know in the least how to address you."

The loveliest mouth in France curved into a distracting smile. "One of your name may call me by my name. Your father calls me Juliet."

It was on the edge of Linda's tongue to say, "I know," but she checked it. For though Madame de Chevonnes did not trouble to hide the quality of her interest, Linda knew her father would have kept his for a less conspicuous time. Madame de Chevonnes completed her examination of Linda's face at her leisure and then said:

"You haven't a feature or an expression like George MacGrath."

The little sentence seemed somehow to bear an accusation of remissness, and it was that accent Linda answered when she said, "Father thinks I look like my mother."

For another moment Madame de Chevonnes examined the young face; its candor and its distinction, then with an inimitable little French gesture she turned back to the samovar. "Tea?" she said negligently.

Linda flushed. It was nothing she could even formulate or resent, yet she would not have taken tea from the hand that dismissed her mother with that gesture.

"No, thank you."

Shelburn had left her to greet her uncle and two other men who had come out on the terrace, and for a moment Linda stood uncertain. Then a pleasant masculine voice at her ear said:

"Perhaps you prefer coffee? I hate tea, and the butler has just put a little coffee pot for me on that table by the railing. Won't you let me give you some?"

It was Fergus Lansell. He moved a little away from the chattering group and made a place for her on a cretonned settee. His humorous eyes looked across the space of terrace at the group about the tea table. "They are not so hungry as they look," he added.

Linda found herself smiling up at him as he sat on the balustrade of the terrace. "How nice to find you here. You live next door, don't you?"

"I live over there, where you can just see the red roof. How have you left your father?"

Her face clouded. "How can one tell? They say there that he will be well in a few months. I hoped I would encounter you just this way to ask you about Mr. Lindan. He sat at our table the two weeks I was in Saranac, and beside us on the porch. He was so gay and brave, and he keeps on writing whether he is tired or not. The harder it is to do the harder he works. He calls it overcoming his inertia, but, oh, Doctor Lansell, if you could see his exhaustion when he has finished his work——"

"I know," he said gravely. "It is his way of being courageous. He is one of the bravest men I know. He won one of his medals carrying Steffin off the field, under fire. We were all in the same regiment; we all live about here; Steffin, over there, just beyond my house—down among the rhododendrons. A half-hour more on that field and Steffin would have lost an arm."

"Well, why, then," said Linda impatiently, "does Mr. Lindan have to write this way? Surely if he needs money——"

She stopped because Lansell was frowning and absorbed.

"Oh," he said, at length, "Steffin has been hunting for a way to pay that debt for a long while. He doesn't rest easily under obligation. But it isn't money that Ned needs. He has enough to live on; Shelburn leased part of Ned's place at Lindanburg for enough to provide well for him, and he'd buy the place if Lindan would sell; but he won't. He works for two reasons. To keep several other men at Saranac, who can't afford to stay there, and because he's that kind of a man. He's no idler. Also he needs the tonic of work. If you took away Lindan's work you might take away his chance. He hasn't too much chance; but what he has is this chance of the will power he has trained so well. These mental forces—perhaps you won't mind if I call them spiritual forces—are in his favor."

"Couldn't more be done for him physically?"

The doctor was looking at Julie de Chevonnes pouring tea for Shelburn. She poured it with engaging grace, looking at him with soft eyes as she handed him his cup.

"I wanted him to go to Colorado, but he won't go so far away."

"He doesn't want to go so far away from what, Doctor Lansell?"

He gave her an approving glance. “You have hit immediately on the thing I have long been wondering about. I almost had him persuaded to go, and then one day he said it was better for him to live eight hours from New York, with a future to look forward to, than to live across the continent, with only his temperature to interest him.”

Linda put down her coffee cup and bent toward him.

“Doctor, you don’t think it’s the lady you were watching so closely, while you spoke about his reason for not going?”

Lansell looked a bit startled. “I don’t think it is that lady; but indeed I do not know. At the moment I was wondering rather if it was the thing that group over there represented that kept Lindan from going so far away.”

Linda drew back. It had taken all of her courage to ask her last question, and all she had left to say was, “Oh, surely not this man; such things cannot mean more to him than the picture they make.”

She paused, arrested by another picture—Lindan leaning back in his steamer chair, his husky voice lingering over the word ‘love.’ “Men have died of love for all that doctors have called it by a more physical name. And men have lived because of love; lived in the very face of death, because love, though it may not be stronger than life, is yet stronger than death.” And when she had asked him how he had learned that love was greater than death, what had he answered? “I learned it, dying.”

“You have lost all your color,” said Doctor Lansell gravely.

“Oh,” she said breathlessly, “how dreadful it would be if this man, so rare, so fine, loved some woman who hurt and disappointed him.”

“If one knew the woman,” he said at length, “one could almost find courage to ask her to walk gently for the little while that may be left.”

She sent a look of appeal at this man who fought death in every form almost every day of his life, this man who must know the things men lived by and what they died for.

“But you see, it isn’t only a little while for him. He will go right on loving whether he lives or dies. I heard him say it. I heard him say that death was a thing unproved, but that love was a living force that death could not touch.”

“He would say that.” Lansell’s voice was very grave. “Perhaps such a love may be even stronger; strong enough to remake what it loves.”

"Fergus," Julie de Chevonnes called out, "here comes your wife and Valentine. Where is Shelly? He was here a minute ago. Somebody tell Shelly that Valentine Brinsley is coming."

"Shelly's gone indoors with Mr. MacGrath," said one of the other women. "They are in his study with packets of folded papers that came out of Mr. MacGrath's pocket. Look at Bertha and Val; I know they like to walk together because they are so becoming to each other."

Linda watched the two women coming down the cliff path that led to Doctor Lansell's house with a feeling of actual loss, for when Julie de Chevonnes' voice had cut into what Lansell was saying she had found the deeper things she was reaching for once more beyond her grasp. Lansell had turned away from her with a curious little gesture, and had followed her look at the two women on the path. Valentine Brinsley's black hair and brilliant color made Bertha Lansell's carefully achieved blondeness look delicate instead of artificial. They were a pretty picture as they came through the evergreen, Mrs. Lansell in palest green, her companion in coral. Long coral earrings gave the darker face a Spanish look and the restless black eyes that darted about the company around the tea table added to the foreign look of the face.

"What's the matter with you, Valentine?" said Madame de Chevonnes, "have you seen a ghost? You are getting white."

The girl sank down in a low chair. "No, I'm sunstruck. Bertha is so mad about this new man who bellows about the great outdoors that she drags me into every sunbeam on the beach."

"You'd better have tea and go inside," said Julie, "and if you get any whiter we'll believe you."

"Bertha," said Julie, "you're the only woman with a husband here; get your husband to go into Shelly's study and tell him Val is fainting because Steffin telephoned he'd come to dinner to-night, and Val has quarreled with Steffin."

"I'd like to interrupt Shelly among his papers with that pretty message! Besides, Val isn't asked to dinner." There was a second's hush in the chatter of the group. "I don't know why." Bertha's voice was exasperated. "If Val keeps on quarreling with all the men at the club, she won't be asked any place and I'll have to go about alone."

Julie lighted a cigarette. "We heard she had quarreled with Steffin, but it is news that Shelly is included in her feud. What's the matter with you, Val?

Why do you quarrel with the two most eligible men on Long Island? If you must fight, why don't you fight with the married men? They're used to it and they won't stop asking you to dinner just because you quarrel."

The girl looked insolently at Madame de Chevonnes. "I don't quarrel with them; they quarrel with me."

"To be sure, Shelly's easily bored," the duchess continued, making rings of her smoke. "But Steffin is another matter. He never quarreled with a woman in his life. What did you do to him, Val?"

Miss Brinsley did not trouble to answer. She was watching Linda and Fergus Lansell, and her reddened lips had grown sullen.

"Well, he quarreled with Val all right," said Bertha. "It was the day after she came back. He'd been away himself, and when he met her on the club veranda——"

She held her cup suspended in the air while she glanced toward the house.

"There comes Shelly and—why, there's Sandy."

But Shelburn and MacGrath were deep in an argument that seemed to have no satisfactory conclusion. They leaned against the railing beyond Linda and Lansell, with merely cursory glances at the tea-table group. If Valentine Brinsley turned her back to the balustrade and Bertha moved closer to it, neither of the men saw it.

Linda felt infinitely removed from this chatter with its lack of reticence on the surface and its swirling undercurrents. There was unreality about the place. The terrace, tiled in blue and white with a balustrade like those she had seen in photographs of the Riviera, with blue and white awnings and wicker chairs cushioned in blue, was a dream place. She looked up at the many windows of the house and out over the water and back along the edge of the cliff to the great blue pots of flowers that studded each post of the wide balustrade.

Down below the balustrade, on carpets of pine needles, were stone benches; places where the view was not veiled by the trees. For a moment, wondering whether Shelburn ever looked at views kept Linda from examining the girl who had turned her back when Shelburn came out on the terrace. Why should a man like Steffin be interested in such a girl? What was there that could conceivably hold him in that restless, colorful face? Linda's impulse, when the girl turned her back, had been so strong to move around in front of her and see if by mere looking she could solve her

problem that it was no wonder she sent her mind on a dozen different errands to keep her body from moving.

Somewhere Linda recalled having heard that Shelburn was artistic, a thing difficult for her to believe, and yet here was proof of artistry; the very texture of the rugs on the tiled terrace, the way the blue vases were set upon the balustrade, a hundred little things proclaimed the kind of taste pleased by a carefully planned color scheme and by graceful outlines. Linda saw Valentine Brinsley turn about for an instant and examine Shelburn with so acute a glance that for a moment Linda doubted she had seen it; the change in Valentine's face had been so great in the moment when its sullenness was lifted from it.

Sharply Linda drew herself back to the surface. She speculated on the number of servants it must take to give the place so spotless a look and the kind of management necessary to arrange the work of these servants so that no one would clash with another. She wondered if there were a housekeeper and if she could interview her and find out how she systematized the work, and what each servant had to do and what they were paid. Behind her on the balustrade Lansell, with that delicacy of good breeding that takes cognizance of another's mood, smoked quietly, leaning back against one of the huge flower pots. In the quiet, Shelburn's voice, suddenly raised, was audible to them both.

"I'm not running a charitable project," said Shelburn. "I'm financing a new company. It's going big eventually; it's only a question of a few years; but just now it's taking every cent I have and a good bit of what you have, MacGrath. I can't pay Lindan or anybody else a cent more than I have paid. Why should I give him money because he's ill? I gave him all he asked for."

"You held him up, Shelly, because he was ill. He took any offer for the lease of the forty acres you made. He's better now and you'll have to give him more. That's the whole reason he won't sell to you. You haven't offered him enough."

"I've offered him plenty, and I tell you the man isn't better now."

In her alarm Linda bent forward around the big blue vase until she could see Shelburn's face. He stopped talking and returned her look with faint surprise. Lansell straightened up and threw his cigarette over the railing.

"Oh, you're there, Fergus," said Shelburn. "You're the man I want to see; how long do you think Lindan will live?"

"About thirty years, if he's careful."

"What!"

Lansell met Shelburn's eyes steadily. "I'm expecting him to get well and to marry Julie or Valentine or some woman he meets up at Saranac. He'll have money enough to marry if he has all the gas in his cellar you seem to have found. How soon do you want him to die, Shelly, and what degree of murder is it to sit around waiting for a man to die?"

"If I begin to murder," said Shelburn shortly, "I'll start with you, Fergus." He rose abruptly because Valentine Brinsley had swayed a little and put out a hand to steady herself. "Are you ill?" Fergus said, as he reached her.

The girl sat down in the chair he moved in front of her.

"She says she's sunstruck," said Julie. "She's been on the edge of coma ever since she set foot on the terrace. She evidently doesn't like coming to see you, Shelly."

The girl pulled herself together. "I didn't come to see him. I came because I am employed by Bertha and she wished me to come with her."

"Bertha, how cruel you are!" said Julie. "Don't you ever give your employees a chance to be individual?"

"There's nothing the matter with Val," Bertha defended herself, "except that her feelings are hurt because she's not invited to your dinner party tonight, Shelly. Val is what is popularly known as white with rage."

Shelburn had stood still looking down on Valentine curiously during this interchange of opinion. He now addressed her abruptly. "Do you want to come?"

The girl looked up at him and once more the sullen veil beneath which she was hiding lifted. For a moment Linda was reminded of the wistful eyes that had looked down on her from Mrs. Gazann's window.

"You know I do not want to come."

To Linda's stimulated imagination there seemed to be more in the simple question and answer than the meaning of the words. It was as if the girl challenged something and the man admitted her right to do so. Linda wondered if six months ago she would have been conscious of all those undercurrents.

CHAPTER XVIII

As Linda dressed for dinner that night she wondered if she were not getting a little hipped on this matter of undercurrents. The boys and girls she had known spoke their thoughts and if they had no thoughts they spoke anyhow. She did not remember ever having to think twice about what they said. But these people were quite different. With apparent lack of reticence about emotional matters, they were reserved about the events in their own lives and in each other's. Revealments occurred only in little chance expressions, never in what they said—the kind of look Shelburn returned to Valentine Brinsley when she had said she did not want to come to his dinner; he had looked as if he expected to be asked a favor and expected to give, but not with friendship.

The white sullen face with its too-red lips again came before her, vivid and passionate; and she wondered again for the hundredth time what possible companionship Steffin could have hoped from it.

A few minutes later she was looking down on Steffin from the turn in the stairway as he stood talking with Shelburn in the hall. He stood opposed to something Shelburn was saying. His whole long body was militant.

Beyond him in the drawing-room she saw the shimmer of satin and the glitter of jewels and she gave a fleeting glance at the new gown she had bought for fifty dollars and that must look like a hundred, if it were to meet with her uncle's approval.

As if some sound or whisper of her standing there watching him had somehow reached him, Steffin turned his head. He brushed his hand over his eyes as if he were pushing away a vision he did not quite believe in that intruded inopportunely.

Linda saw Shelburn look at Steffin in surprise and then turn also.

"Ah," said Shelburn, "here comes the Orange Blossom! Though she keeps her unrouged complexion a little distant from these other decorated ones, yet they are all worried to death. Bertha is afraid she will look robust and Julie is changing the color of her powder."

"It seems hard on the young girl," said Steffin coolly.

Somehow this cool assumption by Steffin that she was in an unfortunate situation annoyed Linda. It was true she did not like her host and that she

had come to his house for exactly the same reason that Valentine Brinsley had come that afternoon, because she was told to come by her employer. Nevertheless this employer was a protecting uncle, and the place she had come to was one of the most interesting places she had ever seen. Linda came down the stairs with her head lifted high; then quite suddenly her self-consciousness fled, for seated in a huge carved chair she caught sight of the Duchess de Chevonnes clad in gold and silver tissue with a diadem on her forehead, and quite as suddenly Linda remembered both the diadem and the pose. It was the same band of jewels that circled the same forehead in the small watercolor painting in her father's desk. Was she that old then? She looked scarcely thirty. Did that diademed head with its corn-colored hair represent romance to such a man as her father?

At that moment Julie leaned forward with a faint smile at the young man who hung over her and Linda found herself startled by the sudden answer to her question. The smile was alluring beyond Linda's belief in allurement. It gave the face beneath the diadem mystery and promise. It made it ageless. With a faint shock Linda saw that the young man was Ollie Knox. Then she saw Julie look beyond Ollie at Shelburn and Steffin with a different kind of smile than the one she had given Ollie, and Linda wondered if she would have to lay hold of whichever man she wished to retain at her side.

"Do you know," she said. "I have just had an example of a thing my father once said to me. He said that when an American woman wants a man to come to her in any room where men and women are assembled socially, she either calls him by name or seizes him by the arm. But the European woman just looks at him and he comes."

"If you mean Julie," said Shelburn, "you must remember she is an American with a European superstructure. She can use either method or no method. Her trouble is not to make men come to her but to keep them from staying when she doesn't want them."

"What would you advise me to do when she begins to look at the man I am talking to?"

"I advise you to cling." He held out his arm. "I'm taking you into dinner."

He drew her hand into the curve of his arm and Linda caught sight again of that fleeting look of anxiety that had been in Steffin's face before. She resented it the more because of her surprise in the odd feeling Shelburn's hand closed about her own, gave her. The feeling was so entirely a surprise to her that she felt she could be as anxious about it as Steffin, if she gave

herself time. She had the instinct to withdraw her hand as one drops an electric instrument where the current is too strong, and she looked up at Shelburn, startled. For an instant it was as if the blinds of a window had been opened. She looked into eyes that were windows of what might lie hidden in the human mind, even unknown to itself. There was regret there; there was compromise with results utterly unsatisfying, even though they were unforeseen; there was a clinging to the present because of uncertainty in the satisfaction of anything age might bring. Then the windows closed.

He seated her at the table, but he looked down at her hand after he had released it.

"Pretty small," he said. "What do you do when you have to use it for something that needs strength?"

In her brief walk with him to the dining room she had heard the roaring of that old sea that had once covered the world of women, the sea of physical weakness, out of which had risen the firm earth on which her feet were now set. But once released from his touch and his closeness, she answered him from the safe shore of wanting nothing from him.

"Have you ever won any single thing you really wanted because you are big?"

His look at her slowly changed. "You can never do without physical strength; not personally or nationally. There will always be questions that cannot be answered any other way. There will always be situations that are controlled by those who can make the strongest fight. Even if you use the kind of strength that you call moral—or whatever you call it—you have to back it with physical strength to enforce it."

She shook her young head. "Yet you no longer build your castles on the highest hills or carry your sword as you go into the street. You are forbidden by law to carry firearms, and I suppose you have not used your clenched fist in any of your business successes."

He shrugged a massive shoulder. "Aren't you just playing with words?"

She recognized the male answer given a woman whose thoughts are unimportant and she turned away from him to Steffin, who sat at her other side and who now said to her in a low voice:

"Why are you here?"

"Why, what a thing to ask, when you are here yourself. Why are you here?"

"Because I am on the board of directors of the Consolidated Gas Company and there is quick need to discuss a matter of importance."

"Dear me! Don't boards of directors have offices where they do such things?"

"Yes, but many a company has been financed over a dinner table, or after dinner. You haven't answered me."

"When a woman delays over her answer isn't it as well to assume that you are answered?"

He fell silent, and Linda looked about the room. The dining room faced the end of the long house with French windows that opened on one side of the terrace. The table was softly brilliant. Linda found herself deeply interested in the way dinner was served, even in the handling of the dishes; and in her absorption over whether she could give a dinner like this in her uncle's house she almost forgot the dinner guests.

Shelburn's voice brought her back to her conversational duty as a guest.

"After dinner we are going to the club. Do you dance well?"

"I wonder if I do? Women have received large rewards from men for dancing well enough for them."

But Shelburn made no answer. For a moment he looked in the fresh young face and saw the gate of a larger power swing open, a power for which he had no name. For one instant he saw himself passing through that gate, a leader of men, a friend no other friend might doubt, a lover no woman would regret; a lover—had this young girl who talked so curiously ever had a lover? Her color rose to his look at her.

As his concentration disappeared under this new thought, the gate swung gently shut and the thing beyond it became a dream thing that beset all men, a vision of power given freely from a source outside a man. Shelburn stared at the closed gate, wondering. Power came from what was in a man, not from the outside. A man wrung it from himself or went weak through the world. He had desired no woman in vain and no man had ever taken from him the thing he wanted. A man of definite accomplishment came to know what he was and how best to use himself.

He came out of his reverie amazed. An odd look in a pretty girl's face and he had been left wordless; a species of powerlessness, after all.

Julie de Chevonnes leaned across Steffin. "Shelly, you shivered; did somebody walk over your grave?"

For a moment Shelburn returned Julie's look with relief and she laughed back at him.

"I think you are bewitched, Shelly. He *is* bewitched," she said to Steffin. "He has not eaten; he has talked to a woman. I have never known it to happen."

They moved into the hall where several maids waited with wraps for the women. Bertha Lansell came up behind Julie and Steffin.

"What do you think I heard Sandy say to Shelly just before dinner? He said Shelly was wrong if he thought this girl was a paid housekeeper in the House of MacGrath. He said she was the only one to inherit the House and that he was letting her run it so that she could learn how."

"That must have delighted you, Bertha," said Julie, over her shoulder, "for it means—if it is true—that Sandy isn't planning to marry very soon."

"It means he's planning to marry his niece to somebody."

Julie stopped short and withdrew her arm from Steffin's and faced Bertha. "Mon Dieu, what a brain you have for intrigue, Bertha! You are wasted here in America."

"Well," Bertha defended herself, "did you see the way Shelly talked to her at dinner?"

Julie's little laugh seemed to tinkle disagreeably in Steffin's ears, for he frowned.

"Oh," said Julie, "I saw, but I also heard. No man ever offered a woman marriage because she talked that way or because he had to answer such talk. Though it may well be that the spectacle of Sandy MacGrath turning generous may have stimulated Shelly to unusual action."

"He certainly is acting; look at him."

For Shelburn had passed through the open hall door and was speaking to his chauffeur with a suppressed anger so sibilant that the low words were perfectly clear.

"I told you I had to get to the telegraph office before it closed at nine and I have had to wait six minutes for you."

Already seated in the car with MacGrath beside her, Linda watched Shelburn as if the outburst of anger fascinated her. To tell the truth it had the same attraction for her a thundercloud had.

"If you are going to the telegraph office," said Linda, "may I send a night letter to Father?"

The limousine door slammed shut.

"It's the nuisance of this village," said Shelburn to MacGrath, "that you can't use the wires after sunset. It took me fourteen minutes when I tried to get Saranac last night over long distance."

"Did you get Lindan?" said MacGrath.

"Not with any success. I'm wiring him to come here."

"Here!"

"Here to the house. He'll like it; he's been tied up there with sick people so long he'll like to get back to his old friends and his old ways."

"Will he come?"

"Yes, he'll come."

For a moment Linda lost her breath. It still came fast when she spoke. "Oh, Mr. Shelburn, believe me you ought not to do this. He is a hemorrhage case and he ought not to take one extra step."

Shelburn frowned. "Oh, he's not that bad! You heard Lansell say he'd live thirty years."

Linda turned to her uncle. "Uncle Sandy, really, oh, really, he ought not to leave Saranac."

"Why, my dear, that's his affair, not ours. He's a grown man. If he oughtn't to, he probably won't."

She looked from one man to the other. In neither face could she find lenience for the man who ought to stay where he was but who did not do so. It would be literally nothing to either of these men that this other man, clutching at life, would look with longing on the few bright days offered him and would be willing to spend dreary months of inactivity to attain them. They did not know the meaning of physical lassitude at which the spirit chafed despairingly. But her father knew; she would wire her father to keep Lindan there.

When Shelburn got out at the telegraph office, Linda looked past him into the little room, empty save for a tired operator, unfurnished save for a counter with yellow blanks on it and pencils on strings. Her uncle took out a cigar and spoke to her soothingly.

“My dear, if we went through the world in your way, we would have a race of weaklings; nobody would have a chance to make their own decisions.”

The word fired her. Was she a weakling to sit there, hesitating to send the telegram she wanted to send for fear Shelburn would see what it was? He could not prevent her from wiring what she chose to whomever she wished. And he might object his head off for all she cared.

Shelburn looked up as she came in. He had finished his telegram and he looked at his watch, frowning while he waited for her. Linda took a yellow blank and wrote on it, “Operator, please do not read this aloud when I give it to you; just run the risk of your getting it right. The two telegrams follow; one to George MacGrath, the other to Edward Lindan, Saranac Lake.”

CHAPTER XIX

The breeze off the water stirred the little curls on Linda MacGrath's neck as she turned her head to look back at the house. To an inlander the sun on the water was an especially lovely thing. To one who had been dwelling in the city streets, the shining leaves of mountain laurel with their shell-pink blossoms were even more lovely. The value of wealth, that had never seemed very great to her, increased as she saw in it a means to refreshment like this. To work hard and come back to rest to this quiet beauty with all your personal needs unobtrusively served was a great economy of strength. Would not her father have stayed well had he had this to come to after the wear and tear of a newspaper office? Or if he could have lived as Shelburn lived, visiting his paper when it interested him to do so, governing its policy when he chose to, and leaving his responsibility to others when he felt like it. She supposed her father would never have managed a newspaper that way. And then her mother; if her mother's vitality could have been guarded against fatigue and worry, who knows but that she might have lived for many years. She thought of her mother walking on this flower-bordered terrace. She would have been lovelier than Julie de Chevonnes and scarcely older, and how differently she would have used these opportunities.

Over the early morning quiet, from one of the open windows of the second floor, came an oath and then a sharp sentence, and Linda thought of the night before when Shelburn had spoken to his chauffeur. His morning voice had no different tone for a valet who had made the bath water too hot than his evening voice had held for the chauffeur. "Yet his servants stay with him," murmured Linda. "If I were to talk to Gaze that way, or to Nora, they'd leave me."

Linda moved down the path toward the beach beyond the sound of the jarring voice. Was the reason for all this unevenness of life an individual necessity? Was growth an ability to control power, your own power at every stage of its growth, or were there many powers that your personality and your will molded into growth or into loss, according to your strength or your weakness? You gained strength so slowly; a word held back, an action reconsidered, a thought plunging deeper to an unaccustomed channel, and you suddenly found yourself stronger.

Her path led to the beach, beyond the little circular cove of sand where the rocks began to pile upon themselves, inviting her to exploration. She

threaded her way between a huge boulder and an arch of wave-washed limestone up a narrow ravine scarcely wide enough for passage. Yet some one must have gone this way, for on a jutting rock that might have snatched it from a careless hand was a small handkerchief with an embroidered V in the corner.

The way broadened a little and came out on a level space carpeted with pine needles. And in this space, latticed by pine branches, was what might have been an artist's studio, or a writer's refuge, or a little summer house for moody hours; a tiny place whose windows stood open, though the door behind its small veranda was closed.

Somewhere beyond here Westwin Steffin lived. Was this little summer house his? She looked at it more narrowly. On the steps of the veranda she turned and looked out through the leafy screen at the dancing water. Perhaps it belonged to Doctor Lansell. He must need some place to study, in a house kept filled with guests by his wife. She looked down at the handkerchief she had picked up. After all, what did it matter whose house it was.

It was no surprise to her when she heard a step coming up the path she had come. Somehow she had expected it; perhaps she had gone forth to meet such a step; to give fate this chance. What surprised her was the man who came into the clearing; it was not the man she had been hoping to see. It was Shelburn.

He bore a telegram in his hand and his heavy brows met over his prominent eyes with a threat.

With a little thrill as of gathering together her resources, Linda leaned against the pillar of the veranda and waited to see what might lie behind those frowning brows. Standing on the step above him as he stopped before her, her eyes were on a level with his for the first time since she had met him. The impact of his anger as he stared at her was like the shock of an electric current; she did not find it very different from the feeling she had had when he held her hand the night before.

"You wired Lindan last night!"

"Well!" With surprise she heard her own arrogance.

"Here is his answer. Knox took it over the telephone, supposing it was for me, since I also had wired him. That's why I read it."

Linda read the yellow slip. "You are very kind. I will wait as you suggest. Lindan."

At the relief in her face, Shelburn flushed darkly. “Will you tell me what you suggested to Lindan that he is so amiable about?”

“Mr. Shelburn, I’m afraid I resent your inquiry into my affairs. It seems quite bad enough that you should read my telegram.”

He looked at her in silence. Perhaps controlled anger in a thing so slight and soft was new to him; perhaps women did not often look at him with such inimical eyes. The flush on his face deepened; he spoke rapidly:

“I asked you to be a guest in my house at a time when I was planning an important matter, and you attempt to upset my plans by foolish telegrams. This isn’t a social matter for a woman to handle. You didn’t suppose, did you, that I left this unanswered? When the wire to you came through I telephoned Lindan. He’ll be here on the morning train.”

“It is a dreadful thing to do,” she said in low tones. “He is fighting for his life. The least fatigue raises his temperature. A jolt from an automobile can break down in a moment delicate tissues that have taken days to form. How could you do this thing?”

For a moment he seemed to be wondering why he troubled to explain; the next moment he heard himself saying angrily, “Why, this is something Lindan will be glad of all his life. We want to buy an old tumble-down place in the mountains for money enough to keep him in ease and comfort as long as he lives; money enough to care for a woman, if that interests you. Your interest seems to be amazingly personal.”

“Could you not have made him this offer by letter? Could he not have accepted it or rejected it the same way?”

“He might reject the offer by letter but he couldn’t accept it, because these are things that require signed deeds recorded and witnessed by notaries, and you cannot sign a deed by telephone, nor can a notary witness it by telegraph.”

She tried to think it out. “But these things are done by mail. Oh, I understand. You mean he has to be persuaded to sell and you couldn’t persuade him by letter or by telegraph.”

In the silence that followed, the sound of a breaking twig beyond the clearing seemed large and Linda turned her head. All women know this under-awareness that accompanies the suppressed wish.

Shelburn lighted a cigar. “If a woman loved me the way you seem to care for Lindan, I would think all the risk involved in getting to her was

worth while. Are you going back to the house or is this a rendezvous?"

"Neither."

She was not looking at him; she was looking in the direction of the crackling twig, so that when his hands fell upon her shoulders it had the effect of a shock. He held her for a second, hesitating, then he relinquished her with another shrug.

"Then *au revoir*; we sail across the bay for luncheon, and we dine with Bertha Lansell. It will fill your day and your lover comes to-morrow. Cheer up!"

He turned away from her and set foot in the almost imperceptible path he had come by. Linda waited, and when no further sound came from the direction of the crackling twig, she left the veranda and parted the boughs on the edge of the bluff, peering beyond them. There was nothing. She moved along the edge of the bluff until she came out on a cleared lawn before a green-roofed house of stone. A stone wall separated her from the lawn and she walked beside it until she reached a stile where a man in white flannels stood with his hands in his pockets and his head bent down. She had not known that Steffin's face could look so dark and heavy. Beyond the removal of his cap he made no greeting.

"I am lost," said Linda. "Is this your house?"

"It is, and there is no path from where you were to my house."

She did not wait to consider this; other urgent matters were in her mind. "Well, here's a path; it looks as if it went through Doctor Lansell's grounds." Then she paused. "Is anything the matter?"

"Yes."

She hesitated, all her perceptions reaching out and reaching in vain. How delicate understanding was! She made an attempt to seize it. "It was your step I heard as I stood on the porch of that little house in the clearing."

"Yes."

His look at her was so curious that her search for understanding was halted. She frowned.

"Is the place haunted? I went out for a walk this morning and stumbled on it by accident and wondered whose it was. I thought it might be yours."

"It is not mine." Then, as if some hurt wrung from him an exclamation, he said, "I do not go near the place by accident or choice. But on the shore

below I heard your voice and I thought perhaps you might have come upon it accidentally, as you have said you did, for all that it is hard to find, and so I climbed the cliff— —"

"Well," her voice was a command.

"I heard words of love; I saw that I intruded."

"Words of love! Impossible!"

"I have keen ears for your voice."

She tried to recall what he could have possibly heard and then quite suddenly she found herself angry—angry as she had been the night before when he had asked her why she was there.

"I have not been off the terrace since I arrived until this morning. If you think I have to climb a steep path to a secluded place to meet my host, I do not. He is there in the house where I am staying, and he is capable of creating his own seclusion by a wave of the hand. As for talk of love, no one in that group of people needs seclusion for that; love can be talked of while the morning paper is unfolded or the butler waits." She paused, but when he made no answer the hot color came into her face. "I don't know what makes you so unfriendly."

He looked at her intently. "I said you were too young for this place and what you have said proves it. Last night, though I do not care for dancing, I went to the club because I was worried about you, because it seemed a friendly thing to do; you might need me. And I sat outdoors on the veranda and watched you dance—with Shelburn more than with the others. The dances of to-day—well, even if you wanted to dance this way with this man, I can't see why your uncle let you do it."

Some latent excitement in her was welcoming the resentful tone in his voice.

"But my uncle cannot govern the way every man dances with me. He is my uncle, not my nurse."

"Quite true. Yet near me on the veranda, also watching you, sat your uncle, and he must have had some doubt, for later he reminded Shelburn that you were neither a Bertha Lansell nor a Julie de Chevonnes."

She shrugged. "A daughter of Grath, who could not be held closely by her dancing partner and relinquished lightly when the dance was done; but who must be held lightly by the man she danced with and relinquished

ceremoniously. What could be better? The wand waves and the pavement is changed to a path of gold. You could not have done it better yourself."

He bent toward her in his uncertainty; so light was this Scotch-thistle voice. He felt himself lifting heavy feet cumbered with mud, to clump after her, he whose heels had been winged by her presence.

"The path of gold created by your uncle did not protect you from the morning's meeting to which Shelburn contrived to give the appearance of the clandestine."

There was a moment when the thistle seemed floating straight to earth, to the muddy place whereon his feet were planted; but near the mud it caught some current of air he could not feel and rose lightly, glistening in sunlight denied to him.

"Oh, no outside power like gold can protect a woman from the clandestine. She must protect herself."

She turned from him and moved down the path and he had the sense of her floating away on this sunlight that he could not reach and of her taking the sunlight with her so that his loss was quite irreparable. She looked back over her shoulder a moment—a pose to make a man's arms reach out—so light, so little, so fragile she was.

Like a ripple her voice came back to him, delicately humorous. "Maybe my uncle was protecting his host and his business partner, not me from the clandestine. Sometimes the Scotch are that way."

The path took Linda across Doctor Lansell's lawn to Shelburn's house. Near its end, close to the terrace, Madame de Chevonnes joined her. Julie's high heels were making holes in the sand and her purple parasol caught at the pine boughs, and neither of these things pleased her.

"Have you been to see the golden icon?" she now asked Linda.

"No, it is my iconoclastic morning. If you are going that way, you will find him on the stile between his yard and Doctor Lansell's."

"Go to see a man left in pieces by another woman—not I. I'm going to walk with you; I want to ask you a question."

But Julie asked no questions; she appeared too surprised at Linda's scrutiny of her face framed by the purple parasol.

"How like you it is," said Linda, "and how unlike you."

"What is?"

"The picture of you that used to be above my father's desk."

"*Ciel!* Where's the picture now? It used to be above his heart."

"I do not know where it is now that he has gone to Saranac."

The older woman sighed. "No wonder it is unlike me now. It was painted when I was your age. What an age, your age! It was the moment of my first success. How boundless all of one's horizons are at such a moment! How was one to guess that this phantom success was only a horizon; an imaginary line, always over the curve of the world, never to be reached." She was silent a moment, then she concluded abruptly, "You might have been my child."

The girl made no effort to hide her startled look.

"You do not like the idea—well, why should you? I am to you but a neglected painting in a desk drawer."

"Never neglected!"

Under the tinted skin a flush rose. For a moment the face seemed a different one to Linda—a face where hunger lived, where thirst went unslaked, and then the look that had subtly deepened all the lines of the face fled and it became again a little shallow, a little worn.

"Never neglected!" Julie repeated. "Ah, *mon Dieu*, if these problems came to us in later years when we had sense to solve them. We are called on to decide the greatest things in life in the years when we have the least judgment."

Madame de Chevonnes had stopped before a stone bench set against the wall of the terrace among the rhododendrons. She looked up at the terrace and found it empty, yet she lowered her voice.

"I still have youth and in spite of the War, I still have money." She made a little French gesture. "There is also position. I could give it to you, even if I did not wish its burden again for myself. You have never been abroad—you would be acclaimed if you were properly presented as the dowered daughter of your father's family. I go down to Virginia next week—why should I not ask your father to come to the old place where I met him as a girl—we could be friends—at the very least we could be friends. I will ask him to come."

"But he cannot come, Madame. He is curing himself of tuberculosis."

"*Mais, mon Dieu*, he is not already entombed. If Ned Lindan can come, your father can. The mountains of Virginia are surely as good for him as the mountains of New York." She looked at Linda narrowly. "What is it? You have grown white. Surely you do not dislike me that much. Even if your father and I were only good friends, still you could go back to Paris with me. Switzerland for the summers, the Riviera for the winters. What is there to turn a young girl white at such a prospect?"

Linda's voice lowered. "The picture you put before me is wonderful, Madame, and I do thank you. It is a fairyland—a fairy gift—and you a fairy godmother, but you see I know my father has to stay where he is for a long time. And after that—well, I do not look beyond it, yet. I cannot. You must have come close to life and death over there in the War. You must know on what slight threads it hangs in such cases as my father's and Mr. Lindan's. You will understand when I say it seems dreadful to handle it so carelessly."

Julie's penciled brows met. "But why shouldn't Ned Lindan come here? It is to his advantage; he is not mentally ill. Here is a new corporation that all his friends are interested in. If it is well handled there is much money in it. Why shouldn't Ned get into the company?"

"I don't think they want Mr. Lindan in the company. I think they only want to buy his land. They don't care about him."

The older woman had a moment's arrested attention at the sound of the girl's voice.

"Why, where have my wits been? Your mother was a Paget. I had forgotten it. Her father was Lindan Paget. It is why you are named Linda. There is always a Linda among the Pagets. You are Ned Lindan's cousin—second or third."

Linda's thoughts raced from Julie to her father and his choice of Saranac instead of Lake Placid because of this man at Saranac he wanted to talk with. She stood so still that she could hear the pine needles falling about the stone bench. Upon her came that curious feeling that comes with a solution of a problem—the moment of verification that gives the mind relief. This man was her kinsman; there was every reason why she should object to his health being put in jeopardy about a matter that might so easily be decided by letter.

Madame de Chevonnes was regarding her with eyes grown shrewd.

"I might have married your father, but for your mother, who was once my friend. Had I married him, he would not have been left to the oblivion of

a country town."

Linda had again the feeling of uncertainty that seemed to follow her among these people—a feeling of a depth she could not reach because of some limitation in herself. It did not occur to her that the limitation might be youth. She closed her eyes for a moment. "Oh, for just five minutes' talk with father," she said to herself. Then, as she slowly mounted the steps, she found herself wondering if she were there on Long Island, away from her father, to make her handle what she met, without his help or his interpretations.

When she reached her own room she looked at the picture of her mother.

"Could that be the reason father was left all alone without mother, so that he would have to do things by himself?" she thought.

CHAPTER XX

The maid came into Linda's room the next morning with a breakfast tray. She closed the windows with a French shiver at American recklessness.

"Madame, Mr. Knox, Monsieur's secretary, sends word that the car goes to the station for Monsieur Lindan at ten, and should you wish to go, there will be nobody else going." The maid's voice was softly significant.

"I will be waiting on the veranda," said Linda.

All the way to the station she kept saying to herself that at least Lindan would bring news of her father. The shining rails came to a point that glistened in the sun; the little brick station had flower beds about it; the road along which Linda had come was rosy with laurel. Surely it was not a bad place for a sick man.

This was not the train that was usually met by the cars from the shore estates and so the station was quiet. There were only a few people there and only one other car. A man at the far end of the station platform talking with the station master turned about as Linda left her car, hesitated and then came toward her.

"You have come to meet Lindan?" Steffin asked.

"Yes, have you?"

"He wired me." He was very grave.

At the shining point where the rails met there appeared a toy engine that grew larger. It was scarcely credible that the sun-browned man who got off the train needed any of the cautions that had been suggested for him, unless one came close enough to hear the quick breathing or were astute enough to discern the languidness behind his forced movements.

"May I dismiss your car, Miss Linda," asked Steffin, "and drive Lindan up in my own car myself?"

He drove very slowly and carefully, sitting alone in front and stopping now and then in spite of the other man's protestations.

"You must have thought it odd," said Lindan in his soft husky voice, "that I should have come, after all, when I had wired you I would wait."

"No," said Linda, "I do not think it odd that you are here, though I do think you should not have come."

He smiled at her. "I so greatly wanted the details of my affairs settled for the sake of some of us to whom it means something, and I have to settle them with Shelburn. Or rather, that's what I say to myself; but it may be I was just uncontrollably homesick for all of this." He looked across the low sand hills. "It has been a long time since I heard the sea."

She stirred at his answer. The tan on his face and the scarlet in his cheeks gave him the appearance of abundant life. For all his gauntness he was good to look on; the flesh burned away had left his face very fine. The eyes were bright with bodily waste, but there was more than this brightness in them. She wondered if looking with courage through the shadow closing about him was what she saw. In his face there was the quiet of one who saw a place from which all shadows flee.

She looked at him again and it was as if some veil that had blurred her look was drawn from it by her deep wish to be of use to him. Yes, the Shadow was close to him; its folds were wrapping around him gently and warmly with some strange promise that held no need for these things she was hoping for him. Then the veil dropped over her vision, leaving her in doubt.

"Why do you look at me so strangely, Little Daughter of the Enchanted Father?"

His whimsical husky voice lingered in her heart. Would he speak in that place where he was going? Would that voice, so winning, so wholly a thing of flesh and bone, still live where flesh was not? In her eyes came tears, the tribute of the flesh to the moment's lifting of the veil that left the spirit wordless.

"Why, what is this?"

"I am so afraid for you," she said. "You don't take care of yourself."

He was silent a moment. His eyes passed from hers to Steffin's profile. "But what a thing to be afraid of," he said at length. "I have always found when I'm afraid of anything, it helps me to look the worst thing my fear presents in the face and provide for it. The fear is done for the moment you find you can provide for it. Let's see what you are afraid of. Death? I have faced Death so long and I am so familiar with it, I think I can take that fear from you. It is the one great certainty of good, is it not—this death? See, what have I of life here? Nothing but restrictions. I must not live, nor love

nor act. The gate is closed on all the things that are life for me and I stand with my hand on its latch, looking over at the other side where life is lived not as we live it here, with all its place and its strength-restrictions, but as it will be lived after I go through this gate, with tireless strength and limitless possibilities—and with love."

He paused because Steffin had stopped the car under boughs that shaded the side of the road. He looked up at the sun-touched leaves a moment. "If love only had to consider its own desire, of course it would be easy enough. But it's all tied up with the desire for the loved one's good. And that makes it infinitely complex. Our will-to-live, that makes it necessary to put self first, walls up the gate to love. I have an odd idea that death breaks down that wall. Wouldn't it be pleasant if we went through that gate to a place where willing is used for building and for growing and not for self-indulgence? And that's the worse fear, isn't it? Will it take your fear for me away if I tell you I know I shall go on to the thing I want? I can only offer this to you as a reason for putting your fear for me aside. You will, won't you?"

Her voice was low. "I will try."

A faintly luminous look touched his thin face. "I shall not go far. I have so much work left to do, I feel sure I shall have to stay pretty close to do it. I came here to-day because I must get some things started that must be done with the hands I now have; signatures must be written. And there are other things that must be planned with the brains I now have. I know; truly I *know* that when I have started these things on this side of the gate, I shall be able to go on with them on the other side of the gate, after I have taken that big step that awes you so." He sighed. "And I know the gate won't open easily enough for me to go through until these things I have to do, with the mind and hands I now have, are done."

They went through the Lodge gates and up the hill to the turn of the road from where the sea could be seen.

"No sailor," said Lindan, "ever becomes reconciled to the mountains. Let's get out here and walk to the house. It's only a short distance."

The three of them strolled slowly through the masses of ivory and pink blossoms of the laurel to the deeper shade of the pines that broke the low limestone cliffs into ledges. A little ahead the house began to outline itself and Lindan stopped to look at it. Then down the steps of the terrace came a swift-moving coral figure. It paused a second on the bottom step, bending forward to look at the little group beyond the turn of the drive; then it swept

through the laurel that bordered the drive and stopped before them breathless, with dark amazed eyes on Lindan and hands flung out against him. And Linda thought in all the world she had never heard so desperate a cry as the low one wrenched from the too-red lips.

"Valentine," said Lindan softly.

The girl stood quite still, trying to pull herself together, but when she spoke her voice held the same passionate protest as her outflung hands.

"Ned, why didn't you tell me you were coming? Oh, my dear, who let you make this long trip, and for what! You are so—so thin—so changed—Ned—" Her voice lowered, "I would have come to you, dear."

"Not while I could come to you, Valentine, and I didn't tell you because I did not decide to come until last night, and you remember I hadn't heard from you for a long while and I was a little uncertain where to wire you."

Linda drew back, searching Steffin's face. For Valentine Brinsley had moved a little to one side and spoke to Steffin with sharp clearness.

"Did you bring him here?"

"No. It was Shelburn."

The girl's face whitened. "How utterly base."

For a moment Steffin's uplifted hand had the look of warning, but the girl was no longer looking at him.

"Why was I not told? One of you might have told me." Then some new fear took her. She looked from the three of them to the house beyond the laurels. "You are not going to stay in this man's house, Ned?" She put out her hand and touched his arm. "You will not?"

Steffin made a little hopeless gesture.

"Why not, Valentine," said Lindan. He said it so simply, so quietly.

And the girl opened her lips to answer, but all that came forth was a low exclamation.

Steffin intervened. "Will you come to my house instead, Ned?"

There was a silence. Far beyond, the sound of the sea swirling up on the rocks made a faint moan. Then Lindan answered quietly, "I am only here for a short time. It is easier for me to transact the business I have come to attend to here, outdoors on Shelburn's terrace, than it would be to discuss it in his office, or even in his house. When I am through with it, I have far more to

arrange with you, Win, than with Shelburn. I count on going to your house directly after luncheon."

"Luncheon here, with this man!" Some deep panic had the girl in its grasp and for a moment it robbed her of words. She struggled with it. "Why do you eat his food? What business have you with him—" For a moment it looked, as she paused, as if she might win back her self-control, but who shall doubt what yielding in the moments that seem to matter scarcely at all robs us of the strength to hold fast in the one moment that matters most of all. She dragged her eyes from Lindan's watchful face and fastened them on Steffin.

"You told him," she said. "What have you told him?"

"Told him?" Steffin looked at Lindan as though there were an ache in his heart. "I told him you were tired and disheartened with your work, and that Bertha would not give you a vacation. I told him it was hard to work day in and day out at work you hated when one you cared for was ill and far away from you, and that one day when it was harder you slipped away and went home to Virginia, to get more courage, and you did not tell Bertha or any one where you went."

Lindan leaned forward and lifted one of the girl's hands to his breast. He did not seem to see the others. "Did you think, Valentine, I would not know that there was more than this that Win told me? Some affront perhaps that had been offered you, some cad you had to be polite to in Bertha's house, some laxness of conduct you could no longer bear to be a part of; things you might not care to tell even me, let alone Win."

The girl put the back of her other hand up against her forehead with a curious little gesture as of pain, and Lindan watched her a moment. Then he said softly,

"You see, when Bertha wrote me that nobody knew where you were and when I did not hear from you myself, it was natural that I should ask Win or Fergus to do something about it. And Fergus was in Boston. But I wanted to know for another reason than because of my worry. For I had been working for you—with how much joy, dear, you will guess, when I tell you I have come here to finish my work; to finish it so that you will never again have to earn your bread this way. Had I known where to find you, I would have written you all about it. I would even have asked you to come to me at Saranac, that I might tell you all about it. Or if I had known that you had gone to your mother's place in Virginia, I think I should have liked to have come there. For it's that little tract of land next to mine that you sold to me

when your mother died and you had to have the money and would take it no other way; it is that little place, Valentine, that is one of the bits coveted by this new gas company. I have deeded it back to you; it would not be fair to keep it, bought that way at so small a part of its value, when neither you nor I knew that it had this value. And I wanted to tell you this, and I am telling it to you now because I want Steffin to manage the lease of it for you to this new company. And oh, my dear, this lease will maintain you wherever you want to live; in Saranac, if you like."

The girl drew her hand away from him and stepped back, her eyes burning at him and her face gone blank with fear.

"I have money? I! And you would have told me of it had I stayed at Bertha's—and not gone away. Why, all I wanted in the world was enough money to live where you had to live; I was saving for it; I was— Oh, God, my God—" Her wrung hands were lifted to her breast. They might well have framed a prayer.

Lindan took the hands clenched on her breast into his own and she stared down at them. "Ned," she whispered, "how thin your hands are; how hot they are." Then her whispered voice broke into a sob.

Linda could bear it no longer. She moved back beyond the laurel and beyond the terrace until she reached the stone bench below it where she had sat the day before. It was not until she stood beside the bench that she was conscious that Steffin had followed her, for her own hurt was clamoring too loud within her heart. She turned abruptly on him.

"How could you have done this thing to him? How could you? You, his friend! I did not dream this was the woman he loved; but you—you knew. You knew he was working for her. You knew he was worrying over her, waiting for her letters, tied to a steamer chair. You might have known that just this worry would send him to bed for weeks even if there were nothing else than the worry. And all the while there was something else—all that you have lost him—how could you, oh, how could you?"

The man's face had flushed a dull scarlet. His hand fell on her shoulder and gripped it. "Oh, hush! How could I tell him the truth? He is ill. It would be like hitting him over a fresh wound. She *was* in Virginia. She went there at your father's suggestion, after she left Springfield. It was your father who told me where she was. Why should I tell him more than this? He is my friend."

The girl drew back with a little gesture of despair. "What treachery," she said, "and to him of all men in the world. Oh, will you go away?"

Breathless and a little sick she flung herself on the stone bench. She did not even look to see if Steffin had returned to Lindan. She sat still, thinking of those two she had left out on the drive. It was here, only yesterday that Julie de Chevonnes had spoken of her father. Was her father's fight to end as Lindan's was ending? She wondered, if she had known what lay before her father, if she might not have accepted the strange offer of marriage Steffin had made her on that golden afternoon when they walked on the river's brink. How young and shining he had been that afternoon, how gay and debonair. And if she had promised to marry him, she might never have found out that it was he whom Valentine Brinsley had come to meet in the secluded little town.

She did not know how long she sat there secluded by the laurels with the wall of the terrace behind her, but she was not roused from her reverie until she heard Shelburn's voice and the striking of the match that was thrown over the railing.

"Lindan, I can't think why you refuse to sell this place. You don't really want to live down there, miles from anything, in your state of health. You have endured leasing it to us; you'd get used to the idea of selling it."

There was the sound of another striking match and Linda's heart contracted. He ought not to smoke.

"Shelburn," replied the husky voice, "you are a rover. So far as I know, you belong to a race of rovers. Your grandfather went all the way from Connecticut to the middle of Ohio and started a newspaper there, and your father roved a few miles farther on and built steel furnaces, or whatever they are in Middletown, and when he got them going he roved farther up the State and started a gas company in Cleveland and sold his gas to the city. And now you have roved back here to Long Island. It seems quite normal to you to live in any one of three towns, in any of your father's houses. But I have lived in one house, there on that Virginia estate, and my father and my grandfather lived there before me; and it isn't anything at all to me that there's no electricity in that house or that the plumbing is not modern. It just happens to be a house that I love from its old foundation to its musty old attic. I have endured your leasing it, as you say. I needed the money, and your wells didn't hurt the property. But I won't sell it."

"But because the place has memories," said Shelburn impatiently, "there's no reason you shouldn't part with it when you need the money. Is it more money you want, Lindan? I've offered you enough to marry and go abroad. Switzerland is as good as Saranac for your trouble and far more

interesting. You could have a corking good time the rest of your life on that money."

"Well, you see, Shelburn, this thing I have plays the devil with one's ideas of a corking good time. It wouldn't occur to me as a good time to impose myself on any woman; and for the rest, let's examine your offer. You've gone up from fifty thousand to seventy thousand. Suppose I took it. I'd get three thousand a year from it. Why should I take three thousand a year for what would bring you three hundred thousand?"

"Oh, it isn't enough? Why didn't you say so before? What you said was that you wouldn't sell because it was your ancestral domain. If you're holding out for more money, I can't go any farther, but I can put it up to the board of directors."

"What I said before holds, Shelburn. I'm not selling what you call my ancestral domain. But I will sell you the adjoining property, the forty acres that you leased from me four years ago, where you have already sunk wells. As you know, the gas is there. This property I bought some years ago. I believe you are using the house on it for an office. It is no part of the original Lindan property, and I am willing to sell it."

Shelburn smoked in silence for some minutes. Then he said, "But this is included in my original offer. It is the reason that I went up from fifty thousand to seventy thousand. I am being perfectly fair with you. The extra twenty thousand is because of what we found when we sunk the well in that corner of your property."

"I will sell you that corner of my property for twice that twenty thousand. The rest I positively will not sell."

There was another interval of silence. Then Shelburn said crisply, "You want ready capital to finance your own tract, don't you? Well, it won't work. Neither you nor any of the people behind you can go up against us."

"If I wanted to finance that kind of thing, it would take more money than forty thousand and I could get more. That doesn't happen to be what I want; though I do want forty thousand cash."

Shelburn rose and strolled up and down the terrace. Presently he threw his cigar away and came back to Lindan. "Will you wait until I telephone MacGrath? He has had to go into the city to-day. I will be back in a moment."

When he had gone Lindan settled down in his chair with closed eyes and relaxed muscles. Across his forehead came fine lines of some pain that was

not physical and about his mouth a grimness of endurance. When Shelburn returned, Lindan had lighted another cigarette and was smoking it quietly, his bent head resting on his hand.

"We take you," said Shelburn; "will you come inside? Knox, my secretary, will have the necessary documents ready in a few minutes. He will make out a warranty deed for you to sign with the boundaries of those forty acres copied from our lease. He is now filling out the form, and I have sent to the Port Washington Courthouse for a notary public to acknowledge it. He'll be here in ten minutes. Is that satisfactory to you? It is the simplest way, if you are going back to-day or to-morrow."

Lindan rose. "That is satisfactory to me."

"Lindan," Shelburn said at length, "you're holding me up for these forty acres."

"That's up to you, Shelburn. You don't have to buy them."

The door closed on them.

For a long time Linda sat quietly on the bench; then she went upstairs to her room to write to her father. But the thought that Lindan, his business concluded, might attempt the walk to Steffin's house alone, stopped her. Several times she left her desk to look out the window, wondering whether she ought to telephone Steffin. But she could not bring herself to do it. Perhaps Lindan would take one of Shelburn's cars. Yet there had been something in Lindan's voice, in spite of the quiet neutrality of his explanations to Shelburn, that had sounded inimical to Linda. It was as if something very deep lay in Lindan's mind, opposing Shelburn and yet held in leash while Lindan accomplished the thing he had come to do. Perhaps Lindan never meant to release the thing held in the depths of his mind. Perhaps men whose time was short could waste none of it on enmity. Yet, somehow, Linda did not believe Lindan would ask even the smallest thing of Shelburn, neither the use of a car, nor the luncheon soon to be served.

Linda wondered if Lindan's delicate perceptions included Steffin in their enmity. To her it seemed much worse that Lindan should have to ask anything of Steffin than of Shelburn—Steffin who had arranged to meet the woman Lindan loved under circumstances impossible to reconcile with loyalty or friendship. Yet apparently, Lindan was asking service of Steffin.

Linda gathered the pages of her letter together, put it into a portfolio, filled her fountain pen, and went back again to the bench below the terrace. If Lindan undertook to walk to Steffin's house, she could at least go with

him to the stile, and wait there for him until she was sure all was well with him.

He came down the steps of the terrace, with eyes a little too bright and with steps a little too languid, as if his will drove him against immeasurable fatigue.

"I think," he said, when he saw Linda, "that I'll walk to Win's house now. There are some things I want to arrange with him immediately; before the bank closes."

"Don't you want him to come for you?"

"It's only a short walk and I've taken it many times."

"May I walk with you, as far as the stile?"

"Yes, nurse, if you are worrying about me. What are you doing, writing a diary?"

"I'm writing father, and I came down here to do it while I waited for you. Father wouldn't forgive me if I didn't dog your footsteps when you took too many of them."

She wished, as they left the Shelburn grounds, that she was a nurse. She didn't like the color of his face or the shortness of his breath, though both might have been expected after the contest he had been engaged in.

"Do you know," he was saying, "your father is going to be well in a few months. He has gained eight pounds and he looks wonderful. We have had the most thrilling talks. You have no idea how many hours we have filled planning a hundred small details of our big scheme; testing it, working on it. He's a good organizer, your father; it must run in the MacGrath blood."

"Won't you tell me?"

"I don't want to spoil your father's surprises. But I think I can tell you how it began. No set of idlers in any boarding house, whether it is dignified by the name of sanitarium or hotel de luxe, is ever satisfied. We have gathered from everybody in our place all the reasons why they are not satisfied; and we are going to have a place that does away with all these dissatisfactions. Don't you like the idea?" He stopped to catch his breath at the gate of the Lansell estate.

"Oh, yes." She was thinking of the long years in Mrs. Gazann's boarding house and the long array of changing guests who had passed with dissatisfaction in and out of its doors. "But wouldn't you have the same

trouble all over, even after you removed their causes for complaint? Wouldn't they still be idle, and so just waiting to be satisfied again?"

He moved slowly over the soft pine needles. "Of course, that's the principal thing, the real source of their complaining. We're going to fix that." He looked down at her attentively. "Would you mind taking off your hat? In that kind of fichu you have around your neck, you look astonishingly like a painting of my mother in my drawing-room. There, now I know why I had the feeling of having known you before that first day when you set foot in Saranac. I saw you get off the train, you know. It was your voice that made me feel it next. Your voice is like the voices of the Lindans—like my mother's."

"You did not tell me all this at Saranac."

"Well, I have so many odd notions that I do not always like to tell them. It's sitting still all day long with nothing to do but think. Since I've had to do this, I have all sorts of clairvoyance about people."

The girl checked the exclamation that rose to her lips. If this were true, if he really had this clairvoyance, how had Steffin's treachery escaped him? Or was his clairvoyance like all the other kinds she had heard and read of; clear about other people, if you could call it clear, but never about yourself?

They moved on slowly to where the path stopped at the low stile. She held her hat in her hand and the sunshine sifted through the pines on her brown hair, turning it to bronze feathers that framed a face any Virginian might ponder over.

He sat down on the stile and leaned back against its upper step while Linda watched him, seated beside him, glad that he was resting.

"They were very lovely," he said, "all these Pagets and these Lindans—the women exquisite and the men—well, I think the men were mostly searchers for the idea and not for the fact. I have seen my father go without his soup over one idea, and without salad over another, and rise hungry from the table, trying to put his ideas into words; but how wonderful the ideas were for us who sat about the table."

He looked down at her gravely. "All these people that were your forebears and mine are gone now, with scarcely any trace left behind them. There are only you and I left and I——"

"Do not say it," she said hurriedly. "Do not even think it. You haven't tried Colorado or Arizona. Why don't you?"

"I have not time enough, my little kinswoman. And now, because my time is so short, I'll go on to Win's house. He must go to the courthouse for me and he must cash my check and send for Valentine and a dozen other things."

"Will you go back in his car?"

"Oh, I think not. These are paths full of old memories for me. Who knows when I shall see them again? I'll take it slowly; it is a real pleasure to me."

She watched him walk languidly toward the house, his shoulders slightly stooping, his head bent a little. She sat down on the stile. Maybe Steffin would have sense enough to make him go back in his car, but if he didn't, she'd wait a bit.

She leaned back against the step above her with closed eyes. The sun was warm and she was very tired. Perhaps she slept, dreaming of that young Linda Paget married to her father so many years ago. When she wakened, or at least when she opened her eyes, she found Doctor Lansell sitting before her on the pine needles, his back against a tree.

"May I ask you," said the doctor, "if you fell asleep on my stile by accident? I came in from a country call I had to make and I saw a woman's figure draped over my stile. I thought you had fainted, or something, so I grabbed my bag and my bottles and my hypodermic and came flying down, only to find you peacefully sleeping."

She laughed.

"I'm waiting here for Mr. Lindan. He walked over to see Mr. Steffin and he intends to walk back. He looks very ill, Doctor Lansell; I couldn't bear the thought of his walking back alone; it isn't safe."

"It isn't safe for him to come here at all."

He turned swiftly about as a footstep dragged on the path.

"Why, there's Fergus!" The husky voice softened. "Fergus, I have just heard of some of the things you have done for Valentine——"

Lansell made no answer. His long surgeon's fingers reached out swiftly to the other man's wrist while he pushed him down on the steps. Then his hand crept under Lindan's loose coat to his heart and stayed there.

"Not another step do you take this day, Ned Lindan. Miss MacGrath, will you sit here? Ned, put your head on her knee for a moment; only a

moment. It's flat on the ground for you. Now don't talk; just a second."

But Lindan did not move. The panting breath grew sharper; eased a little; and then he turned his head. The shine had gone from his eyes; they were wells of gray depth and they looked out at something the others did not see.

"May I use your portfolio, Linda?" Lindan whispered after a moment. "No, Fergus, don't hold me back. Keep me steady. The Thing is here; there is nothing you can do. I've known it all day. I've known it longer. In God's name, keep me steady until I get this written. If I go out before it is done, I shall not rest even over there. I should have done it in Win's library, but I wanted so to speak to Valentine first. I was on my way there. Catch Win before he leaves for the courthouse; call him."

Lansell hesitated, his own face blanching as he reached for his hypodermic needle. But Linda did not hesitate; some swift awareness surged through her. She gave him but one look as he sat propped against the top step of the stile, clutching at the step as those do who hold themselves from fainting. She laid her portfolio open on his lap, sweeping her letter to her father to the ground. She took the fountain pen from the little strap that held it and placed it in his hand and unfolded the letter paper. He began to write, his hands clutching paper and pen as they had clutched the steps. Linda fled up the lawn towards Steffin's porch.

He was not there. Linda did not wait to ring. She flung open the door and her voice rang out in the hall, calling his name again and again. He came hurrying down the stairs.

"At the stile," she gasped. "Mr. Lindan is ill. Hurry!"

A servant came running into the hall. "Will you call Mrs. Lansell's house by telephone and ask Miss Brinsley to come down to the stile? Tell her it is terribly important. Please, *not Mrs. Lansell*; see if you can't get Miss Brinsley herself."

She ran down the walk after Steffin. Lansell, fingers on Lindan's pulse, was reading from the paper in the portfolio: ". . . subject to a lease, terminating July 1, 1924, held on such lands, by the Consolidated Gas Company of Virginia. I appoint as executors without bond, George MacGrath and Westwin Steffin."

"Ned," said Steffin, "you must announce it as your last will and testament. See, you must sign it in our presence, that way, yes, and we must sign in your presence and in the presence of each other."

The man on the steps took a long breath, steadied the hand that still clenched the pen and wrote, Edward Paget Lindan.

"Quick," he breathed, "will you two sign, at my request? I declare it to be my last will and I have signed it in your presence."

Lansell was writing while Lindan spoke. He handed the pen to Steffin. As Steffin's name crossed the paper, Lansell lifted Lindan to the ground.

"Keep still," Lansell ordered. "Put your head here. I am giving you another hypodermic. Keep still. Don't talk, Ned."

"It's no use, Fergus. Linda—Linda Paget—I wanted so much to tell you all my plans; your father and I have formed them together. But Win will tell you all that I cannot. I can see you standing on the porch where my mother used to stand, with the sunshine about you—but I must not tell you all I see, save that I see you fulfilling my hopes and plans—" His voice died.

"They shall be my hopes and my plans," said Linda, "and it shall be as if you were there to see them grow in service and in strength."

"Yes,—it was meant to be so—it is the way, you know." A gust of coughing racked him and he raised his head on his elbow. Then in his gray face faint color flamed. For down the path came a hurrying figure. "It is Valentine. I thought she must come. Valentine!"

She reached him with incredible swiftness, and as she knelt beside him and her arms crept under him, the others moved back a little. The coughing had stopped and he lay spent in her arms.

She bent and kissed him. A faint smile came through the whitening flesh like the lamp of the spirit flickering.

"Ah, Valentine, if I had married you before I went to fight, it would not be this way. Or if I had come back strong and well for only a little while! But all the while I have loved you; I have loved you all my life; from the time when you were a little girl and we played in your orchard of white blossoms. There will be no time in all the years to come, wherever I live, or wherever I learn, that love for you will not be part of both."

"Ned, Ned. I cannot do without you."

"You can do without me now. It isn't for so very long. You can do all the things you have wanted to do, the things that will hold us together, no matter if you are here and I am—over there."

Lansell came closer and once more his fingers rested on Lindan's wrist. Only for a second and then he laid the hand gently down on Valentine's. He looked about at the waving pines and the blue sea and then back to where the halting voice was whispering something—just the arms of the woman he loved, just the promise of his work, well begun, to be carried on by those he cared for; just the shining laurel and the wind on the water.

The gate swung softly, so softly only he among them saw its moving rhythm. For one long quiet moment it stayed open. Slowly, slowly it swung back, the gate of love that life walls up; the gate that love can go through only when it has been opened.

CHAPTER XXI

On the terrace with its gay awnings the sun shone as brightly when Linda came back to it alone as it shone when she had set forth. Gay little groups of color were splashed over the green-and-blue background, and as she heard the flowing voices it came to her that these bits of color were people and that they were having a pleasant hour together. She passed her hand over her eyes, trying to make it seem more real. This was the same terrace she had left so short a time ago. On these steps Lindan had stood with the sun glistening on his hair and in his shining eyes—Lindan, so strong for all his weakness that Shelburn could do little against his planning. He had been thought, this Lindan, thought stripped of flesh, directed by will; kinetic; power in motion. She caught herself with a little gasp. Where was this power now? What was it doing while the body it had directed so short a time ago lay so quietly in Westwin Steffin's library?

She looked about for Shelburn or for Ollie Knox, but they were not there. For a moment she paused before the stone seat among the laurels while she forced back her tears.

Perhaps there was something about her as she crossed the terrace that arrested attention, for the careless talk stilled. Linda paused again to look for Shelburn at the tea table, and in the silence the people before her became more real.

"Will you have tea, Miss MacGrath?" said Julie.

"No, thank you, I am looking for Mr. Shelburn." Her voice, with its hint of tears, created another space of silence.

"He went over to the courthouse by motor, with Mr. Knox, but I think he has returned. Perhaps you will find him in his study," said Julie. She watched her a second, then she rose. "Is there anything I can do?"

"No, I think not. Mr. Lindan died quite suddenly a half-hour ago."

"Died! Where? Why, Bertha started home to hunt for him only a few minutes ago."

Linda stood still a moment, then she moved into the dim hall with relief. Gropingly she found her way to Shelburn's study and knocked. Behind its closed doors was the sound of voices in argument.

The door was opened by Knox and Shelburn swung about in his desk chair and looked at Linda curiously.

"You want me?" he asked.

She shook her head wearily. "No. Mr. Lindan died suddenly a half-hour ago."

Nothing moved in the room. The two men stared blankly at her; then Knox closed the door behind her.

"Come in," said Shelburn slowly. "Where is he?"

"He is at Mr. Steffin's."

"Does anybody else know he is dead?"

She looked at him in surprise. "Why, of course."

"Who?"

Linda frowned, trying to remember. "Doctor Lansell and Mr. Steffin and Miss Brinsley and I were with him."

"Steffin does not want him brought here?"

"I do not know. I should think not."

"And Lansell will give the certificate, doubtless. It is not a matter for the coroner?"

She made no answer. The silence became weighty.

Shelburn moistened his lips. "I should like the news of his death kept quiet, if only for an hour or two. My guests will many of them be gone by to-night. And since he is at Steffin's, there is no need to distress them."

"I told your guests as I came in." Linda's voice held no hint of tears now.

"Ah!" His eyes, a little bloodshot, rested on her with enmity. "That was unfortunate. Did it not occur to you that it was a needless thing to do among a party of uninterested people?"

She drew back. "This is a needless death. You need not have brought this man here and you know it. You have killed him for your greed's sake. You do well to fear a coroner's inquiry."

His look at her steadied. "I fear nothing."

"You best know what you fear."

"This has been an ordeal for you and you are unsettled. I realize it. Shall I not send a maid with you and will you perhaps lie down?" His voice was soothing. "Of course, I know that such things as coroners' inquiries are but names to you; you do not realize how what you say sounds, or rather how it might sound among the servants."

"Names! Why, I have been a police court reporter. Be quite sure I know what a coroner's inquiry means and how to testify at one."

His face flamed. "God! The man was your lover then."

"He was my kinsman."

For a moment the silence in the room seemed unbreakable. Shelburn stepped back to his desk. He turned to Knox.

"Many of these people will be leaving and you will have to attend to it. As soon as they are gone, I shall have to leave, myself. No, I shall not take you; you will be needed here. I am merely going to Virginia. Wait a moment, Knox; call the maid to help Miss MacGrath with her luggage. Then come back, for there are one or two papers here I want you to attend to. After that I do not wish to be disturbed. Good-by, Miss MacGrath."

Linda stood out in the hall a moment, trying to think what she ought to do. Apparently she was dismissed from Oliver Shelburn's house and though she ought to know what to do, she didn't, because the house was several miles from the railroad station and she had a trunk and a suitcase and no car with which to get them to the station.

As she hesitated, she heard Shelburn's voice telephoning from his study. The voice had a note of sharpness in it that carried.

"MacGrath, Lindan died an hour ago. I want the best engineer we have to meet me at Lindanburg to-morrow morning at eleven. I want to see about the lay of that land on the extreme west of the Lindan property; no, not the old Lindan place, but the tract that adjoins it that we leased from Lindan several years ago. Well, you can come if you like; you've been all over this property recently. But get me Grosset or somebody as good as he is, and have him catch the night train. I'll talk to him on the train. Don't fail me; I'm in a hurry."

Linda moved down the hall to meet Knox, who was returning with the maid.

"Linda," said Ollie unhappily, "I have ordered a car for you and there are two trains, the five-thirty and the seven. Most of these people will be going

on them, so you'll have company. Wait a minute. There is Doctor Lansell. Doctor, Mr. Shelburn is engaged now over the long-distance 'phone."

The doctor nodded. "You will do, Knox. I have come for Lindan's traveling bag."

"I will get it, Doctor. I think it is in Mr. Shelburn's study."

The Doctor turned to Linda. "We are going to take him home, Miss MacGrath, to Virginia, and we are going to bury him from his own house, beside his own people. We thought you would wish to go along."

"I do wish to, Doctor. Do you think I can?"

"Can you not go with us to-morrow morning? You will be going to your own home, you know. It is now your home."

"My home!"

"I forgot, you were not there while Lindan was writing that part of his will. He has left all his property to you. Steffin and I are your executors." The girl clasped her hands.

"Oh, it is only left to me in trust, is it not? He had very definite ideas that he wanted carried out."

"He had about the larger part of the property. But the house and its immediate grounds he wants left intact for you and your father to live in as long as you will. Some of these directions are with your father and some of them are with Steffin. We will probate the will at Lindanburg when we get there. Shall we call for you here to-morrow morning?"

"Mr. Shelburn has just asked me to leave. You must forgive my hesitancy, but I haven't much money and I am employed by my uncle. Perhaps if I go back to the city to-night I can join you to-morrow morning at the station."

He frowned. "Shelburn has asked you to leave—what do you mean?"

"He got angry over my telling his guests of this death."

Lansell straightened himself and took a worn traveling bag from Ollie Knox's hand.

"Miss MacGrath," he said, "will you come to my house? You can then start with us in the morning. You can telephone your uncle from there."

Out in the automobile Lansell said, "As soon as this will is probated, we will ask the judge to give you an allowance to cover the period between the

probating of the will and your taking possession of the inheritance. In the meantime, as your executor, I can advance you enough to cover your immediate needs. The property is valuable." He looked at Linda anxiously. "I hope you will take the most expert advice you can get if you lease to the gas company; a lease should be made on new estimates of the value. If there should be oil beneath the gas, you must own and control it yourself. Your father will, of course, give you most competent advice, but he should not be allowed to leave Saranac for a month or two. But you will, I know, keep in constant communication with him, will you not?"

"Oh, surely, and with you too, Doctor Lansell, if you will let me. You will know from whom I ought to take advice."

"What I do not know, Steffin will. He is competent, and he is a lawyer and Ned's best friend."

She had a faint sense of shock as she found herself repudiating the idea that Steffin was Ned Lindan's best friend, and the sense increased when Lansell stopped the car at Steffin's door and asked her if she wished to go in for a moment.

She went into the hall chilled and anxious. Well, Steffin could marry this girl now. Perhaps he had only been waiting to do that. And yet— The man who opened his library door for herself and Lansell was no man released by death to love; but a tired man worn and absorbed. He stood outside in the hall after he had opened the door and if his dimmed eyes saw the woman kneeling before the shrouded figure, it was with no more recognition than that given to irreparable grief.

But to Linda there was something in Valentine Brinsley's face as she raised it that held her. It was not that it was as white from lips to brow as the one she had been kneeling before. It was that other touch of death that was in it; the death of the will to live. There was no will to live in these tear-dried eyes, no wish even to breathe on the drawn lips.

Lansell had given her a look and then gone away. He came back with a glass.

"Valentine, drink this."

She shook her head and his hand fell on hers and moved a little to her wrist.

"Valentine," he said gently, "there is so much for you to do. You cannot fail him now when he most needs you."

"Needs me," she murmured.

"Valentine, the thing he most wanted to do lies undone. He has planned every little detail of it; just what is to be done and how, and there are only us to put it through."

She steadied herself against the wall. In the white face the effort to think was a painful thing to see. "He planned for me only the chance for freedom. There is nothing in these other plans he meant me to do."

Lansell looked down at the cloaked figure. "There is no freedom, Valentine."

"There will be for me."

He stirred. He looked out the door at Steffin and at Linda, who had withdrawn a little, then he looked her straight in the eyes.

"Wait," he said.

"Wait!" Her voice vibrated on some note that wrung the heart. "You said wait to me six months ago. I might have been there near him, but you said he would not get well as soon, that I must give him this chance, and I waited; I waited here in your house while the man I loved was dying. I waited all these last days of his life, away from him, when I might have seen him every day; and see what I have."

Her hands fell limply to her sides. "Oh, no," she whispered, "I am done with waiting."

Lansell took one of the limp hands in his and put the glass in it. "I want you to drink this, Valentine, and I want you to sleep. I want you to sleep as long as you can; because you have not done with waiting. You have only begun. You have given to your love the very best you had; your strength, your patience, your work—every hour of your work was done for him. But it isn't over now; it has just begun. You can sleep here, if you want to; over there on that couch, but there are many things before you, and I want you able to face them."

"It doesn't matter," she said dully. "I will sleep if you like. It will not change anything." She drank the liquid in the glass.

Lansell went to Steffin at the door. "Look after her, Win, until I come back. I'm taking Miss MacGrath to my house. Don't leave Valentine until she is sleeping."

"Oh," said Linda, in the automobile, "I could only think of what Mrs. Gazann said that night you came to our house on the way to the opera."

The doctor looked back at the house. "What did she say?"

"That she had had girls turn on the gas jet without lighting it in her house, when they had such a look in their faces. And that was quite a little while ago, Doctor."

"I know. I wish she could have told me; I did not dream it was Lindan. I thought it was another man until a few months ago. You see, she thought they might be married so that she could live at Saranac with him, but he wouldn't. And then she wanted to live at Saranac anyhow, so that she might be near him."

"I think she should have done that."

"There was the faint chance that Lindan might get well enough to go West, when she could have gone with him. That was what I hoped for and I begged her to wait."

"I think she should have gone to him," repeated Linda, as they got out of the car at Lansell's door. "Would none of you help her? Only a little money? Could she not have asked it of you? You can repay money, but there is nothing to do when life is gone."

"You see, we did not know. She asked one man for money. It was a pity; she asked the wrong one, and after that there was no chance for the rest of us who might have helped her."

He gave Linda's bag to a maid.

"Marie, where is Mrs. Lansell?"

"She left the house before luncheon, Doctor Lansell. I do not know where she went, except that she took the one-thirty train for the city. She left no directions about being met when she came back."

"Very well; will you see that Miss MacGrath is comfortable. She's staying over night and going to Virginia with our party to-morrow morning. Before you go upstairs, Marie, call Mr. Shelburn on the telephone. I think, Miss Linda, you had better let them know in Shelburn's house that you are here; your uncle may telephone. If he doesn't you should try and get him and advise him of your plans, don't you think?"

"Doctor Lansell," said the maid, returning, "Mr. Knox is on the line; Mr. Shelburn is not there; he left for the city only five minutes ago."

"Knox," said Lansell over the 'phone, "I want Miss MacGrath's trunk left at the station for our special car. We have been given a car to make the trip to Lindanburg. It will be on the siding in time for the nine-thirty tomorrow morning. And I want Mr. MacGrath switched here, if he calls his niece. She is staying here over night. Do you expect Shelburn home tonight?"

"No, Doctor Lansell. He is on his way to Virginia himself. He has driven to town because his guests all cluttered around him so with inquiries about Lindan's death he couldn't get his work done."

CHAPTER XXII

The lady who rang Sandy MacGrath's doorbell at dusk that afternoon waited with deep impatience. She rang again and then she sent a quick glance up and down the street.

"I might have known," she said petulantly, "that there'd be something wrong at this end of the line; it went so well at my end—Shelly and Julie tied up at the same house party with the guardian niece, and Valentine half-witted because her lover had arrived from Saranac." She kept her finger on the doorbell.

And presently the door was opened by a large Irish woman who watched her come inside with a tolerably shrewd glint of bright gray eyes.

"No, ma'am, Gaze had to go to Himself's office with something he wanted from the house, and Gaze hasn't come back at all, so I didn't hear the bell. It's my belief, ma'am, Gaze is taking advantage of the situation, Miss MacGrath being away and Himself not comin' home for dinner."

"Well, I'm not calling on Gaze," said the lady with annoyance. "Are you sure Mr. MacGrath is not coming home for dinner?"

"No, ma'am. I'm sure of nothin' at all. Dinner is here for him if he comes. And 'tis Gaze who should have told me for certain. 'Tis his business to do it, ma'am, that I may know what to cook. But Gaze wants to eat what is cooked for his betters, and he thinks if he tells me I'll cut down on the dinner. Which I would, ma'am, my hours bein' too long anyhow and gluttony bein' one of the seven deadly sins."

From the lady's gold mesh bag came a crisp bill deftly slid into the Irish woman's hand.

"I want to wait for Mr. MacGrath and perhaps if I wait long enough I shall be hungry for your dinner; I have eaten your dinners before."

Nora made a courageous move. She used the lady's name.

"Sure an' ye have, Mrs. Lansell. May I be bold to suggest that the housemaid is takin' her time off while Miss MacGrath is away and so with Gaze gone too, ye will not mind me waitin' on you."

"I shall prefer it."

" 'Tis quieter with no one about. If ye are to be here for dinner, ma'am, I will be leavin' you to find your way about. If Gaze comes back, ma'am, I will be sendin' him to you."

Bertha moved upstairs to the library. It was no use to telephone the office; it was almost six now; but she did try MacGrath's club. Then she sat down at his desk to consider.

MacGrath hated to dine in restaurants where there was nothing he wished to drink. He would come home to dinner unless he had some engagement, and he was unlikely to have that because he had planned to spend these days at Shelburn's house. She had not started on her long journey without finding out that he was not expected at Shelburn's for dinner. She had telephoned Ollie Knox in the morning and he had said that MacGrath had business that was keeping him in town. It had been that, coupled with the information that Miss MacGrath was not leaving until the next day, that had sent her to town herself in search of the explanation long overdue and so cleverly avoided by Sandy. He could not very well put her out of his own house and he would not be likely to go away from the house with her in it. The opportunity had seemed designed for her, and she did not doubt the design until she had waited in vain a half hour.

Sitting at Sandy's desk, Bertha reviled the fate that had been dogging her with small maladjustments like this for so long.

"I will wait until after dinner for him. I can't dine alone in the city and I can't get anybody on such short notice, and besides, I've paid Nora well for my dinner. But if he isn't here by that time, I'll leave him a note."

She looked about for paper and found the desk drawers locked. She turned to the typewriter table where the drawers did not lock and extracted a sheet of paper.

"Better than my own handwriting," she said, "if I am to leave it on the desk."

She inserted the sheet of paper and began to pick out her letters with one finger of each hand. Being unskilled, it required more concentration than she counted on and she did not stop until the doorbell, being rung as she had rung it, impatiently and often, arrested her. Sandy had evidently expected Gaze to be there to open the door. She hastily opened her vanity box and scanned her face with a malicious smile at herself because Sandy was waiting at his own door as she had been kept waiting. She knew by the argumentative sound of Nora's voice downstairs that there would be trouble for both Nora and Gaze.

She drew her useless note from the typewriter and tucked it in her pocket. Then she stood back a little, her heart beating faster. It was one thing to come to dinner by invitation and quite another to be there uninvited. Sandy might be going out again or he might be annoyed. It was an old risk to her, but rarely taken in vain; so she drew her breath a little sharply and stood very still behind the bookshelves until the step on the stair had passed the threshold. When she came out it was Oliver Shelburn whom she confronted.

He stared blankly at her and she thought that his face flushed; she was sure that anger flooded it.

"What are you doing here?" he said curtly. "MacGrath is out of the city."

"That might be the reason I am here."

Shelburn hesitated; it is difficult to order a woman out of a house not your own; but Shelburn's difficulty lay in the fear that if he ordered Bertha to go she wouldn't do it.

"Well, you'd better go," he said. "I don't think you came here because Sandy was away. He won't be back for several days. You're not going to wait that long, are you?"

She observed him shrewdly. "You are evidently in a hurry; and you are excited; and you have come to a house where the servants all seem to have been given errands elsewhere, and since you know Sandy is out of town and you don't expect him back for several days, I don't suppose you are here to see him."

A faint oath escaped Shelburn.

"I think you've come to meet somebody—why, Valentine, of course! She went to your house at eleven and came home so weepy she could not do my letters. And then I left for town. Of course it was the psychological moment. Valentine and you here for dinner. You never did mind using your friends. Did you send Sandy away purposely and how did you persuade Valentine to leave Ned Lindan?"

"By gad, you're corrupt to the bone. Now you get out of here."

"I will not. I'm here to protect Valentine. She's a young girl of too little experience to manage your sort."

"After being your secretary for six months? Has she anything to learn?"

Perhaps because it had a touch of truth, the taunt stung. Bertha's face flushed.

"No matter what she's learned, it's all theory and you know it. I'll stay."

Voice, gesture, expression were beyond the man's endurance.

"You will not," he said huskily.

"Well, we'll see. I've warned her against you a hundred times. I've told her you aren't thinking of marrying her." Bertha came closer. "I knew you had something to do with her disappearance that week. I knew she wasn't in Virginia all that time. I heard her tell you at that Washington's Birthday dance that she needed money, and I heard your answer. Fergus heard it too."

He flung out one heavy hand and grasped her arm. With the other he took her coat from the back of the desk chair.

"You go out of this place now." His hand tightened on her arm and she found herself going down the stairs at his side. She wrenched herself free with a sudden twist that swept an unbearable pain through her shoulder.

"You brute, you've broken my collar bone. Sandy will make you account for this."

As he opened the door, he gave a short laugh. "Not Fergus, I suppose! Sandy won't care; he doesn't want you here and you know it."

He released her in the vestibule and she heard the lock turn. Slowly, with infinite pain, she crept into her coat.

"But there is no train home until ten," she said. "If it is Valentine who is coming and if she has taken advantage of my absence, she loses her job. But it looks to me as if there were something more important about it than a girl or he wouldn't have been so angry."

But either she must stand there and wait to see if Valentine came, an unthinkable thing, or she must go home to find out what Valentine was doing. She looked up and down the street for a cab and, finding none, her eyes came to rest on Shelburn's car at the curb.

"Just a little luck," she pleaded of the fate she had been reviling a half-hour ago. "Maybe he was in too much of a hurry to take his key."

She stole to the car. It was unlocked. She stumbled over a heavy black case on the floor and cried out against the pain of her arm.

"My left arm; I can drive if I take the empty streets to the ferry."

It was not yet seven o'clock and this car rode like the wind. She had ridden in it before; she might yet get home in time to intercept Valentine if she planned to come in on the theater train. She might even get home in time for her own dinner.

In Fergus Lansell's grave face as he held her chair for her at the table, Linda thought she detected added anxiety when Marie said Mrs. Lansell had just telephoned that she was motoring from town and expected to be home soon, but the doctor was not to wait for dinner.

"Valentine is still sleeping," said Lansell and fell into silence.

Linda thought about the journey they were to make to-morrow and the home that was now hers; she who had never had a home. After a while the doctor began to talk to her quietly of their regiment in Belgium, where there were but two American divisions; of Steffin and of Ned Lindan the day he was made captain.

"Doctor Lansell," said Marie. "Mrs. Lansell has driven into the garage."

The doctor rose. "I think Bertha left before there was any chance for her to learn about Ned."

Through the hall came a voice as querulous as a child's. "Be careful of my coat. I have hurt my arm. Miss Brinsley not here? When did she leave the house?"

"A few minutes after you left, madame."

"That settles that. Oh, Fergus, give me coffee, will you? I am sick with the pain of my arm. I thought it was only a wrench, but I think something's broken. I had an automobile accident."

Lansell drew her into the dining room and Marie filled a cup for her. She looked over it at Linda in amazement.

"Miss MacGrath is staying over night, Bertha, because all of Shelburn's guests have left and she is going with us to Virginia to-morrow."

Bertha drank the coffee thirstily. "What is everybody going to Virginia for?"

"Ned Lindan died suddenly at two this afternoon. We are going there to bury him."

Bertha put her cup down slowly. "Ned Lindan—dead! Does Valentine know it? She left here, Marie says, around lunch time."

"Only to go to Steffin's, where he is."

Bertha looked down at her left hand that was swollen. "Does your uncle know, Miss MacGrath, that you are going to Virginia?"

"No, Mrs. Lansell. Mr. Knox says he left for Virginia himself at noon to-day."

Lansell lifted his wife's hand in his surgeon's fingers and watched her while he lowered it slowly.

"How did you do it, Bertha?"

"I wrenched it, turning suddenly out of the way of a brute I think now was drunk."

He made no answer but he looked in her face for a moment and not at her arm. Perhaps those who heal must look for the signs in the human face with swifter vision than most other men and women use.

"If you will take your dress off, Bertha, I will make you more comfortable. I think your shoulder blade is dislocated."

Bertha rose from the table. "I suppose you want me in your study. Bring me something to eat, Marie, in my room. I'll have it when the doctor is through with me. Good night, Miss MacGrath."

"Miss MacGrath," said Lansell, "breakfast will be given you to-morrow at seven and we will leave from Steffin's for the station at eight. If there should be anything we can do for you, let us know, won't you?"

He took his wife's right arm and they went through the door. And after awhile Linda went into the drawing-room and stood there, looking across the lawn at the dim lights in Steffin's house. A wreath of mountain laurel hung on the door. She wondered if it might not be blooming in Virginia, this laurel. And where he was now, could Lindan see these two who were watching over him to-night together?

There was something here she could not grasp. She had the feeling that the Valentine who was watching with Steffin to-night was not the same Valentine who had peered from Mrs. Gazann's window, waiting for a man who did not come. It was as if some portion of Linda's brain were struggling to signal some other portion. Was this a different woman or was she still the same—a woman who could love a man so deeply that there seemed nothing left to her when he had died and who yet could go on this long journey to meet another man? Was she a woman of whom such a thing could be believed? Yet Linda had heard her telephoning to this other man. And she

had heard Steffin talking with her father. Then sharply came the question that must inevitably follow; Was Steffin a man of whom this thing could be believed?

She drew behind the curtain as she heard Doctor Lansell's step in the hall, not wishing to be a further burden on him.

He paused at the front door in deep thought; then he went outside, walked slowly back to the garage and stood for some seconds before the car in which his wife had arrived. Then he walked about it.

Evidently he expected to find no marks on it, for he did not examine the outside closely. What he did was to open the door and look at the wheel carefully. Below it on the floor was a piece of typewritten paper that had fluttered open from its foldings. He got inside the car, lifted the paper and read it twice. Then he folded it carefully and put it in his pocket.

As he got out, he stumbled over a heavy little black case that flew open as it turned over. He lifted it from the floor to close it. It was a traveling typewriter.

He stood some minutes puzzling over it. Every physician spends hours fitting together the jagged edges of events, and on his ability to do it correctly often depends human life itself. This man was a surgeon who had won his experience on many fields. Yet as he stood there facing Shelburn's car, with a typed note to Sandy MacGrath in his pocket and a small traveling typewriter in his hand, he was totally unable to fit the edges of the event together.

He carried the little black case into his study and locked it up.

"I will give myself time to turn it about in my brain. There are bruised finger marks on Bertha's arm and she has not cared to say how she got them. There is Shelburn's car in my garage, and I think this is Knox's typewriter. Some piece of the puzzle is missing. But I think I shall find it."

CHAPTER XXIII

Virginia in May. Linda, whose forbears had helped to settle Virginia, whose grandfathers had ridden over its soft hills and through its mountain passes, looked out of the windows of her great-grandfather's house, now so miraculously her own, and did not wonder that she loved everything she saw.

From that house Edward Paget Lindan had been buried that day; and all the country had come to honor him. He was buried on a high hill where all his family had been buried since the days of the Old Dominion.

What it was to be the last Lindan of Virginia had come home poignantly to the girl, from the moment they had arrived and found the station filled with bareheaded men, and women with tears in their eyes.

This was her mother's country. Over it her mother had ridden, one of the best horsewomen in the county, a girl as young as Linda now was. Her mother had come to this house, where her daughter now stood, for many a dinner. The long drawing-room, with its crystal chandeliers and its carved furniture brought from Italy by one of the Lindans who had made the grand tour as his English antecedents made it, just after he finished college, had been the scene of many a ball where her mother had waltzed and schottisched. Her engagement to George MacGrath had been toasted in the dining room across the hall where hung the old portraits of Lindans in the uniform of the first American army, and Pagets in judges' robes.

Linda looked about the delightful library with its bookcases extending to the ceiling and the little stepladder on wheels to reach the top shelves. The room, with its soft-toned paintings and its deep window recesses, was made for browsing among books, and the books were of every kind. Her father would love this library, and off of it was a study evidently designed for the master of the house. Her father's own books should be sent from Mrs. Gazann's for that room; her father's own desk and chairs. And he would doubtless want that for his office in the management of the new venture he had planned with Lindan. The vision of her father in this gracious place warmed her.

It was a lovely thing to have befallen him. No more lonely waiting on a bare veranda, worn by the thought of his uselessness; but work he could do, and do well, work that would use all his gifts of insight and kindness and

executive ability. And this work could be done in his own home, and it had the enlarging of the home idea running all through it. No man knew better what it meant to be without a home than her father.

This plan of Ned Lindan's had not sprung full-fledged from a mind without vision. It had come to him slowly, during quiet days of watchfulness in the midst of those who needed the help he had planned. First the study of the needs, then the working out of the plan, then the careful arrangement of living conditions to fit the needs; and then the contriving of a way to get the money to carry out the plan.

She left the window to answer the old-fashioned doorbell that sent a peal all over the whole house. It was Fergus Lansell.

"Miss Linda," he said abruptly, "I have left Valentine up there on the hill, making a coverlet of the laurel to tuck into that newly made grave. In an hour I have to go back to New York; I have patients I cannot leave longer."

"But I thought she was going with you, Doctor—back to your house on Long Island."

"She says she will never go back there again, and she has no place else to go. She says nothing else. She will not leave off what she is doing even to answer me, and I have become fearful of that moment when she does leave off doing it."

Unconsciously Linda put out her hand in protest. This girl was not her task; there were others to help her who had known her longer; others Valentine had never hurt. Nor was she penniless now. Lindan had provided against that.

The Doctor watched her gravely.

"But if she has no place to go," said Linda, "what will she do? She cannot stay there."

The girl's glance crept about the room; the gracious room, gift of one who had known this girl who had no place to go—known her better than anybody else. Through the window came a golden shaft of light from the sun setting over the purple hills. She could see it every night now, this setting sun. She could see it through her own window, and her father, who loved such things, could see it with her. She remembered when he had read to her, in Mrs. Gazann's shabby little room with the books on the walls and on the floor,

Over the hills and far away,
  Unto their utmost purple rim,
And deep into the dying day,
  The happy Princess followed him.

The little rhyme came so clearly to her that she was startled for a moment.

"Did you speak?" she said to the doctor.

"No," he answered gravely.

"I heard something——"

"Yes, what did you hear?"

She was silent, not knowing exactly what she had heard, or if she had heard it.

"It is because I'm so tired," she said.

"You did not sleep last night on the train and of course here in your new home there are a hundred things to keep you from resting."

"My new home! This is now mine." It was as if another part of her mind added without her will, "And the woman he loves is out there on the hill, homeless."

The doctor made no answer; but he did not take his eyes from her.

She waited a moment, then she said, "It would have been her home had he married her."

"It is still his work that is to be done here, by and by, after your father comes and all our plans are complete."

She paused in dismay. "You mean *she* should have a place in it?"

"I mean you will need help to carry out all these plans. You do not like her?"

"I do not know," said Linda, "but I do know that, whether I like her or not, she should come here. I will bring her here."

He moved to the door with her. "If she will not come with you, will you telephone me at the hotel, before the train comes in?"

"Yes—but—she will come, I think. I think that was what I heard."

He assented with a grave bend of the head.

The soft May dusk was falling as Linda climbed the hill where the Lindans and the Pagets were sleeping. Upon the newly made grave lay masses of mountain laurel and Valentine Brinsley was kneeling beside them, arranging them like a coverlet. She turned at Linda's footfall as if she were guarding one beloved from attack.

"I have come to take you home," said Linda softly.

"Home," said Valentine, and the word was desolate.

"Not home with me, but home with him. He is there. There was a moment when I am sure that if I had been a little closer to him I might have seen him. But maybe feeling is a finer vibration than seeing, for I felt him there. He waited so long for you—I thought I must come and get you. I do not know how it is with them over on that other side; maybe they cannot stay near us for a long time, but I think you ought to be there, not here."

In the still whiteness of Valentine's face something that might have been the shadow of color crept slowly. She put out a hand as if to thrust back the unwelcome tide of returning life and then quite slowly the hand turned as if it were clasping something. She looked away from the laurel and the grave at her feet and up to her hand, as it was held out before her, and on from that to Linda's face.

"You came here to tell me this? You felt it? You are not just telling me—just making it up?"

"I am not making it up. You will see what I mean. I beg you to come now; I cannot bear to wait."

Valentine bent over the coverlet of pink blossoms and pushed a twig or two under the newly turned earth, as a mother tucks in one who is sleeping.

"I will stay," she whispered; "he will not move, but he may want me."

"He is not there," said Linda, "and he is not asleep. He has wakened to the work he wanted most to do. And I think the work includes you and me and many others whom he wants to help. I think we can be his hands and feet. You can be more; you can do the things he thinks out and the things you help him think out. That was what he meant, was it not, when he told you death would not keep him from loving you? Doesn't love have to be expressed that way?"

"Expressed what way?" said the girl sharply.

"Oh, surely it takes every day of life itself to express it; it takes working together at something that is of use to life itself. Isn't that what he meant

when he said you could work together whether he lived or died? He left you his work to be done."

The girl bent her head into her hands that had fallen laxly over the laurel coverlet. Linda turned away and looked out at the purple hills. She had not dreamed as she climbed the hill that she would say this to Valentine. She had not dreamed that Valentine would rise as she now did and go with her without a backward look. She did not know why she now whispered to herself as she faced the hills:

And over the hills and far away,
  Unto their utmost purple rim,
And deep into the dying day,
  The happy Princess followed him.

Valentine stopped and passed her hand across her forehead.

"Why, he said that to me, here in this very place, on the day the grass had grown too high up here on the hill and I came with him to superintend the cutting of it, and he called it The Garden of the Sleeping Beauty. What made you say that?"

"I do not know," said Linda. "It would be strange, would it not, if you had been asleep, and if you were now being awakened and if you had to leave your garden of sleep and go with the one who had awakened you out over the hills."

The girl stood still for a long time. Then she lifted her eyes to the hills where the setting sun made a path of gold and she took her first step away from the Garden of Sleep into that new land which is the old.

CHAPTER XXIV

At eight o'clock Amanda brought fresh candles into the library and put them on the mantel. For four years Amanda had done this every night, though for four years there had been nobody in the house. For twenty years before this Amanda had put candles there for the master of the house. The library was always thought of as the master's room. The old colored woman stood still, looking at the candles. There were no sons of the house to need them now; the library was no longer the master's room. She gave the girl who stood before a portrait of a Lindan of long ago an oblique look.

"You'm pow'ful lonesome, Mis' Linda," said Amanda, with the liquid consolation that the voice of the colored race can make beautiful.

"I'm not so very lonely, Amanda. Every place I look there are some of the people who made this house lovely. There over the mantel is my grandfather and there at the other end of the room is my great-uncle."

The old woman moved restlessly. "Yas'm; they is all about and you favors 'em. I been here for long time now and I ain't been lonely. I done feels it keener now. There's hants in a house after a funeral. You can hear 'em, if you lissen. Mis' Val'ntine, she's lived hereabouts longer'n you have, Mis' Linda, and she can talk to 'em. I done hearn her talkin' while's you was on the gallery lettin' her go 'round by herself befo' dinner. An' she's out there on the gallery now, lissenin' to sumpin' mighty keen; she done hear sumpin'; she lissenin' like she does."

"I hope she does, Mandy."

The old woman shivered a little. "'Cose I knows what I knows. I knows Mas'r Ned ain't never looked at 'nother girl, 'ceptin' Mis' Val'ntine. But I'm pow'ful glad you here, Mis' Linda. She don' look right to me, Mis' Val'ntine. She ain't gwine to have any mind with her body, Mis' Linda, if she don't look out. She fin' hersel' all body or all mind."

"Listen, Mandy, we don't have to worry about that. Somebody who loves her will attend to that. When it gets to that place, he'll see to it that she has rest."

The old woman gave her a fearful look. "You mean Marse Ned, Mis' Linda?"

"I mean what you do, Mandy; only I mean it stronger."

The old woman leaned over the fire and gave it another poke.

"They was always like that, all the Lindans. Ole Marse, he died, and every time the wind blew you could hear him. I've stirred this here fire many a time when the wind whistled down this very chimley and I done hear him—plain as if he was here. But I ain't never heard that the Brinsleys was that way."

"Maybe you didn't know the Brinsleys as well, Mandy."

"Yas'm, I done know 'em all; Mis' Val'ntine an' Ole Mis', her mother, an' yor father an' mother. And they's all here."

"Not my father, Mandy."

The old woman drew the palms of her hands down over her apron and cast her shining eyes about the room.

"No'm, he ain't here like the others; but there's sumpin'—he's close to them and comin' closer. I can't just say."

"Mandy, you are tired out. Don't you think you ought to go to bed?"

"Yas'm. Yo' tired yo'self, Mis' Linda. I spec' you gwine to bed soon yurself. They's a bell cord in your room, Mis' Linda, and the bell rings in my room. Will yo' have your breakfas' in your room?"

"Yes, thank you, and this is all I want to-night. Why, there's the doorbell."

"Yo' all receivin' visitors, Mis' Linda?"

"Let's see who it is, Mandy. Come, I'll go with you."

"It's pow'ful dawk outside that door, Mis' Linda."

Linda drew back as Shelburn stood in the doorway.

"The drawing-room, Amanda," said Linda. "And if I need fresh logs for the fire, I will ring for you."

The old woman sent her an understanding look. "I done stay out here in dis hall, Miss Linda, effin you want me."

Shelburn stood on the hearth with the smoldering logs behind him and looked down at Linda, as she sat in the dark red hearth chair in silence. Some memory was asking for admission to her mind; somewhere she had seen Shelburn standing on some hearth, looking at her with the same predatory look. With a faint shock she realized that it was that first night she had seen him in her uncle's house, when he had thought she was some

stranger-woman waiting for Sandy MacGrath's favor. She remembered his voice during that encounter, with its under levity and its outer courtesy, and she remembered thinking that as housekeeper in her uncle's house, she would have to endure the voices of his guests, no matter what they expressed of disrespect to her.

But she did not have to endure this now. Seated quietly in the mellow old drawing-room, so restrained in color and atmosphere, so adapted to the uses of well-bred men and women, a new security came to Linda MacGrath. This place was hers; she was not an employee in it; it belonged to her. Its atmosphere of grace and courtesy to the guest who might come, of rest and repose to the host, would stay; it was a tangible thing. She was this host and before her was a guest. She was no pensioner in a strange house who must be amiable to a guest she had not invited. She was in the house of her fathers and she need receive only such guests as would obey her restraints and repay her courtesy with appreciation. Here were dignity and tradition—a protection against whatever was not fine.

From the look of those predatory eyes everything in the room guarded her. There was nothing there that time had not shown to be fitted for its use and to be in perfect taste. The little octagon table at her elbow, where Amanda had put the old silver coffee service, the rich tones of the Persian carpet, the soft colors of the Castle of Eze, in the dull gold frame over the mantle, the crystal chandelier like moonlight on ice, these things were the chosen surroundings of discriminating people of self-control and good taste.

Linda brought her eyes back to the sleek black head that blotted out the corner of the Castle of Eze.

"You had something you wished to speak to me about, Mr. Shelburn? Will you sit down?"

Something of assurance in the voice, something of serenity in the girl's face seemed to puzzle the man, and because it puzzled him it annoyed him.

"You are pleased with all this, are you not?" he said, looking about him an instant. "It is a pleasant background for russet beauty; a becoming garment for you, is it not?"

The faint twang of amused insolence in his voice stirred something within her and she rose abruptly. Vividly there came to her that moment in the fraternity house where those about her had looked at her, discrediting what she said—the moment of angered incredulity at their doubt of her; the sweeping wish to fight with her bare fists if need be. Once more Linda looked about the room, so distinguished, so dignified. Not with any such

lack of self-control had the women who had lived here answered men who offended them. Linda rang the bell.

"Amanda, will you take away the coffee. Mr. Shelburn is not staying and does not wish it."

Shelburn's eyes narrowed. "You did not offer it to me."

Linda made no reply, but she did not return Shelburn's look. Her eyes rested on the servant, and this denial in front of a servant must have sounded strange on that hearth, even to Shelburn, for he moistened his lips with his tongue.

As Amanda lifted the tray, she sent a shrewd glance at the figure on the hearth, and when she reached the hall door she paused a moment, reaching out to close it with a hand that obviously felt it was jeopardizing the safety of the silver tray in releasing its hold on it.

"You may leave the door open," said Linda; "the fire is a little too warm."

The old woman's bead-like eyes glittered a second. "Yas'm, Mis' Linda. I'se here in the hall, Mis' Linda; effin the fire needs feedin', I'll bring another log."

The heavy line of Shelburn's brows lowered over his eyes. He seemed to be readjusting his sight to an object that some accident of vision had blurred.

"It seems a shame," he said, "to let you get accustomed to all this when you'll have to give it up so soon."

He waited for her to ask some question, but she was silent, though she gave him concentrated attention. And this being new to him, he hesitated, again bringing his brows down over narrowing eyes.

"You are aware that Lindan sold me all of this—" He made an encircling gesture.

"All this?"

"All this property." He recognized a note of explanation in his voice and it annoyed him.

"No," she said briefly.

Again he waited for her to question him and again she did not. His annoyance deepened. There was something here he did not understand and

so could not have foreseen or provided for. Apparently he had to explain further.

"It was to complete the formalities of purchase that Lindan came to Long Island on the day——"

"The day he died," Linda filled in the space.

For a moment it seemed a very natural completion of an unfinished sentence. Then in the dead quiet of the room the simple sentence took on significance and Shelburn found himself looking about the room and out into the hall, listening to the wind in the pines that had risen since he entered the house. He hated pines. One might as well expect to hear dirges on every windy night if there were pines about the house. There were no pines around his house on the Sound.

"Mr. Shelburn," said Linda, "I was sitting on the bench below the terrace when you offered to buy this property and its owner refused you."

He stared at her, some curious closed chamber of his mind swept by a current of discernment. He found himself repeating what she had said that he might catch its unspoken meaning; a thing he never remembered having done before. And he looked again at the hall door, for this current stirred in this closed chamber of his mind old superstitions of a boyhood long forgotten; superstitions of the dead, who were near but whose speech could not be heard. A light step sounded in the hall and passed into the library and Shelburn found himself actually trying to see beyond the door with a curious feeling of dread.

He straightened his heavy shoulders and laughed. He turned back to Linda. She was but a young girl, of small experience and little knowledge, who sat in a house she could not hold, as if that possession which is said to be the nine points of the law had no need of the tenth. It was his long morning of inspection of wells and pipe lines, and his afternoon following Ned Lindan up the hill that had tired him so that he was a prey to these curious feelings. He would say what he had come to say, and go away to the sleep he greatly needed.

"A deed takes effect as soon as it is signed. I bought this property of Lindan a half-hour after his first refusal. He signed the deed and it was properly acknowledged. Yet it was quite right that Lindan should be buried from here and I have no objection to your staying in the house for a few days, if you choose. I came solely to extend this courtesy to you; to say to you that you are entirely welcome to the use of the house for the rest of the week. You are also welcome to any of the furniture in it—to all of it—if it

takes your fancy. Do not consider this as generosity on my part, because I have no liking for old things and no place in which to put them. And a sale of them would bring too trifling an amount to make it worth the trouble. I shall be glad if you want them; only they must be removed at once, because we shall begin to tear down the house as soon as the men who are sinking the new wells arrive."

She considered this in silence but with the same concentrated attention she had given him from the beginning. A log clanged from the andiron to the hearth, and almost before it touched the stones Amanda had come in. She laid another log upon the irons, waited a moment to see if it caught, and moved noiselessly out to the hall.

"You do not believe me?" said Shelburn.

"No," she said again, as she had said before.

It may have been the utter simplicity of the thing that held him; as a child's protest has a value beyond his ability to impose his will by strength. But Shelburn was puzzled. He had no wish to make a scene with Sandy MacGrath's niece, yet he saw no other course.

"It's a fight between us, then?"

"Would you call it that?"

"You mean you will just go as soon as it is convenient?"

"No."

The laconic monosyllable began to get on his nerves. "Gad! What do you mean?" he exploded.

"I mean I shall stay."

He made a movement toward her, and then he halted; for again that light footstep sounded in the hall.

"Stay, then," he said, with the flush in his face deepening. "Who am I to put a girl from my house who so unexpectedly wishes to stay with me in it?"

He reached into his pocket and drew a pipe from it. Over the flame of his match his eyes rested on her, vastly intrigued. He puffed a moment, then he said:

"You confront the situation with such ease, I gather it is not the first time you have been the unexpected but most welcome guest in a man's house."

She appeared to be studying him. Perhaps she was measuring this power of bulk and weight. Whatever it was that she was doing, it had the same effect on him that her laconic monosyllables had. Nothing in his experience with women covered the situation of one considering him in silent thought. This creature, so slight, so tired-looking, had no fear of him. Though she said so little, it was as apparent as unsaid things can be that she said little because it was not worth while to speak. Something primitive stirred in his mind.

"You must know how easy it would be to put you out."

She listened a moment to the step in the hall.

"Not so easy. What would happen if you took possession of my house by bodily bulk? You would be discredited in the whole country. Not a man in this Virginia that would not think of such weakness with contempt. And you are establishing all the ramifications of a big gas company through the State. Such contempt of you would hurt every stockholder in your company. The very workmen in your fields would look askance at you. You best know how weak your position in this house is, when you have to bully a girl to stay here."

He laid his pipe on the mantel with deliberation. He wondered how he had ever thought she was not beautiful. True, she was small and slight, but what pride was there! She presented material worth taking possession of. The possession of a proud woman had subtleties of pleasure the subservient woman could never provoke. She was the potential mate of a man of strength.

"Come," he said, and the voice held richness, "for all this fighting we have done since the first moment we met, we are closer to each other than you know; so close it blinds us. There is a reason for this thing between us. Why waste our strength quarreling; why not give to each other, instead of take? You do not wish to give up this place, yet it is mine. Why not join our strength?"

He paused as she drew away from him. "Why answer hurriedly? I am in no hurry. If you work with me and not against me, you will find I know how to stand by an ally. You shall live here, if you like. You have not the capital to sink gas wells. I have. And they will not hurt the appearance of the place. They are only pipes sunk into the ground, with an elbow and a gas meter on the surface. They are not like oil wells. You can go on with whatever you are planning, and I will go on with my plans, and we can be friends; why not? You will have money enough to do whatever you like——"

Then as he watched her face flame into greater beauty, the folly of argument where fire burned overtook him. He reached her side as she moved from him and his arms closed round her. He looked down at her and some faint coloring or curve brought between her face and his the face of Sandy MacGrath—Sandy who had reminded him that she was no Julie or Valentine, but a MacGrath, dowered and protected. He smiled.

"It is my wife I am asking you to be."

Once more that light step in the hall, restless now, walking up and down the hall; an uneven step. The man released her, watching the door.

"I am sorry," she answered gravely. "If you came here to ask me that, and I have mistaken all you said. I cannot marry you."

Again the darker color flushed his face. "Your blood runs smooth and cold; your very words run in smooth cool paragraphs."

Then he started; he must be tired indeed, for the door did nothing but swing open to Valentine Brinsley's figure—Valentine, with that strange look that, out in the hall, Amanda had fled from.

She stood still, looking at him. Then she said slowly, bitterly, "You! How can you bear to come into this house, you, who are an intruder here——"

"Why should I not be here? I have been his friend."

It was not her words he answered. It was that look in her face. He defended himself from it; he had to.

"You! You were never anybody's friend. Were you his friend when you had me go to Springfield to take new work you never meant to give me? Did you think he did not know where I had gone and why? You cannot hide from vision so sharpened."

"Why should he not have known? You wanted to do it. You could not stand Bertha; you wanted anything to get away; you were willing to take anything for more money——"

Her voice lowered to a whisper. "It was George MacGrath who saved me from that."

Linda gave a low cry. Her face was whiter than Valentine's.

He put his hands in his coat pockets and some old unforgotten anger ran like a current through him.

"Yes, and he lost his job for that little undertaking. Did you think you could do that to me—slip away, leaving me, with no word, to look the town over from hotel to railroad station? Do you think you can stay here now, in my house——"

"This is not your house. He would never have let you have this house, not to save himself from starvation."

"He has let me have it——" He stopped short.

For out in the hall came a long, low cry, a thing of pulsing protest. Amanda stood in the door.

"Mis' Linda, Mis' Linda, fo' the love of Gawd, Mas'r Ned, he comin' down the stairs."

Swift as a falcon Valentine sprang to the hall.

Slowly Shelburn bent his head to peer out of the door. Then he straightened up.

"You are mad, all of you," he said.

The old woman drew back close to Linda.

"Ain't you never hearn of these here Lindans, yassir, and the Pagets too? They all like this. Mas'r Ned, he buried this day; but Mas'r Ned, he ain't never stay out there on the hill, not this day, when all his friends come home with him." Her voice lowered ominously. "But he ain't come for pleasure."

Shelburn strode to the front door. The wind from the pines moaned wearily as he opened the door.

The old woman flung out her hands. "You hear!" she cried. "You hear!"

"It is time the house was torn down," said Shelburn sharply. "Next Monday! I give you until then."

The door closed on him. The old woman humped a shoulder. "He done got sumpin' to be 'fraid of, that man, Mis' Linda."

Her old, old eyes were scanning the girl's face as she talked, for some new exquisite thing was creeping into Linda's face; something that had long begged to live.

"Oh," whispered Linda, "all these days and weeks of doubt and faithlessness! How can I ever repay? How blind I have been. And all the while you must have known it, Ned Lindan. And if I had not gone for

Valentine and brought her back here this afternoon, I would still be blind. How quickly you have repaid me, and how richly."

Amanda looked hurriedly behind the girl and around her, for it might be Linda felt or saw what even she could not. Then she said:

"Yas, ma'am, they's that way, the Lindans. I lock up the house, Mis' Linda. Mr. Steffin done telephone not to 'sturb you now but he be here tomorrow mornin' at nine, to take you to the courthouse, Mis' Linda, ma'am."

CHAPTER XXV

Linda wakened to the sound of a wren chattering in a bough that touched her window. For a moment she lay still in surprise at the feeling that was flooding all her body. It was like sunshine, only it reached every little cell, and as her mind wakened this sunshine crept into the cells of her mind, filling it with warmth and light.

She sat up in bed and then she remembered. She did not have to weave her web of love with old threads raveled from another woman's misery. Here were lovely new threads, golden threads, silver threads, scarlet threads, from which she could weave a hero—a hero in silver armor with a golden helmet, a knight bearing a scarlet pennant and climbing the hill of his endeavor before all the world, not stealing through underground passages.

She tried to think if she had betrayed her misery to him. As she thought back she knew he had not suspected for one moment the thing that had been in her mind.

But these things she would examine to-morrow, calling her mind to account. It had been long since she had wakened with joy; long since merely being alive had been enough. To-day she was glad she was alive and she would let it go at that.

And there was Valentine. She would no longer have to endure Valentine's presence because of a debt to be paid to the man who loved Valentine. She might now look Valentine in the eyes, instead of looking away from her. She might try to make friends with Valentine, who had been as young and as poor and as desperate as she herself had been and who had tried to get the thing she wanted in the only way she seemed able to get it and who had been cheated.

Linda knew that had she been in Valentine's position she would have taken any chance, no matter how desperate.

Amanda brought her a tray with corn pones and wild strawberries and steaming coffee on it.

"Yas, Mis' Linda, Mis' Val'ntine, she done gone out. No'm, she ain't up on the hill. 'Pears like she got places she been with Mas'r Ned when they was chillun and she craved to seek them out. Mr. Steffin, Mis' Linda, he waitin' on the gallery downstairs."

"Goodness, Mandy, why didn't you say so?"

She sprang out of bed, a streak of light darting here and there; a pin thrust in her hair, a buckle clasped at her knee, a hat swept from the table and a swift run down the stairs.

"He done say not to 'sturb you, Mis' Linda," said Amanda at the top of the stairs.

But if Steffin wanted an undisturbed lady he was unfortunate, for the lady who came out of the long window to the gallery was so disturbed she could hardly speak; indeed, as she paused before him, she made no effort to speak. She looked up at him once and then she looked at everything else about her, at the trees and the birds and the flowers and even at the hills off on the horizon.

He watched her with a very straight look from his bright blue eyes and then he continued to look at her, for she did not wear a mask of a face this morning with hidden eyes and unmoved mouth. Her eyes were wells of loveliness, and her mouth was curving into something so rare, so sweet, he held fast to the balustrade to keep himself from coming closer. And she, seeing this, put out her hand and he had to let go to take it in both of his. And when he had taken it he could not choose but come closer to her.

"I don't know what has come upon you in this place," he said softly. "The very spirit of the spring, I think."

"I have come home," she whispered.

"Yes, and home is not empty for you. I was afraid last night it would be. I came out and walked up and down outside your window for a while, fearing for you."

She looked out to the hills, wondering that she had ever known fear, forgetting entirely what had happened the night before.

"Can we walk to the courthouse?" she said. "It is so lovely." She looked up at him shyly. "Is it not wonderful that I should be going with you to the place where so many records of my family are stored away—my mother's wedding record, my own birth, my grandfather's will—I never probated a will; I don't know in the least how it is done; for all my work as police court reporter."

He laughed a little. This new thing in her was mounting to his head. "You don't probate a will in the police court. Look, here's a hill to climb; we take that little path that cuts off a mile and we come out to a place where a

fairy has spread hundreds of little red roses—a fairy called Dorothy Perkins; and right down below this place is the village, with its spires and its pillared courthouse with more red roses on the lawn. And they are waiting for us at the courthouse—Judge Randolf, and Mr. Simmons, the clerk who helped issue your mother's wedding license. They are glad you are to live here; they asked me to tell you so."

The high columns of the courthouse rose to a triangular portico and on either side of the shallow stone steps were banks of Dorothy Perkins roses. In the room where the wills were probated the clerk gave her a red-lettered printed form, with a bow she thought could be duplicated no place save in Virginia.

The undersigned, the printed form read, next to kin of said decedent, resident of Virginia, hereby consent to the probate of said will of Edward Paget Lindan.

Above the names of Westwin Steffin and Fergus Lansell, executors, Linda wrote her name.

"Now," said Steffin, "we go down the hall to the other wing of the courthouse and record, in the big fat books there, the change of names that will show whoever cares to look that these acres that once were Ned's are now yours; and after that is done we will appeal to Judge Randolf for a suitable allowance for you, should you lease this property to the gas company or whatever you arrange to do with it. You see, inheritances are not distributed for some months after they are probated. This is to give time for all bills against the estate to be filed and paid. But I think there are no bills against your property and I think it can be put on a paying basis at once. The Consolidated Gas Company is ready to lease it, which will give you a definite amount of cash in hand. Your income will be from the wells sunk. You get a percentage of the proceeds from each well and the law requires the company to sink wells at once that you may realize on your lease. You see you have no pipe line at your disposal so it would do you no good to try to operate your own wells. You can drill them, if you do not care to lease and sell the Consolidated Gas Company your gas, but this expenditure and risk is unnecessary and unprofitable if you have the right kind of lease. As soon as the wells are drilled your income should be assured. This property is really keystone property; it is at the center of the arch of this gas belt. You will have no trouble with your lease."

Under the guidance of the clerk the heavy book of the deeds of the County of Lindan was put on the sloping counter and the leaves turned to

Lindan, Edward Paget. The clerk stopped a little abruptly. He peered down at the page; he ran his finger along the line.

"This has been transferred, Mr. Steffin, to book number three hundred and sixty-five. There is a sale recorded; will you wait a second."

He lifted another book to the counter and read, "'Warranty Deed transferring this property'—wait until I compare the record—yes—'to John Oliver Shelburn, June 1, 1924.'"

In the stillness of the room a fly droned wearily. Steffin looked at the book, read its inserted lines with care and turned sharply on the clerk.

"You have the original deed?"

"I can get it for you, Mr. Steffin; it has just been transcribed. Will you wait a moment?"

Steffin's brows were drawn closely over eyes whose color deepened and glowed. "There is something very curious here."

"Then that was what he meant," said Linda, "when he came to the house last night."

"He came to the house last night? For what?"

"I did not know until this moment. I thought it was some queer kind of bullying. I wondered for a moment or two if he were sober. He came to say that the house was his, but that I could stay in it for three or four days."

"Why did you not telephone me?"

"I had no time to telephone you; he was there and had to be answered. When I was a little girl and used to sometimes run into men at Mrs. Gazann's who were not quite sober, Father used to tell me never to answer a drunken man, so I just didn't answer him any more than I had to."

His face darkened. "And what happened?"

"Valentine came in and asked him how he dared to come into Ned Lindan's house. And in a little he went away."

"Why did you not tell me this when I came this morning?"

He was dumbfounded to see a gorgeous blush of color flame from neck to brow. The girl looked at the heavy book on the sloping counter and out the door at the tiled floor, and at the clerk coming with a folded paper in his hand that bore the red legend, "Know All Men By These Presents." Then she said:

"Oh, I didn't want to think of him this morning when you came."

Steffin did not look at the clerk. He did not even see the folded paper held out to him. He was staring down at that flood of color from neck to brow as if it had blinded him.

"This is the deed, Mr. Steffin," the clerk reminded him, and Steffin took the folded paper in his hand and brought himself back to it with a jerk—the printed form of a warranty deed signed by Edward Paget Lindan, acknowledged by Morris James, Notary of Nassau County, in the presence of John Oliver Knox. Steffin turned back to the first page. The land described was in two sections; the first section, ten acres that were not included in the property Linda MacGrath was applying for possession of; the second, the original Lindan estate.

Steffin read the two sections with utmost care, then he spoke to the clerk, pointing to the first section:

"Are you familiar enough with this country to tell me what these forty acres are?"

"They are the old Brinsley property, Mr. Steffin, forty acres adjoining the Lindan property on the south. Mr. Lindan bought it from Miss Brinsley after her mother died, six years ago. I can get you the deed for it, if you like."

"Not now, thank you. This second paragraph—this is the Lindan estate?"

"Yes, sir. Does it compare with your record?"

"Yes." Steffin reread the two paragraphs. Then he turned slowly to Linda. "There is something very curious here. Ned Lindan never sold all his property at eleven in the morning and at noon made accurate arrangements for its use as a Convalescent Home for Tuberculous Patients. At noon he transferred to Valentine a check for forty thousand dollars that he said he had received for property that was once hers and that she had sold him at a nominal price, not knowing its value. He could not take advantage of her ignorance and he was returning her the real value of the property, minus the three thousand dollars he had originally paid for it. He would not have gone to the trouble in the short time at his disposal to have fabricated a story of this kind. Nor would he have willed his property to you, dying, if he had no property to will. It was not only this three thousand dollars he willed to you, but his property—his estate."

Once more he examined the deed. Then he took Linda by the arm.

"There is some quick, hard work necessary here, Miss Linda. I must go back to Judge Randolf and file a suit of fraud. If I do not you cannot stay in your house comfortably. I will get an injunction, restraining Shelburn from occupancy of the place and permitting you to retain possession, until the matter is decided. You see, though I can file suit for cancellation of the deed because of fraud, I have to prove the fraud; and that is quite another matter. If you don't mind, I'll take you back to the house first, for I have much to do here."

She went with him along the shaded path they had taken an hour earlier.

"I myself," said Linda, "heard Ned Lindan say he would not sell one acre of the property his father left him, but that he would sell this corner of it that he had lately bought; and when he offered it to Mr. Shelburn for forty thousand dollars, Mr. Shelburn said he was being held up. Isn't that proof?"

"Only to us. He might have changed his mind."

"What will you do?"

"I will go back to Long Island and see Knox, who must have typed all the insertions on the printed form. I will interview every servant I can lay my hands on and everybody who spoke with Shelburn or saw him after this deed was drawn. You see the time was short between the signing of the deed and Ned's death. If the deed was altered after Ned left Shelburn's house, it was a forgery."

"You think there will be somebody who will know that it was altered?"

"I think that it was altered. Unless Shelburn typed the inserts himself, there will be somebody who will know that that second paragraph describing the Lindan estate was not there when Ned Lindan signed the deed. Shelburn is not a professional criminal; he's just a man who has done pretty much as he pleased all his life without bothering much who it hurt and how he got what he wanted. I imagine he has been so situated that he has never had to do anything criminal to get what he wanted—a little crooked may have been his limit. And then came the unlooked-for event. Not even a practised criminal can think of everything in the hurry usually associated with what he has to do."

She did not answer, moving at his side over a sun-flecked path of a hundred shades of green.

"I wish you had somebody else to stay with you besides Valentine," he said impatiently. "Is your father coming?"

"Next week. He wired yesterday. There is Susie Ryland, but she has to work. Why, there is Mrs. Gazann; maybe she won't have to go back to Springfield at once. Where is Uncle Sandy, Mr. Steffin? I have not seen him since we came."

"He was here. I do not know where he is now—whether he has returned to New York or not. If you will tell me where Mrs. Gazann is, I will ask her if she will not come to you, if only for a week."

"I've had her in the back of my mind ever since we began to talk about these plans for our tuberculous convalescents. I wrote to father about her only yesterday as the one woman, besides Valentine, to help us run the new place. It is work she would love and she would be so well fitted for it. She has two things that are hard to find in one person. She is naturally maternal and she is very shrewd. She actually loves to feed and shelter people; that part of running a boarding house is the part that made her do it. I think she would have liked to have done it all the more if the people she fed and clothed had been unable to do it for themselves; but her experience has been so hard that she has developed a shrewdness in not being imposed on that would be ideal in such a place as we are planning."

He paused, looking down at her. Not for one moment had this girl felt that this possible fortune was hers to do with as she liked. She had thought of herself only as an instrument of usefulness. She had not even thought of these new responsibilities as a burden. She had thought of them as a privilege.

"Did you say," he asked gravely, "that you wanted Valentine to help you in this work? Have you thought of the old friendship between Valentine and Shelburn? In fighting Shelburn, you must remember this friendship and be careful not to take her into your confidence."

Linda found herself breathing fast as if she had been running. This was her chance to make amends for all her long misjudgment of Valentine. She plunged into it eagerly.

"Oh, you are wrong. You should have heard her last night! It was because of what she said that he went away."

He shook his head.

"Wait," said Linda breathlessly. "You feel that way because of something you found out in Springfield. I remember you said at that time when I first met you in front of the courthouse that you had been hunting for a record of somebody's marriage. Do you remember?"

"I could honestly think of no reason for Valentine's coming all the way to Springfield to meet Shelburn, except that she might have wanted to marry him without its reaching Ned in Saranac. That she would go to Springfield to meet a man who lived next door to her on Long Island and whom she might have seen every day in New York, if she didn't want to be seen meeting him on Long Island, seemed so incredible to me that I looked for a reason for it. You see, Valentine had begged Ned to let her come to Saranac and live there. He wouldn't. He thought it would be a dreadful thing to impose such a life on a young girl. A little after that, she wrote him she couldn't endure Bertha's house any longer and that she would have to hunt for some other kind of work."

"But that's just what she went to Springfield for—to hunt for work."

He looked at her gravely. "Curiously, that occurred to none of us. We had seen Shelburn's interest in Valentine—he does not trouble to hide his interests of that sort—and I thought, and Fergus thought, Valentine was running away from Shelburn. We didn't know where she had gone, but we thought it was a good thing, and that she ought to stay away a bit. But we didn't want to tell Ned this."

"You could have told Ned Lindan anything. He would have understood it and he would have let her come to Saranac."

"I wish now I had told him. But at that time I hated to worry him over a thing that might not be true. But when Ned didn't hear from her either and when he began to worry, we had to do something about it. It was Bertha who suspected Valentine might have gone to meet Shelly instead of running away from him. It was Bertha who found out from Shelly's secretary where he had gone the day Valentine left. The secretary lost his job for telling and young Knox was put in his place. And that was why I went first to Middletown and then to Springfield."

"But Valentine went to Springfield," said Linda eagerly, "for the same reason I went to New York—for work that would give her enough money to go to Saranac from time to time. Mr. Shelburn had promised it to her. That was all in the world she wanted to do—to go where the man she loved had to live."

"Love!" His voice was bitter. "How could she have loved him and acted this way? What was to have hindered her from telling Ned where she was going, and why, if it was a thing so simple as that?"

"She is only a young girl and she is not trained to any work that would make much money for her. If she was offered something that gave her more

money because of the special influence of a man she knew, why shouldn't she take it? Mr. Shelburn was always hiring people for some special reason outside their ability to hold the job. Father was bothered to death by people like Ollie Knox and Mr. Brate. The trouble was that after Valentine got there Mr. Shelburn was too busy to take her in charge right away and she quarreled with him. She didn't know you have to wait on the man you want to be employed by."

"You must remember," he answered sharply, "that Shelburn knew her for Bertha Lansell's constant companion. He would not suppose her as unsophisticated as you have portrayed her."

For a moment Linda searched for an answer. She remembered her father's having said that there were but few suspicious circumstances that could be helped by explanation but that there were two places where explanation should always be made, where a man's honesty or a woman's reputation were suspected.

"Did not my father tell you," she said, "that Valentine never even saw Mr. Shelburn; that my father himself put her on the train that started her for Virginia and her old home where I think Father hoped she would rest and think. You see, Father didn't know about Ned Lindan at Saranac, or I think he might have advised her to go there. She couldn't bring herself to tell him that."

"Your father merely told me where Valentine was in Virginia, and he only told me that after he learned that I was not hunting her down on my own account."

She took a breath as one does when one plunges into deeper water. "But see how easily such things are misunderstood even by people like you and me. I came down the stairs as you were asking father about Valentine, and to me it sounded as if you were imploring him to tell you about a thing you cared deeply about."

"I was. It was Ned's flesh and blood that was being wasted by this careless thing. It was Ned I cared deeply about, never Valentine. I could not forgive her; I have not forgiven her yet."

"And I, who had just come from an afternoon all gold and silver—I was all aglow with it and hurrying to prove the gold and silver in you to my father—I heard you implore him to tell you where this girl was. I heard you at a moment when it seemed to me, from everything I had ever heard or read of men and women, that you should have been thinking of me only. I suppose this seems very girlish to you, but to me it seemed very serious. I

thought but one thing: On the day Valentine came I had heard her implore a man over the telephone not to keep her waiting; I heard her say she could not endure it any longer, and I was there when she ran away from whatever it was she could endure no longer. And I knew she had run away, leaving no word where she was going for fear her determination might not survive being overtaken. And here were you asking where she was—imploring to be told. So I went away because I could not bear the disappointment after my gold and silver afternoon, of thinking you were the man Valentine had run away from."

He was very grave. "You went away because you thought that! But your father—he could have told you that it was not for myself that I was trying to find this girl."

"I could not ask my father with you there, nor afterwards; it hurt too dreadfully."

He did not take his eyes from her. "And your father—he said nothing to you?"

"I suppose my father thought that my slipping away in this fashion was my way of expressing regret for the afternoon in which I had put aside all my customs for an afternoon's ride with a strange man. He is tender of such things—regrets. He would not have asked me about it if he saw I did not want to speak of it."

His face grew stern. "These are the things you have been thinking all these weeks you have been so withdrawn from me—these weeks in which I have searched in vain for your reasons. Why, Ned Lindan was my closest friend! It would have been impossible for me to have done such a thing to him—or to her."

At the look in his face she whitened a little but she spoke evenly. "Don't you see why I am telling you all this? It is to make amends to the woman Ned Lindan loved, because I suspected her. When once you begin to suspect anybody, every word and every event deepens your suspicion. Why, even what you and Valentine said the morning Ned Lindan died made me think that my suspicions of you and her were right. You would have thought when she didn't want Ned to come into Mr. Shelburn's house that I might have guessed Mr. Shelburn was the man she ran away from in Springfield. But I did not guess it—ever. And last night Valentine told me."

"Could you not have asked *me*?"

"No. Of course, I knew after Valentine had been in the house with me here how she loved Ned. Whoever looked at her would know it—broken and burdened with her misery, and yet striving to build again for her love. But I thought part of her misery was her regret over you."

He had drawn away from her. And now he looked at her in a silence that became heavy-weighted. The wind in the pines made little liquid words whose music drowned their meaning. The sun filtering through the green needles of the pine trees made golden lace of the ground on which the girl's eyes drooped.

"All this time," said Steffin at length, "I thought you were just showing me that what I planned from the first moment I saw you was impossible. I thought it was your way of drawing back after your second thought had steadied you a little. And all this while you were suspecting me of these intolerable things."

"It was because I could not bear to weave so dear a thing with tarnished threads. I wanted them all new—"

At the glow in the man's deepening eyes she stopped suddenly. After a moment he leaned over her.

"But see how new the threads are, Little-To-Be-Loved. They are so new I could never weave them alone. Come, there is no moment in my life you shall not know, and you will find no other woman there."

She turned away her head.

"Oh, this old hurt that I could not bear all these weeks, it is just part of love—this joy is like it, unbearable."

He drew her into his arms.

"Little Lover," he said so softly that the wind in the pines might have been part of his voice.

The sun filtering through the green needles covered the girl's closed eyes with golden lace as her lover kissed them.

Steffin crossed the stile between his own yard and Lansell's, and waited for the doctor to join him. They walked together on the path along the bluff to Shelburn's house.

"I have seen the notary," said Steffin. "He read only the signature and acknowledged it. He did not read the deed and he left the moment he was

through. He says that when he went out to take his car he saw Lindan standing on the steps of the front terrace with a young lady and he thought Lindan looked very tired. You see, Fergus, this fixes the fact that Lindan left the house the moment after he signed the deed. He came from there to my house, and then he died."

"Now, let's see, Win; you believe that the deed was drawn for that portion of the land that originally belonged to Valentine and that Ned's other property was added to it afterwards? Is it written or typed?"

"It has typed inserts in the regular printed form of a deed. I suppose young Knox typed it and while I believe he is a lawyer, he has never practised. A lawyer would have drawn a slanting line in red ink across that blank space that was left on the printed form just below the description of the forty acres."

"Do you believe, Win, that Shelburn meant to alter the deed from the first?"

"No, I don't. I think he expected to persuade Ned to sell the rest of his property and that he regarded this sale as a beginning. Perhaps he thought he could fill in that empty space with Ned's permission, before Ned went back to Saranac. But Ned died. Even at that, unless it was a sudden impulse, I don't see how he was tempted to take such a risk."

"It probably did not seem a risk," said Lansell. "The heirs, so far as Shelburn knew, were entirely in ignorance of the situation, if any heirs could be found. And if there were heirs, they would be remote, so far as Shelburn knew, and extremely glad to get forty thousand dollars cash instead of ancestral acres."

"But there's the moral element. It was a steal."

"Well, there you are. Is Shelburn a man you could say instantly would not steal? I couldn't. Given enough temptation, I could not rely absolutely on his honesty."

"You are back to my trouble. That was what I said; I couldn't understand how he could be tempted."

"Has it occurred to you," said Lansell, "that the land may be more valuable than you know, and Shelburn more financially embarrassed? He is not a man of unlimited capital. Was he buying this property for himself, or for the company?"

"He was buying it for himself. It is so recorded. And he gave his own check of forty thousand dollars for Valentine's forty acres. I know about that, because Ned was so anxious to have it deposited to Valentine's account at once that ten minutes after he had been in my house, I dragged Valentine from Bertha and sent my man with her to the village in my car to get the check in before the bank closed. She sent back her own check for three thousand dollars, which was what Ned originally paid her for the property. You recall we took it from his pocket, and it is part of the estate Linda inherits. She is going to need it, and I think she will be allowed to use it at once; the judge is a Virginian."

"Where," said Lansell, "would Shelburn get the description of the Lindan estate? These descriptions are intricate affairs."

"The gas company has all these descriptions, many of them in leases prepared for them for a long time and quite accessible to any officer of that company. Shelburn probably had it in his study: he would have had everything ready to complete the sale before he sent for Lindan. Surely he would not have cared to risk Ned's changing his mind while he hunted up a description of the property. When could he have altered it?"

"It isn't a thing a man would do hurriedly. You can't reel the description of five hundred acres of land in the Virginia mountains off on the typewriter in a hurry. He would have wanted to do it quietly and without interruption."

"Well, we'll probably find a servant in the house," said Steffin, "who will have received orders just after Ned's death was announced, that Shelburn was not to be disturbed."

Lansell frowned. "When I came for Ned's bag, Shelburn was in his study with people going in and out and a houseful of alarmed guests. Miss Linda had just told him about Ned's death. He couldn't have had a chance then, even to use a typewriter for a moment; and his guests must have kept him busy the rest of the afternoon, saying good-by to him and making their arrangements to leave."

"He would hardly have left the house to do it," said Steffin. "Even a tyro at fraud knows that any typewriter expert can detect the work of different machines."

Lansell stopped short and threw his cigar over the bluff.

"No," he said sharply, wheeling about and staring at the terrace with its huge blue pots filled with flowers, "but he might have left the house in search of a quieter place and taken his typewriter with him. Wait a moment.

I am piecing bits of knowledge together, and I think my bits take us back to Bertha, who on the day Ned Lindan died drove back from New York in Shelburn's car. In my study closet is a portable typewriter I found in the car." He paused and a dark flush of color crept up his cheeks. "And locked in my desk drawer is part of a typewritten note to Sandy MacGrath that says the writer has waited for him in his library as long as she cares to wait."

The two men stared at each other.

"You are a practised diagnostician," said Steffin. "What do you deduce?"

"If Shelburn drove into his office to do this typewriting quietly and found it occupied and then drove to MacGrath's, my pieces will fit pretty well. Bertha was waiting in MacGrath's house and he could not have been there, since she wrote him that she would not wait longer for him. Bertha's arm was bruised as a woman's arm might be if a man took her by it to put her out of a door she did not wish to go through. I have puzzled about this. If she had written MacGrath that she would not wait longer for him, it was not MacGrath who put her out, though I had pieced in the fact that MacGrath might have returned while she was writing her note, since the note is unfinished. But it's having been Shelburn who interrupted the writing of the note is a better piece for the puzzle."

"But how would she have come back in his car?"

"If he had shut the door on her, she would only have to walk down the steps to get into his car and if he had left it unlocked and she needed a car to get home, it would be the thing she would do, taking the typewriter with her."

Steffin gave a short laugh. "I told you he was not a practised crook. He must have been some surprised when he came out for his typewriter—unless he had already filled in that blank space in the deed."

"If he had, why would he be going to MacGrath's house, unless MacGrath was in it? And once there, why would he put Bertha out unless he needed to be alone and she would not go. If the rest of that space on that deed is filled by typing done on the same machine that this letter of Bertha's to MacGrath is done on, then we have Shelburn."

"Will you want Bertha to come into this thing this way?" said Steffin gravely.

The doctor looked up at the blank windows of the house before them.

“If those are Shelburn’s finger marks on Bertha’s arm,” he said with deadly quiet, “she will wish to testify against him. As for her presence in MacGrath’s house, you can trust her to have an excellent reason for that. And what I want doesn’t matter. I couldn’t get it, anyway.”

The two men walked up the steps on to the terrace.

“We’ll speak to the servants and give Shelly’s study the once-over, while he’s away,” said Steffin. “Knox is in town, and I’ll go in to talk to him and one or two other people I want to interview. You’ll be through your patients by that time and I’ll telephone you.”

“I’ll be through my patients and able to report to you about Bertha.”

“Will she tell you?”

“Not all at once, and not until I tell her. After that she will be interested in correcting me where I am wrong, especially about MacGrath.”

“It’s my guess you’ll find that Scotchman has not incriminated himself, for all that he may have expected to get in on a profitable sale. It’s also my guess that when we get back to Lindanburg, we’ll find Sandy MacGrath there, giving his niece the canniest advice in the world about any possible oil on her land. Don’t forget, Fergus, to take your best magnifying glass along with you. One look at that deed with one of your glasses ought to tell us and the judge, too. It isn’t a jury case, you know. It’s a case in equity.”

“Forgery,” said Lansell, “is a penitentiary offense. Gad, I hope Sandy MacGrath is in it.”

CHAPTER XXVI

Susie Ryland and Mrs. Gazann sat in the stiff little drawing-room of Susie's boarding house and looked at each other.

Steffin had just gone. He had talked exhaustively but briefly. There were many things they had no chance to ask him that they asked each other.

"Mrs. Gazann," said Susie, "you don't have to go back to Springfield this week, do you? You want to see that Virginia place and it's too bad to have Linda staying there alone, with nobody there but Miss Brinsley."

"I don't have to go back to Springfield until I get ready. But I do have to get out of New York in a day or two or Gazann will catch up with me. He followed us that time I went with you to Sunday tea at Mr. MacGrath's, and some man has been calling this boarding house by telephone asking about me."

"Mrs. Gazann," said Susie, "what are you going to do with your Slovakian lover?"

"Well, if I ever see another man that I want to marry, I'm going to divorce him. A man's dead where I come from after seven years' absence; and if his being legally dead isn't enough, it wouldn't take me but fifteen minutes in the Court of Domestic Relations to bury him. But if I never find another man I want to marry and it doesn't look to me now as if I would—I won't do a thing about it."

"What makes you think you won't find somebody else, Mrs. Gazann? Wait until you get down there to Virginia—those Virginia men know how to win a woman."

"Well—maybe. Of course in the boarding-house business the men that want to marry the woman that runs the house are mostly looking for support. Still I don't think it's that. Aside from that when that no-account left me he broke some kind of pride in me that makes me afraid it was me, not him that made him leave me, and that maybe the same thing would make another man leave me. If you fail once, why try it again?"

Susie looked at her thoughtfully. "I'll tell you why: You were meant to be a mother. Every instinct you have is maternal. You like to feed helpless creatures, and keep them warm and teach them how to help themselves. You ought to have a chance—a better chance than you've had. And I hope you'll

find some sensible soft-voiced kind-hearted gentleman fit to be a father, who wants lots of children and a good mother for them. And I think maybe you'll find that in Virginia, and maybe the man will be just some nice man who has never gotten over being a boy himself, so that you can keep him warm and well-fed. And if ever you find this, Mrs. Gazann, I want you to promise me not only that you'll marry him, but that you'll go to work the minute you find it to make it possible to marry."

Through Mrs. Gazann's darkened eyelashes something very like a tear fell. "Yes, I promise," she said huskily.

Susie rose. "Well, that's that. Now I'm going to make a little trip on my own account to Mr. Alexander MacGrath's elegant house with the grilled door and the coat-of-arms. You and I have heard Gentleman George say lots of times that the newspaper people are the real detectives. I'm going to sleuth a little bit. My debt to Mr. George MacGrath is still unpaid: I'm going to pay a little interest on the debt if I can."

Mrs. Gazann walked to the door with Susie. "Are you going to call on Mr. MacGrath at his house, Susie? You can't do that."

"What, and me an interviewer? You just bet I can. If it pleases you to have me make a proper entrance before Gaze, I'll ask your Slovakian lover if Miss MacGrath is at home before I ask for Mr. MacGrath."

But when Susie reached the house with the grilled door and the coat-of-arms she did not have to ask Gaze the questions she had planned. He told her with a slightly acid inflection before she had made any inquiry whatever that Miss MacGrath was out of the city and Mr. MacGrath not at home.

Susie stepped inside the door. "What makes you think I came to see them?" she said evenly. "I did not ask for them. I have come to see Nora. Would you like to announce me?"

"Announce you," said Gaze, entirely at a loss.

"You know my name," said Susie.

But Gaze had his second wind. "I can't say that I do, madam."

Susie laughed softly. "Well, I know yours, Gaze, and it isn't Gaze. I've seen your picture many a time when you wore a mustache and hadn't learned to say 'madam' or to announce a name."

"I beg pardon," said Gaze huskily.

And as he stood holding himself erect, Susie passed in through the dining room into the butler's pantry and from the pantry into the kitchen.

"For the love of the saints," Nora ejaculated, "'tis Miss Susie herself. Miss Susie, 'tis doughnuts you will be smelling, the boss being out. Will ye have a hot one?"

"I will that and a cup of the tea you were about to pour out." Susie let herself fall into her mother's brogue. "Is it the only time you can be having doughnuts, Nora, when Himself is out?"

"'Tis so; he has no nose at all for hot fat. Never a fish from the frying pan for him."

"And when did you have them last, Nora, for I wish I had known it."

"Well, now, it would be on Friday when I couldn't be eatin' meat—'twas the Friday last week when Himself went in such a hurry—the afternoon he made Gaze bring the shirts to the station, and me getting the dinner all the same because Gaze didn't tell me, for fear there'd be no meat for him."

Susie grinned. "And gluttony one of the seven deadlies; he knows what he'll get for that."

"He got nothing at all, Miss Susie."

"You never ate all the dinner yourself, Nora?"

"That I did not. Things happened the night."

Susie sank down in the straight chair before the red tablecloth and took a sip of tea and a bite of doughnut.

"Well, praise be," said Susie devoutly, "that something has happened to somebody. Nothing has happened to me since I left here, Nora, and when I ran in to ask when Miss Linda would be back, I got nothing at all from Gaze. It's my belief he knows nothing. It's why I came to ask you, Nora."

"Sure, ye've come to the right place. It's nothing Gaze knows. Sure, Miss Susie, Miss Linda won't be back at all, not for a time yet. She's visiting in Virginia and last night I heard Himself say over the long-distance 'phone to let her stay where she was until she got tired of it and that would be about ten days and she'd be glad to come back. And if you want to know where she is, Himself will be in any minute now and ye can be settin' in the library when he comes in as if you was waiting for Miss Linda, and he'll tell you all ye want to know whatever."

"Maybe he will," said Susie, "but I'll sit here with you, if you don't mind, Nora, until Himself comes, for I don't like the way your butler received me."

"Sure," said Nora, smiling, "he's no way with the ladies at all. Many is the time I've told him so, and he says 'tis small speech a man should have with women, if he wants peace——"

Susie leaned forward and observed Nora narrowly, then she said very softly, "He ought to know, and him a married man, Nora."

In the kitchen, that had been noisy with gay words and browning doughnuts, a curious silence fell—a heavy silence. Nora pushed the deep frying pot to the back of the stove without even looking inside of it. She turned off the gas and stood still with her hand falling laxly to her side.

"Married!" she said.

"Sure! I know the wife he deserted."

Nora opened and closed the oven door and Susie looked out the basement window, listening to the opening of the street door and Sandy MacGrath's voice.

"There do be times," said Nora at length, "when I think I'll be going back to County Kerry. 'Tis sick I am of the city. Some grass now and the flowers and the hens—there's nothing here but hurry and work, and work and hurry."

"Nora," said Susie gravely, "would you like a country job—not right away, but say in six weeks or so, up in the Virginia mountains with Miss Linda—not such big pay, maybe, as this, but not so much chance to spend your money, and in a place where everybody knows everybody else, when they got married, and how and why."

Nora filled the teakettle slowly. "Sure, a change is good for us all, Miss Susie. I'll be thinking of it. It's tired I am with all the excitement of this city."

She watched Susie rise wistfully. "You said Gaze—" She paused, unable to put it into words.

"Married fifteen years ago, Nora, to a woman I know in the town I came from. Ask him."

"Not me, Miss Susie. 'Tis nothing to me at all." But she turned dully away and Susie waited.

"Will Miss Linda be back, Miss Susie?"

"She'll have to come back for her things, Nora, and to see what Mr. MacGrath wants her to do."

"Then maybe if it's the same to her, when she comes back I'll speak with her about going with her. What does his wife look like, Miss Susie?"

"She's thin, Nora, not large and fine looking like you, and her hair is gray with waiting for him, for he left her, never telling her he wouldn't come back; and she's paid his debts and made a living keeping boarders."

" 'Tis no wonder she's thin. Can she cook, do you know?"

"Not like you, Nora." Susie regarded her thoughtfully, then she added, "I think she'll divorce him, Nora."

" 'Twould do me no good and me a good Catholic."

" 'Twould do you no good, anyway, Nora; he has the eye of a fish and the white stomach of a shark. He's not for such as you! You'll find a man in Virginia that knows a hot biscuit when he sees it, and a warm heart when he feels it."

" 'Tis a great place that," said Nora, with a sigh. "There's others should go there, too. Will you be going yourself, Miss Susie?"

"Why not?" said Susie lightly. "For a visit, anyhow, Nora. And now I'll go upstairs and ask Himself when Miss Linda's coming back."

Sandy MacGrath was standing, hands in pockets, before his desk, when Susie stopped at the library door. He did not look happy, nor could he rid himself at once of whatever it was that troubled him, for he answered Susie absently that Linda would be home in a day or two.

"In a day or two! But she has inherited the whole Lindan estate! Surely she's sending for her father. Isn't it splendid for him; he can live outdoors the rest of his life. And have you heard of her plans?"

Sandy MacGrath opened his mouth to say something, thought better of it and said shortly, "I'm afraid not."

"A convalescent home for special tuberculous cases that are well enough to work four or five hours a day and earn enough money to fit them for whatever they can do best."

For a moment Sandy was silent. Then he said somberly, "It would be a shame to use land like that that way. There are thousands of mountain places

for invalids that aren't rich in gas that are better than this place. Did they expect to make consumptives dig gas wells?"

"Why not? Why throw a man on the scrap heap just because he's getting well? Why not let him work under careful supervision as long as it's healthy for him to do it?"

But Sandy was grim. "They would clutter the place; they'd be a nuisance."

"Clutter a tract of land of several hundred acres—how could they? And they get well much quicker if they have the right work to do at the time when they are able to do it. And a few extra houses on all that land won't hurt the gas wells and the gas wells won't hurt the houses, and so that your company gets the gas, what do you care who delivers it."

"Well, I care because it won't work. If George wants to start some highfalutin' idea I'll stake him to a country newspaper in Lindanburg and he can fill it with semi-invalids. Writing isn't work."

Susie bridled. "Oh, it isn't! Well, I've seen it take the brown out of hair and the red out of cheeks. I saw your own brother work so hard and so long and so ceaselessly that he fell over on the office floor half dead of the work."

"He's a cripple," said Sandy.

Susie drew back and some of the color went out of her face. "There's something," she said, "about a strong man's taking a crutch away from a cripple that makes one sick."

She turned and ran down the steps.

In the vestibule with the door closed behind her, Susie stopped and looked up and down the street for a place where she could telephone, but there was none. Then, as she moved swiftly to the corner, she ran into a man who had swung diagonally across the street with concentrated brows and unseeing eyes.

"Holy St. Francis!" said Susie. "Please help the blind."

Ollie Knox brought himself up with a jerk. Then he looked up the street at the House of Grath and down again at Susie and the gladness went out of his face like a snuffed candle.

"Are you calling on MacGrath?" asked Ollie.

"Not with you, Ollie."

Ollie glowered. “You have been calling there, and you knew Linda was in Virginia.”

“Maybe I live there and have come out on the corner to wait for you.”

“Do you? Have you?”

“I don’t, and I have. Have you seen Mr. Steffin, Ollie?”

“Yes, I have,” said Ollie, curtly.

“What did he say to you, and what did you say to him?”

“I won’t repeat what he said to me, and I told him I was no scandal-monger.”

“Didn’t you tell him what you know?”

“I told him I couldn’t go back on my uncle, nor be treacherous to my employer.”

“I suppose he reminded you that you could be subpœnaed.”

“Yes, I know; but I can’t tell what I don’t remember, and I couldn’t hold latitude and longitude in my mind an hour. Have you ever seen the description of property that goes on a deed? Nobody could remember it.”

The girl looked at him shrewdly. “Now listen, Ollie, you might not recall the boundaries of property you had typed on a deed, but you and I were trained by the same editor, and you and I know we can remember paragraphs by eye. You know you can find what you want in any book you’ve ever read by your page memory of paragraphs; I’ve seen you do it. You can remember perfectly whether on the front page of that deed, in the long space where the property is described, you had one paragraph or two. You can’t tell me that you have even forgotten the number of lines you typed on it, though you might get away with that to Mr. Steffin or a jury. I know you only have to shut your eyes to see that page as it looked when you took it off your typewriter, and you only have to see the deed again to know whether it looks the same now as it did then.”

“No jury would take that shut-eye stunt as proof; and who said I typed that deed?”

“The jury won’t have to take your testimony for more than its worth. You’re just corroborative. I’m not a jury. You don’t have to answer me innocently. I already know you are as sure as the rest of us that there is something phony here. I’ve watched your face before, Ollie. Are you afraid of losing your job?”

"No, I'm not afraid."

"It can't be that you are unwilling to admit your uncle is a crook; you've always known that."

He made no answer.

"And it can't be that you don't want to help Gentleman George, after all the pains he took teaching you how to think."

"No; I'd like to help him."

"You have the chance, now."

"Why doesn't he get his brother to help him? He's the big man in this gas company; he has money and influence. We're just nothing at all."

Susie lifted her chin. "Would you get Sandy MacGrath to help you in anything? Especially if you were nearly down and out yourself?"

The lad brought his troubled eyes, that had been roving about the street, sharply to her, and a little of the trouble went out of them.

"Susie, wouldn't you ask MacGrath to help you?"

"Not if I were starving!"

There in the dusk of the quiet street, Ollie's arms went round the girl. He held her a second and then released her and his young voice was a little husky.

"Susie, I hoped I'd get enough saved up before I lost this job to buy you an engagement ring you could boast of; and maybe enough, if I were lucky, to buy a platinum and diamond wedding ring to match the engagement ring. And then I thought, among all the men this job brought me close to, I might pick up a better job so that we could get married. But nobody would employ a secretary who went back on his boss. Besides, it isn't right."

The girl put out her hand and took the lapel of his coat. She was Irish and even such a gesture did not come easily. "My dear," she said softly, "we don't want to get married on Oliver Shelburn's money; it's too uncertain; unless he has to go to the penitentiary for four or five years and leaves you in charge."

"Susie! Listen, dear; Uncle Oliver may be a crook; but he's brought me up since I was a pup. He got me my job on the paper where I first saw you. He's pretty close; I can't turn him down."

"You can't do anything else, Ollie. You could get another reporter's job."

"Would you live on it, Susie?"

The girl looked down at the pavement. "I have, for a long time," she said gently. "I know how to."

"You darling!" He bent and kissed her. A cabman signaled them. "Come on, let's ride in the Park."

"Yes," said Susie unsteadily. "But first I want to say one thing and then I want to telephone Mr. Steffin. It won't take me a moment."

"Say it; and then we'll drive up the Avenue to Steffin's club. I just left him there; it's only a block or two away. I'll call him out and you can say what you like to him. What's your one thing?"

"I'll say it last. I want to tell Mr. Steffin that Sandy MacGrath is so grim about the inheritance that has come into his family that I am sure there's something else than gas wells that he and your uncle are being deprived of. He ought to be glad his niece is coming in for property she won't even have to waste money on exploiting because there is a gas company at her front gate ready to pipe her gas and to buy it. That's luck enough and thrift enough even for a Scotchman; and he vice-president of the gas company. It's superb; you'd think he'd be tickled to death over the nice melodramatic way it fits in, like fate and such things."

"I wouldn't think he'd be pleased, and I've other things to think of now."

He put her in the cab.

Susie herself had other things to think of, but she had found herself a little breathless and something so near frightened she would not admit it. For her heart was beating to suffocation, and her breath seemed to have deserted her even as she called on it to make her words intelligible.

"I want to tell Mr. Steffin to send for Gentleman George. He will know what's behind his brother's way of feeling. You can't fool Gentleman George about such things."

Ollie bent sharpened eyes on the slim sweet thing crouching at his side. He had sense enough to sit quite still and listen gravely.

"Let's tell Steffin after our ride in the Park, not now. He'll be at the club until seven. He told me so. And now is—well—I love you, Susie; I've loved you ever since our first job together: the job Gentleman George sent us on: and you stood back and let me handle it. What was the first thing you wanted to say last, Susie?"

She looked out the window at the jeweled lights on the Avenue. “I think Gentleman George always knew, Ollie. I think he knew before you did. He knew about me, if he didn’t know about you, Ollie. I—I thought you were—lovely—Ollie!”

“Dear, dear, dear!” said Ollie in a low whisper. Then very softly he slipped his arm about her.

CHAPTER XXVII

George MacGrath smoked on the terrace of Lindan Crest the one cigar he was permitted a day; and as he smoked he looked at the blue rim of the mountain horizon; at the pines and the spruce and the glossy leaves of the laurel, with its shell-pink blossoms. Presently he turned and looked up at the tall white pillars and the gallery between them that jutted out over the broad front door. He looked through the long window at the old mahogany and the soft portraits. And then his vision was blurred by a white mist, that might have been a memory of a lace gown; and a golden halo that might have been gold hair caught about a white forehead; the vision of Linda Paget walking through the long window to him as she had walked through it twenty-five years ago the night Lindan Crest had dined the county in honor of her betrothal.

MacGrath threw away his cigar and went in to the library where Linda was puzzling over grocery lists.

"You see, Father," said Linda, "some of these people who are coming to testify will be with us. Susie can't come; she has to hold her job, she says, to buy her trousseau, unless we need her. But Nora, the cook, is coming, and Win will stay here. Doctor Lansell and Mrs. Lansell will be at the hotel, and who do you think came yesterday to visit the Randolfs? Madame de Chevonnes." She laughed up at him. "She says she came on her way to Hot Springs to ride along unfrequented roads before she rides in public at the Horse Show at The Hot. But you can't tell, can you, Father?"

"I can't."

"Father, do we ask Uncle Sandy to be our guest? You know he came here, the day before you came, to offer me any help I needed."

"Did he offer you money?"

"Well, not in actual words. He inquired who my lawyers were and if I could afford them, and what hopes they had about the case. And I said I had one lawyer who was giving me his services and who had not the faintest doubt that the jury wouldn't even leave the box. And when I said my lawyer was Westwin Steffin, Uncle Sandy said, but surely I wasn't relying on him alone, if I was serious in this suit, and didn't I want some one else; that he'd be glad to help me."

"You look ungrateful."

"I suppose I was worse. I was so angry. I don't know why. Uncle Sandy didn't know I was engaged to marry Win; he doesn't know it yet. And he has a right to his opinions, of course."

"Especially if he is willing to back them with money," MacGrath's voice was dry as summer heather.

His daughter looked at him with attention. "He fears the Greeks bearing gifts," she said softly. "Oh, there is the horse Judge Randolf said he'd send for you, Father. You're sure it's all right for you to ride?"

"As long as I keep to a single-foot. I don't think you need to ask Sandy to be your guest. The gas company has made Miss Brinsley's house into temporary offices with living rooms upstairs. I am riding there this afternoon. I missed Sandy in New York."

She looked at him happily. "I don't care what happens, now that you are well. No matter how the suit comes out, there is that three thousand dollars for you; and Win says Ned—you know I never know what to call him, so I've compromised on Ned—shall not have planned in vain. But you heard him and Doctor Lansell talk that over; and, Father, would you have believed Mrs. Gazann had so much money? She insists that Ned's plans are all worked out on a self-supporting basis and that she will prove it, if we give her a chance; and she's so sure, that she will invest some of her own money in it."

"Where is she to-day? I haven't seen her."

Linda broke into laughter. "Oh, until I saw her start out, I thought Judge Randolf was riding with you."

"I didn't want to hold him back. He rides faster than I am allowed to."

"Well, he'll be held back all right. I wish you had seen him. He's teaching Mrs. Gazann to ride. She was so stiff this morning from yesterday's ride that I thought he'd never get her in the saddle. Wait, Father, I want to see how you look on a horse. Isn't he a beauty? If we win, Father, you'll have to have a horse right away, and teach me."

MacGrath rode slowly down the curved drive toward the village, deep in thought. He had carefully gone over with Steffin every point Steffin meant to bring out in the trial, and found there no proof that his brother was connected with it in any way. George MacGrath was accustomed to waiting for proof before he gave judgment, though proof that passed unobserved by

those who worked under him had frequently been damning evidence to the managing editor. The verification at length of what had seemed proven to him after a few minutes of study had happened so often in his office that he had had to insist more than once that he was no psychic; on the contrary, he was merely a man with certain methods of thought and observation that had become a habit.

But to-day he found himself wishing he could use some emergency of thought, since his usual habits were availing him so little. Some place he believed he would find Sandy MacGrath in this thing, but so far, if Sandy were in it, Shelburn was probably the only one who knew it. That Sandy would be Scotch enough to keep out of trouble, George well believed, but George was Scotch himself and he could not believe that Sandy could keep out so far that another Scotchman could not find him.

"He won't stand by Shelburn, if Shelburn loses," mused George. "And yet——"

He patted his horse's neck as the road crossed the railroad track and skirted the long row of freight cars in the siding. George slowed up, browsing over boyhood days when he and Sandy and the man whose horse he was now riding climbed the ladders on the ends of the cars, and made scissors of pins they laid on the tracks for the cars to roll over. He looked about the station to see if other boys were there, but he saw none. He lifted his rein and the horse quickened his gait.

At a bend of the road, MacGrath turned his horse down a small ravine that circled a hill and ended at a creek tumbling down from the mountains, with dozens of little tributary rills that threaded their way through other little ravines and into little fringed pools that were like jewels scattered loosely on the green velvet of the grass and among the brown silk of the pine needles.

George got off his horse and looked about him. "It hasn't changed much; but it was back farther. This is Brinsley property; it was on the Lindan side."

He turned up one of the tiny ravines, rounded a curve, and came to a pause on a level place where all the little fringed pools were iridescent with a liquid that floated on the water like a shining veil caught into color by the sun. He walked around among them and stumbled in a rut of an improvised road that ran through a cleft in the rock where trees had been cut down to let in some heavy vehicle. The ground was powdered rock and bore weights evenly. He went through the cleft in the rock and beyond him lay three patches of ground carefully staked off.

He examined it with care and went slowly back to his horse, and he rode the horse up the hill to an old orchard and through the orchard to a white shingled house with a broad veranda, where ten years ago he had asked Valentine Brinsley for plum blossoms from her orchard. The front door bore the legend: Consolidated Gas Company.

George opened the door and went in. The room that had been the Brinsley drawing-room was still so new in its office fittings that it smelled of paint. And Sandy MacGrath sat at the desk between the long windows, bending over a blue print as if he were also new enough in the office to be still a little unadjusted there. George did not sit down. He leaned up against the sill of one of the long windows and regarded his brother thoughtfully.

Sandy folded the blue print. "You certainly do look better, George, than the last time I saw you. What's on your mind?"

"If you're staking for oil wells, Sandy, up on Little Cup Creek, you are on the Lindan side of the boundary."

"It's all the same property now. What difference does it make?"

"Well, it won't be, day after to-morrow. It will be pretty sharply divided."

Sandy took a cigar from his pocket and lit it deliberately. "What's the use of that kind of talk? We're in a lawsuit, but we're buying thousands of acres for the gas company and leasing thousands more. I suppose we're due to get into some kind of trouble before we finish. You can't get property from a hundred different people with all kinds of defective titles without a lawsuit here and there."

George MacGrath gave his brother a very direct look.

"Sandy, I know a good deal about this oil. I've known something about it ever since the idea came to Shelburn of using the drills and the machinery the gas company has on the ground for his own private game in the development of this oil. I was in Shelburn's offices, working among his men, in their confidence, listening to Brate, your manager here later, talking with them—the mill men at Middletown, the machinists at Springfield, the bookkeepers and the treasurer in the newspaper office. I knew just how Shelburn was bleeding the paper of all it could give to buy promising property for himself, not for his company. I knew how he was using his mills to sell his company pipe and machinery at a profit that enabled him to buy more property. He has quite a bit now."

"But what on earth has this to do with me? I'm not Shelburn's guardian."

"You are vice-president of the company he's president of, for one thing. But I don't have to tell you where you come in, Sandy. It was I who told you about this oil, ten years ago, and we're both of us pretty good engineers. I know why you offered me the job of resident manager here in Lindanburg; and why Shelburn discharged me after Steffin came to Middletown to look over the accounts of the piping made there. You got into your first hot water there."

"We fixed that up. Even the board of directors were satisfied."

"You may remember Steffin was not."

"He could have resigned."

"He had a good deal of money in it; why should he? I suppose that is what you were planning for—putting him out. The idea of oil and none of the expense of developing it that ruins most men, must have gone to your head. And when it came to the richest tract of all, the Lindan property, you thought you had only a dying man to cope with. It's a bit ironical that I should have gone to Saranac where Lindan was instead of to Lindanburg where you offered me a position and where I might have expected to find him."

Sandy moved his fountain pen about the desk.

"It was you who put Lindan up to holding out against our offer?"

"Ah, *our* offer! Well, Lindan was no fool and he had other plans. But it was I who told him about the oil and that you knew about it. He did not have to be told that, owing to the location of the Brinsley property, you would probably think you could sink your wells there and get the oil from the higher levels of his property and that if you did think this he could probably sell you the Brinsley tract at a good price; a price large enough to enable him to sink offset wells on his own ground."

Sandy MacGrath sat quite still for some seconds. He did not even move his fountain pen. Presently he narrowed his eyes and studied his brother.

"You weren't so sick, after all, were you?" said Sandy. "But even if by some accident of law this property goes to Linda, neither you nor she will have money enough to develop it. And you will need the gas company behind you, and you won't have it."

George considered this. There was a silence.

Sandy finally broke the silence with, "You didn't come here just to tell me what you know. Have you some proposition to make?"

"No; I came solely because, after all, you are my brother. One way or another this thing is going to get a good deal of publicity. Publicity, you recall, is my business, and I can be counted on to see its signs before they are in print. I am hoping you'll keep out of it and I came to warn you that the noon train brought several reporters; and good ones."

"I told you I was not in it. The best reporters in the world can't make any copy out of me. There's no news connected with me."

"I wouldn't be too sure, Sandy. Shelburn will stay president of this company only until the next directors' meeting, and it looks as if you would go out with him. There's news in that, news about you as well as about him. There's every chance of Shelburn's going to the penitentiary for forgery. It is forgery to alter a deed above the signature. I do you the credit to believe you did not countenance anything as dangerous as forgery, though I don't actually know where you come in on that. Perhaps you have escaped the law by not committing the forgery yourself. But if you intend to share in the results, if it can be proven that you intend to share in them—well, this is what I came to say, Sandy—even if the law cannot touch that, and I do not know whether it can or not, publicity can touch you and you will find it an ugly thing. All this quite aside from your moral responsibility."

"We'll leave out the moral responsibility," said Sandy dryly. "It has been a long time since you believed in my morality. And these newspaper tactics to involve me into some kind of admission are wasted. Shelburn bought this property. He paid cash for it, inherited, I understand, by your daughter. I've been working with Shelburn on a dozen ventures. I came down here to go over ground Shelburn bought to see if I wanted to go in with him in its development. I brought a man with me who knows oil and he staked out some plots on the border line between two properties. Why not? And then you come along with this song and dance and your talk of forgery. Well, you'll have to prove it."

"What if we do prove it, Sandy?"

"You mean, what if the Lindan property is awarded to Linda?"

"And if you and Shelburn go out of the gas company."

"We own good blocks of stock. And even if we go out and you, yourself, come in, you still won't have enough money to develop your oil gamble." He drew little lines on the blotter with his pen and was silent a moment. Then he said abruptly, "Do you, by any chance, want me to go in with you and Linda, if it turns out—the way you hope?"

George's face softened a little, but he answered evenly, "I do not, Sandy. I didn't come here with that in mind. I came only for the reason I have given you and having given it, I am going. I went into one thing with you and it left me penniless." He looked out the window at the plum orchard. "And at the time when I needed money most and when I did not want to leave my wife to go to an office every day and you were owing me money, you would not pay it. You are still owing me money."

"You have said that to me before. It is not true that I owe you money from the estate. Those bonds were given to you only if you came back to the United States to go to school. You didn't. You stayed in Paris."

"You took good care, Sandy, that I did not know the conditions. Had I known them, I would have come back. I would have come without the bonds, had I known Father wanted me to come. You took care that I did not know that either."

A flush rose in Sandy's face. "You think I fostered your estrangement with Father?"

"I think you nursed a little baby argument until it grew into a big thing that could be called by the name of estrangement. And I think you have profited by it very materially."

"There you go, relying on your invalidism again."

George rose.

"Well, you've counted on my being an invalid a long time, Sandy. It has served you pretty well so far. It has permitted you to live in the old house, in the old luxury, in the old pleasant ways."

"If you had been left the house and the money to keep it up, you'd have had it made into some kind of sanitarium for newspaper men who had lost their jobs, or people who couldn't afford to pay their board, just as you now plan to use revenue-producing property for some kind of crazy home for consumptives. Well, you'll lose it and I'm glad of it."

George MacGrath paused at the door. "I don't know what your plans are. You may be planning to work with Shelburn if he gets clear of this; or equally you may be trimming your ship and planning to take Shelburn's place as president of the gas company if he loses. But in either case there's one man you do not appear to have counted on and that's Steffin."

"Steffin!" Sandy humped a shoulder. "Another convalescent home-maker!"

"And also," said George thoughtfully, "an executor of the Lindan estate, knowing its possibilities in both oil and gas, and on the board of directors of the gas company."

"In none of these capacities will he interfere with any plan I have."

"And last," said George, as if he had not heard him, "Steffin is engaged to be married to Linda."

"Ah," said Sandy MacGrath and his eyes fell to the blue print on the desk and stayed there.

There was a long silence. Slowly Sandy's red-brown Scotch brows came together; slowly the frown deepened between them. His fingers ran up and down the fountain pen he had lifted from the desk. The foot he had flung over one knee made a restless movement.

George MacGrath put his hand on the knob of the door.

Sandy swung his foot back to the floor and lifted his hand.

"George," he said, "if I were to return you that fifteen thousand dollars, would you feel more confidence in me?"

George leaned against the door. "What makes you wish to return it just now?"

"Oh, I've really long wanted to give it to you, but I never could bring myself to it. And I haven't had the money before. I've known ever since I went to Springfield when you were so ill that you felt deeper about this than I imagined. I suppose that was the reason you didn't want Linda to come to me."

"It was one reason."

"It has been on my mind ever since." Sandy slanted his eyes at his brother with the look of a red fox. "It's true, when you first asked me for it I didn't agree with you that this money was yours. I was following out accurate instructions; and besides, I couldn't have given it to you then; it was tied up. But I can give it to you now; and I would rather give it to you, no matter what I think about it, than have you feel the way you do."

There was another silence. After a little Sandy broke it again:

"Even if Shelburn loses this case, George, and Linda gets this estate, it is hers, not yours; and you say she is going to marry Steffin. This fifteen thousand dollars would be yours. You don't care to be dependent on your daughter?"

A faint flush crept up George MacGrath's thin cheeks.

"You are thoughtful about me! This is a thing you wish to do solely to set yourself straight?"

"Oh, I know your infernal pride. I'm offering you no gift. Let us say, if that's what you want to hear, that I am paying an old debt."

"Very well, then. I accept it. Fifteen thousand dollars and the interest at five per cent. on fifteen thousand dollars for fourteen years."

Sandy's chair scraped on the floor. "By gad," he said and fell silent. The fringe of color mounted a little higher in George MacGrath's cheeks, and the old whimsical look came into his eyes.

"I let you off compound interest, Sandy. Ten thousand, five hundred dollars interest added to the fifteen thousand. At that, I dare say you won't be a loser; you've been getting more than five per cent. on it yourself."

Sandy gave him a haggard look. "Very well," he said. "You shall have the check—certified—to-morrow. I will give it to you before the trial."

"Are you likely to change your mind before the trial?"

Sandy rose. "I suppose you were about to say that if I were likely to change, you would not care to tell Steffin that your confidence in me was restored. Now I will tell you what I'll do. I am one of the directors of the Lindanburg bank. We have been depositing in it since the gas company had its first offices located in the village and since we had to do so much business with these people about here. I have a safety-deposit box in the bank with twenty-two thousand dollars' worth of bonds in it that I have kept there for a special purpose. But I shall not need them now; they will have to go to paying you. If you'll take them for this debt I will go in with you now and give them to you, and you can transfer them to your own safety box or take them with you or do what you like. Is it a go?" A faint smile touched George MacGrath's face.

"I will take them," he said. "You'll feel better about your conscience money if you make a couple of thousand on it."

In the bank, the transaction complete, Sandy MacGrath looked out the door and across the street at two young men standing in front of the hotel, watching the door of the bank closely. He knew perfectly who the young men were and what newspapers they represented.

"George," he said, "there's nothing about this newspaper game you don't know. Can I count on you to keep me out of the papers in this?"

"Twenty thousand is a pretty stiff price to pay for that, Sandy. You might have tried it on those young men and found it cheaper—or more expensive."

Sandy put his hands in his pocket. "I was not bribing you."

George looked across the street at the two young men. "Sandy," he said, "I've been handling your publicity for you ever since this suit was filed; and as you say, there is a good deal in this business that I am familiar with. Those two young men across the street are not very bribable—not in any way that you or I could manage; but, on the other hand, you're not their brother. For your own sake, Sandy, honestly and earnestly, for your own sake, quite aside from its benefit to me, I am glad you have paid this debt. As for your present danger, though it has nothing at all to do with your payment of the debt, I am glad that I am here to be of this service to you. I think you can safely trust it to me. Without your knowing it, I have been guarding you for some days. Now that you do know it, I shall not lessen my efforts."

CHAPTER XXVIII

Through the open window of the courthouse a faint wind carried a handful of Dorothy Perkins rose petals to Linda's feet, and she stooped and gathered them, crunching them in her hand as Steffin paused a moment in the opening speech of the case of Steffin and Lansell, executors of the estate of Edward Lindan against John Oliver Shelburn.

Judge Randolf looked from Steffin to the girl who had stooped to gather the rose petals and then back again at Steffin.

"If your Honor pleases," said Steffin, "the facts I wish to present in asserting that the portion of this deed that describes the property disposed of has been unlawfully tampered with, are divided into three parts; how it was done; why it was done; and where and when it was done.

"We assert that an additional two paragraphs have been added to the description of the property sold. They were added to the one original paragraph written in there with Edward Lindan's consent, thus conveying to the defendant five hundred acres of property that, since the beginning of Virginia, have been in the hands of the Lindans and the Pagets.

"We will show you that the first part of this description was written into the printed form of the deed by a Ramona traveling typewriter. This division describes the forty acres known as the Brinsley property, which we will prove was the entire extent of the property sold to John Oliver Shelburn by Edward Lindan.

"The second division of this description comprises the Lindan estate of five hundred acres and we will show that this second division was written into the deed by a three-year old Regal machine. We have a copy of a letter written on the same machine on the same evening that this addition to the deed was inserted. And we have in court the Ramona typewriter on which the first paragraph of the description was written. We will ask you to use the magnifying glass on the two different paragraphs from the different machines in this part of the deed, and even though the ribbon is identical in color, under the glass the differences in type are clearly visible.

"We will ask you to also use the magnifying glass on the letter written on the same evening and on the same typewriter that we assert the second division of the description was written on, that you may see that the script is

identical in the two specimens. These typed distinctions, as you know, are readily recognized by expert typewriter people, so that it is easy for them to prove what machine has produced any kind of specimen offered them and also to prove whether the machine was a new one or an old one.

"We expect to show that Edward Lindan executed this deed at one o'clock after being heard to say that he would sell this corner of his land because it was a late purchase; but he would not sell a rod of the land that had been his father's and his grandfather's. At one-thirty he left Mr. Shelburn's house, where the deed was executed, and walked across Doctor Lansell's yard to my house which is next to Doctor Lansell's. He arrived there at two o'clock where he asked me to arrange immediately for the deposit of the forty thousand dollars he had received for the corner of his property. He wished to deposit it in the Port Washington bank to the account of Miss Brinsley, his fiancée, to whom the land had originally belonged. He wished to return to her thirty-seven thousand dollars, retaining only the three thousand dollars he had originally paid her for the property, thus reimbursing her for the loss she had sustained in selling him her property when she was ignorant of its real value. I did this. I sent Miss Brinsley and my secretary to the Port Washington bank with this check, and my secretary brought back Miss Brinsley's check for three thousand dollars. She was unable to return herself, because she was employed by Mrs. Lansell and had no more time to spare at that moment than it took her to go to the bank.

"At no time did Edward Lindan consider this forty thousand dollars payment for his own five hundred acres, nor did he once admit or assume that this land was sold. On the contrary he outlined to me clearly his projects for the sale of the gas on his land to the Consolidated Gas Company and the development of the oil which he had known for some time was there and from which he expected to make four or five times more than forty thousand dollars; enough to support in comfort a number of convalescents suffering from the tuberculosis of which he died.

"We will show you that Edward Lindan left my house at three and died on the way back to Mr. Shelburn's house at three-thirty. He died in the presence of Doctor Lansell, Miss Brinsley, Miss MacGrath and myself, after writing a will in which he bequeathed his property to Miss MacGrath, asking her to carry out the plans he had been working with for so long a time. This will was witnessed by Doctor Lansell and myself and has been duly probated and accepted.

"We shall show that if Edward Lindan had changed his mind and sold his whole estate it would have had to be done between one and one-thirty,

for after that time he was occupied every moment at a distance from the deed, and he died at three-thirty.

"We will prove that Oliver Shelburn had long been acquiring property that promised to be rich in oil and that he regarded this Lindan estate as unusually promising; that he had repeatedly tried to buy it cheaply and that he had said several times that it would be more profitable for a dying man to accept a cash certainty that would carry him easily through his last days than to be bothered with the development of property whose resources were uncertain.

"We will show you Oliver Shelburn's amazement at Edward Lindan's sudden death and his lack of knowledge of who the heir might be.

"We will show you that this sudden death, occurring at a house party, disorganized the guests who undertook to leave in various ways, both by automobile and train, creating endless confusion in the house; that finally Oliver Shelburn left the house before his guests had departed, taking with him his secretary's traveling typewriter, and drove to the house of Alexander MacGrath who, he knew, had already left New York for Virginia.

"We will prove that in Mr. MacGrath's house Oliver Shelburn encountered Mrs. Fergus Lansell, and Mrs. Lansell will testify that Mr. Shelburn was so anxious to have her leave that he took her by the arm and put her out; that finding Mr. Shelburn's car in front of the house and wishing to get home after this experience as quickly as possible, Mrs. Lansell stepped into Mr. Shelburn's car and drove home with it. Unluckily for the defendant, the traveling typewriter was still in the car, and thus deprived of the typewriter that the first part of the description in the deed was written on, and having no idea whether he would ever find it again, it was necessary for the defendant to write the rest of the description on another typewriter. A witness will be produced who saw Oliver Shelburn writing on Mr. MacGrath's typewriter at six-fifteen on this evening.

"We will show that the defendant took the seven-thirty train that night for Virginia, arriving here in Lindanburg next morning, when he took the deed to the courthouse at nine.

"We will show you that the plaintiff having no idea of this fraud, came after the burial of her kinsman to probate the will; and when she went to transfer the property from the name of Edward Lindan to that of Linda Paget MacGrath, she found this estate, that for two hundred years had been the property of this old Virginia family, of which she herself was almost the last member, had been transferred to John Oliver Shelburn of New York.

"We feel that these facts, as we expect to show them, will justify the court in declaring this deed conveying this property from Edward Lindan to John Oliver Shelburn void and without effect, and in ordering a reconveyance from John Oliver Shelburn to the executors of the Lindan estate; and that this be placed on the records of the County of Lindan."

With a stub of a pencil the judge put down some figures and made a little note, staring at the paper with a frown of concentration. The frown did not disappear as he listened to the elderly and justly famous lawyer for the defense make a vivid picture of the position and the reliability of his client, his many responsibilities and business resources, and the impossibility of a man of his standing incriminating himself for the sake of five hundred acres of property—a mere bagatelle among his many large holdings.

"If your Honor pleases," the lawyer concluded, "my client, having persuaded an invalid of changeable mind to sell a part of his property, found it necessary to execute the deed in all haste, lest this invalid change his mind again. The deed, which was a printed form, was filled in by my client's secretary, Oliver Knox, on his own typewriter. We will show that this writing was done on this little traveling machine solely because Mr. Knox had more speed on his own machine, whose mechanism he was accustomed to, than he had on the Regal machine in my client's study; and this was a case where speed was necessary. Mr. Knox had used this little Ramona for a year or two, during which he was a reporter on Mr. Shelburn's newspaper and he continued to use it after he became Mr. Shelburn's secretary, because he frequently transcribed Mr. Shelburn's business in his own room, if his employer happened to be busy in his study where the Regal typewriter is kept.

"My client will testify that after Edward Lindan and himself reached my client's study, my client added to the money offer he had made Mr. Lindan the offer of a position in the gas company if he would sell his property to the gas company, and that Edward Lindan accepted this offer. Having accepted it, he was not disposed to wait for a new deed to be written, this being a needless hardship for an invalid, so the second and third paragraphs now on the deed were added in Edward Lindan's presence on my client's Regal typewriter which was at hand.

"Forty thousand dollars in cash was paid to Edward Lindan and we submit that this is a larger sum than could be expected for forty acres on the edge of a small village in Virginia, even if gas had been found there.

"We will show that my client's other movements the rest of the day were the natural result of the unlooked-for death of a guest in his house, and the handling of the departure of other guests at a time when he had pressing business to transact. We hope to prove to your Honor that it is a natural thing for a man to leave such a hubbub if he had other affairs it was necessary for him to arrange before he undertook the short journey to Virginia which he began that night. My client is the head of a large gas company, the owner of flourishing steel mills in another part of the country and the editor of a large Ohio newspaper. He must necessarily have many things to do before he absented himself from his house and his office. He was leaving on an evening train from a station within a few blocks of the house of a business associate and it was impossible for him to reach the city before the time when most offices are closed. To go to his office in Wall Street after six at night, when a quiet house and a well-equipped library belonging to the vice-president of the company of which he was president were at his disposal, was so manifestly unnecessary that we do not expect to touch upon that fact save to prove that Oliver Shelburn, once arrived at the house, asked for and searched for some consolidated gas leases that he wished to take with him to Virginia.

"If your Honor pleases, we do not expect to deny that two paragraphs of description in the deed exhibited were done on different typewriters. We affirm it. What we do expect to deny is that these paragraphs were written in different places or after the death of Edward Lindan."

The judge lifted Fergus Lansell's best magnifying glass in his hand and laid a paper weight of George Washington on the red letters at the top of the deed that had been submitted in evidence by the executors of the Lindan estate.

The cross-examination of the typewriter experts had proved interesting only in that point where the defense maintained that the difference in type of a Regal machine three years old and one two months old could not be detected. Alexander MacGrath's Regal machine, it appeared, was two years older than Oliver Shelburn's new one. The expert had testified that the second division of the description of the property sold was done by the same machine as that which had typed the note written by Mrs. Fergus Lansell, which had also been offered in evidence by Steffin.

"I will now ask Mrs. Fergus Lansell to take the stand," said Steffin. And the judge hastily put down his magnifying glass.

"Mrs. Lansell," said Steffin, "will you tell the judge at what hour you reached Mr. MacGrath's house and what took place there as you waited for him?"

Bertha pushed back the dove-gray veil that draped her hat and sent a fleeting glance from Shelburn, sitting beside his attorney, to Judge Randolf, whose eyes were apparently following the folds of the veil.

"When I left my dressmaker's that afternoon, on Fifty-third Street, a block from Mr. MacGrath's house," said Bertha softly, "I found I had consumed far more time than I had expected to, and that I was too late to catch the six o'clock train that would bring me home on Long Island, where I live, in time for dinner. The only way it would have been possible for me to get home for dinner would have been to find somebody who was going that way in an automobile. Mr. MacGrath was one of the house party staying at Mr. Shelburn's house next to mine. His niece, who lives with him, was also staying at Mr. Shelburn's, but Mr. MacGrath came into town from time to time to transact his affairs, and I thought if he happened to have done so that afternoon and if he were going out again to join his niece in time for dinner, I might get a lift in his car. So I walked to his house where I had to wait some time to be let in, for there was nobody there but Nora, the cook. Nora thought Mr. MacGrath might come in any moment, as the dinner order had not been countermanded and she was waiting to serve dinner. So I went in and upstairs to the library to wait, hoping that even if Mr. MacGrath were not going out for dinner, he might be going directly after it, and I could still go with him, which would be an improvement on the seven-twenty-six train, even if I did not reach Long Island in time for dinner.

"But when after a ten-minute wait Mr. MacGrath did not come, I realized that I might be kept waiting longer than I wished. So I prepared to go, and feeling that the cook might not explain clearly to Mr. MacGrath why I had come, I looked for pen and paper in order to leave a note for him. The desk was locked, so I began the note on the typewriter, which is on a smaller desk beside the big desk."

"Will you identify the note, Mrs. Lansell?" said Steffin.

"Yes, Mr. Steffin, this is the note, and it is not completed: because when I was halfway through it, I heard a voice downstairs at the front door and I took it off the machine, supposing Mr. MacGrath had come in. It proved, however, to be Mr. Shelburn, and he appeared excited and annoyed when he saw me, and his comments on my being there were so disagreeable that though I had been on the verge of leaving, I sat down, declining to go, with

the hope that Mr. MacGrath would come. This hope was the natural result of Mr. Shelburn's arrival. I supposed that Mr. Shelburn had an appointment with Mr. MacGrath."

Bertha paused and lifted her chin a little as she let her quiet eyes under the dove-gray veil rest on Shelburn.

"And what happened then, Mrs. Lansell?" said Steffin.

"Mr. Shelburn took me by the arm, wrenching it most painfully, and put me out."

"What did you do then?" urged Steffin.

"I was so indignant and my arm hurt so badly I felt that I could not get home quickly enough. Mr. Shelburn's car was at the door and I got in it and drove it home."

"That is all, Mrs. Lansell," said Steffin, and submitted his witness to cross-examination, a privilege the elderly and justly famous lawyer for the defense did not care to exert. Indeed, the accent with which he waived cross-examination of the gray-veiled witness was slightly contemptuous.

Doctor Lansell was then called and he testified that his wife had arrived home at eight o'clock with her arm injured and that after treating it he had gone to the garage to examine the car she had driven home and that he had found in the car the little Ramona typewriter, which was submitted as evidence, and on the floor of the car the half-finished note to Mr. MacGrath which had fallen from his wife's pocket.

Doctor Lansell was followed by Nora O'Flynn, who being sworn with very evident interest in the process, admitted a little breathlessly that she was Alexander MacGrath's cook until four days ago, when she had left his employment in order to be present where she now was.

"Nora," said Steffin, "will you tell exactly what happened after you let Mrs. Lansell in on the night of June first? Just tell it your own way. We will understand."

Across the courtroom Nora sent a hesitating glance at Sandy MacGrath and from him her alarmed eyes traveled to Shelburn, as he leaned over and said something to his attorney that caused that gentleman to fix a direct, not to say a threatening, eye on Nora O'Flynn.

Steffin leaned toward his witness with attention so flattering that the Irish heart took hold of the alarmed Irish mind.

"Nora," said Steffin, in dulcet tones, "will you look at the judge, who is waiting to hear you?"

"Go on with your story," said Judge Randolf, the soft Virginian vowels promising understanding and lenience.

"Sure, yer Honor, 'twas this way. I wint to me kitchen where 'twas doughnuts I had fryin' and me grease burnin' and me no time with the burnin' grease to stay with Mrs. Lansell whin she waited. And 'twas no time at all whin Mr. Shelburn came, and me not knowin' who it was ringin' the doorbell, 'til it was like a church bell." Two little bright spots came in Nora's cheeks as the ancient gift of gab of her forbears overtook her. It was not every day of the week that grave and serious gentlemen hung upon her words. Nora straightened up in her chair and lifted her head high, the courage of the O'Flynns rising in her blood. "Me grease was burnin' and me not knowin' who it was breakin' the doorbell and havin' to put the fryin' pan to the back of the stove, 'twas some time before I reached the door owin' to havin' to wipe me hands before I could handle the doorknob."

She paused with a backward look at Shelburn.

"And what did you do, Nora, when you opened the door?" prompted Steffin hurriedly.

"Faith, I jumped back, sir, for Mr. Shelburn he was in temper, what with waitin' and ringin' and he had words with me whatever, and me listenin' for fear the words would be heard upstairs in the library, and them not right for a lady."

"And then?" urged Steffin.

"And thin we went up the stairs and I sez to mysel', I sez, sure he's in no mind to meet a lady at all and her waitin' up the stairs, and if it's not expectin' her he is, he'll be in less mind. And 'twas so. He was in no mind at all, and 'twas no time for any lady to be waitin' for him for he had words with her and before I could shut me kitchen door he was pushin' her down the steps and out the door."

"What did you do then, Nora?"

"Sure, I went to the area to see if the lady needed anythin', and her cryin' out when he shut the door on her. But whin I got there she was steppin' in the car and was goin' down the street. And she had hardly gone, and me still standin' there, whin Mr. Shelburn came out on the steps, looking for his car."

"Did he have his hat and coat on, Nora, ready to go?"

"That he did not. He was bareheaded; belike he came for something in the car, and whin he found it gone, his words were not words for a lady to interrupt, and so I stayed where I was, thinkin' if he had put one lady out of a house not his own, he might do the same by another. And thin, my dinner wastin' on the stove and Mr. MacGrath a friend of Mr. Shelburn's, I went up to him when he went back to the library and spoke him kindly, askin' him would he be eatin' some dinner."

"And what was he doing, Nora?"

"Sure, he was at the typewriter, writin' slow and sweatin' fast."

"Do you remember what he was writing on, Nora?"

"A docyment with red letters on the top."

"Was it like this document, Nora?"

"I object," said the attorney for the defense.

"You may answer," said the judge.

"Yis, sir, it fell over the back of the typewriter with a long tail like that one does whin ye hold it up."

"And what did Mr. Shelburn say, Nora?"

"He sez, 'Bring me some coffee,' and I sez, 'Will ye be havin' cream and sugar, sir?', and he sez, 'Oh, get out, and don't come back.'"

"Did you go, Nora?"

"Faith and I did, sir. He had the look there's no denyin'."

"Were you present when he left, Nora?"

"Not where he stood, sir. But he left before I had my dinner, so 'twas a matter of a half-hour or so."

"That is all, Nora."

"Now, Nora," said the lawyer for the defense, "from where you stood in the room, could you have known what was on that typewriter?"

"Sure, sir, I was beside it, and there was red letters on it."

"But could you say definitely it was a document like this one?"

"I could, indade, sir. If 'twas not the same, 'twas its twin, or me eyes have gone to me feet."

"Nora, will you look at these documents in my hand that also have red letters at the top. Could it not have been one of these?"

" 'Twould have to be a docyment like the first one there, sir, to be any other one, sir."

"These documents, Judge," said the lawyer, "are leases of land leased by the Consolidated Gas Company that Mr. Shelburn went to Mr. MacGrath's house to get that night; and I offer them in evidence."

"I object," said Steffin.

"Objection sustained," said the judge.

George MacGrath then took the stand, and testified that he had discovered oil on the Lindan estate as far back as nineteen fourteen and that the presence of this oil was known to Mr. Shelburn and had been discussed by him with his assistants in his various offices. Mr. Lindan also knew about the oil, for they had discussed the possibilities of marketing it and developing it as they sat beside each other at the sanitarium in Saranac.

The courtroom grew a little stiller when Linda MacGrath was called. The defendant stirred uneasily in his chair, reached automatically for a cigar, and checked himself.

The judge looked from the soft young profile of the last of the Lindans to Steffin, who guided her gently through the story of that ebbing life that had rallied even at the Gate of Death to provide for the women he cared for and the sick friends he had left behind on the mountain tops; who had, even as his own hands became powerless, lifted these tasks of making life easier for those who needed help, into the hands of his young kinswoman.

No one moved as the young voice trembled over the story of how that will was written on note paper from her portfolio with her fountain pen held in dying hands. The girl paused and waited for control. Then she said softly:

"He knew that it was life itself he might be called upon to pay if he took this journey and made this effort in behalf of those he wanted to help, but I think he gave up his life gladly, feeling that the plans he had given it up for were to be carried out by those he cared for."

The judge looked away from her to the little branch of red roses swinging to and fro in the open window. If a man had to die when the roses were red and he was well loved, it was better to be grieved over. He sighed as he brought his attention back to the justice that had to be meted out. Steffin was writing a sentence on a little pad that he handed to George

MacGrath, as Shelburn's lawyer put Sandy MacGrath's butler on the stand. George left the room and the judge listened perfunctorily while the butler swore he would tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

"Your name?" said the attorney.

"Oscar Gaze."

"How long have you been Mr. Alexander MacGrath's butler?"

"Seven years, sir."

"Will you state what occurred when you returned to Mr. MacGrath's house on the night of June first?"

"I came back at seven o'clock and found Mr. Shelburn there. He was in a state of mind that could properly be called impatient, because he had come for some papers he wished to take with him to Virginia, and he believed them to be locked in Mr. MacGrath's desk when they should have been left out for him to look over while he was on the train."

"Would you attribute any shortness of speech he indulged in to the cook, or to anybody he might have encountered in the library, as due to the many things he had to get done before he left and the interruptions that were being put in his way?"

"I would, sir."

Gaze's look wavered a little. For George MacGrath had returned, bringing with him a chestnut-haired lady in a lilac gown and hat. Even the judge cast an interested look at this lady.

The eminent lawyer showed an almost imperceptible annoyance with the wandering look of his witness.

"Was Mr. Shelburn also impatient with you, Mr. Gaze?"

"Well, not to say impatient, exactly, sir. He was shortlike. He was in a hurry. An engineer was to meet him at the train and he had to have certain documents to go over with the engineer and he could not find them. I assisted him to hunt them, sir."

"Did you find them?"

"I did, sir. Some of them. They were in the bottom drawer of the typewriter desk, sir. Mr. Shelburn had found one of them, on the desk, I believe, but they were not what he wanted entirely, and so we hunted until it was time for him to leave for his train."

The lady in the lilac hat bent forward, fanning herself with a lilac fan, and the witness fixed fascinated eyes on her. The eminent lawyer, in surrendering his witness to Steffin, also looked at the lilac lady, and if his inscrutable face could have been said to register any feeling it might have been called wariness. Evidently the lawyer could not see what the lady had to do with a cross-examination. And indeed she appeared to have very little to do with it. She sat quite still, and after an admiring look at the judge in his dignity-of-office that she let rest on him until she was sure it had been observed, the lilac lady gave all her attention to the witness, even leaning further forward when he spoke.

"Mr. Gaze," said Steffin, "you have under oath declared your name to be Oscar Gaze. Is it not a fact that this is not your name?"

"I object," said the attorney for the defense.

"What are you attempting to show, Mr. Steffin?" asked the judge.

"The entire incredibility of the witness, Judge."

"Objection overruled," said the judge, and frowned a little.

"Is it not a fact," said Steffin, "that your name is Gazann, and that the woman whom you married under that name in Springfield, Ohio, fifteen years ago, and then deserted, leaving your whereabouts unknown to her for seven years, is now in the courtroom."

Gaze moistened his mouth with his tongue and looked helplessly at his interlocutor. Fearfully his look traveled from him to the lilac lady, fanning herself so that the little curling tendrils of chestnut hair moved caressingly on her white brow.

"I object," said the attorney for the defense.

The judge had turned in his stately chair and sent a somewhat sharper look at the lilac lady than he usually permitted himself at any handsome woman. The look had been caught by another admiring look from the lady that she made, in some way probably unknown to men, soften and flood her face, so that a man would have had to be blind indeed to fail to perceive it.

"Objection overruled," said the judge curtly. "The witness may answer."

"Your correct name?" said Steffin.

"Gazann," murmured the witness.

"That is all," said Steffin.

"Your Honor," said the lawyer for the defense testily, "the private and past life of a man's butler is not usually inquired into when he is employed as a servant; or when, as a servant who has been present in a house, he is called upon to offer testimony concerning what occurred in the house. Butlers with names unsuitable for the constant use necessary in responding to household orders frequently shorten their names. The same thing is done constantly by actors and authors and many other persons for whom a name easy to pronounce is a business asset. It does not necessarily mean that the man who does it is unreliable, either as a witness or as a man."

"Mr. Steffin," prompted the judge.

"Your Honor, this is true, of course, in the case of many public men and women. But such recourse to making a name more euphonious should not be confounded with a name changed because a man wishes to hide from a woman he is deserting and whom he has left penniless, without any means of discovering where he is or whether he intends to come back or stay away. The kind of man who will treat in this manner a woman who has given him nothing but kindness, and who will change his name to facilitate his ease in deserting her, is quite a different kind of man from one who merely alters his name in order to make it easier for his employer to pronounce it. If your Honor wishes, I will place Mrs. Gazann, the wife of the witness, on the stand."

"It is unnecessary," said the judge. "How much time do you gentlemen wish for your closing addresses?"

The lady in lilac fanned herself quietly, thoughtful eyes on the judge. Apparently she was either unconscious of the startled look of the impugned witness, or she was indifferent to it. The judge did not look at her again. He fixed his eyes on the man addressing him. They wandered but once, when a faint west wind blew a shower of red rose leaves into the courtroom and some of them fell on the bent shoulders of Linda MacGrath.

CHAPTER XXIX

Very slowly, because for all the rest of his life he must never again hurry, George MacGrath mounted the Hill of Sleep to the little sunny corner where he had stood ten years ago while life in its dearness slipped from his numbed heart, leaving him to a bare succession of weary days and to nights of aching hunger.

The sunshine flooded the little corner as it had flooded it so many years ago, weaving the grass into a carpet of living jewels; and George MacGrath stopped and laid on the grass a bunch of roses he had gathered from a place where Linda Paget and he had danced in those days when loneliness had seemed to them to be forever stricken from the world.

They had danced and played and ridden all about these hills; they had loved and married, and gone away to work and to live. And he had brought her back to rest from the living and the working and served her as perfectly as a man who loves may serve, until his very reason for living had seemed to creep into that serving, and to go from him when it was over. He looked at the gay sunlight on the roses. What if it all ended here in a sunny forgotten corner, with a bunch of roses brought after all these years. He knew better, and yet how he had fought, crying her name, in those first years; and it had been she who had been struck down, not he who fought; struck just as he was winning, making his victory barren indeed, making all victory barren; narrowing what was left to the horizon of a little town where a little girl might grow unhurt, though there was no guarding woman to watch over her girlish ways. And now even this last service to her was over. The little girl had come from the years of careful training out into a larger world and found herself fit to meet its problems. Growth was before her, service held out rich opportunity to her, love had come to her. There was little more he could do for her now.

He walked out from the sunny corner, turned and looked back at the roses glowing like flowing wine, and then he moved down the hill, pondering.

He was still young enough—Why not begin again? He had fought for life in Saranac, because even shreds of life such as an invalid could hold might be useful to Linda. Some problem might come to her that needed his solving; some difficulty that only he could help her with. Life had returned

to him, vital enough to bring him to her in this present need, to keep him at her side, erect and useful. He smiled a little grimly as he thought of his latest service that brought her enough for her simple personal expenses without taking any of Ned Lindan's money from his cherished project. And if she did not need that money after she married, it would be enough for him, and there were still many things that might yet be pleasant to return to; Nice at Christmas; Paris in May; Kew in lilac time—the days of his young years and his old friends—what could a man ask better at fifty? It had been long since he had lived for himself; so long, he wondered if he could get the knack of it again.

The road from the Hill of Sleep took him into the main road, but he left it at the creek before it reached Valentine's old home. He had no wish to see Sandy again to-day, and he had another wish. High up on the hill beyond the little oil-coated pools stood the greatest pine of them all; the Sentinel; and there Linda Paget and he had ridden one June afternoon as sunny as this, leaving their horses down by the creek and climbing the limestone crags like young antelopes to the top where the rocks took curious shapes they had called soldiers, guarding the fortress where the Sentinel stood. There was a little passageway of descending rock to a tiny plateau bounded by a rock ledge, and on this the Sentinel stood, its huge roots carpeted with years of brown needles that had given it soil to grow, and made the roots velvet chairs for young guests.

Here he had asked her to marry him. He meant to go there on this day when his long service ended, and he could say, "All is well with your woman-child whom you left for me to care for." Who knew—in some heaven it might be heard. In some way he might know that it was heard, and that even heaven was a happier place because all was well with a child on earth. As he left the road at the culvert for the bank of the creek that, a mile further back, rippled about the base of the hill he meant to climb, George MacGrath turned for a moment to watch the four or five riders clatter over the little wooden bridge. There was Judge Randolf and Bertha Lansell, and a man and woman he did not know; but they turned in their saddles as the judge called to him, and George, saluting them, moved quickly around the curve of the high bank and down to the edge of the creek, that the riders might not think it necessary to stop and talk with him.

Below the oil pools, a name he had long ago bestowed on the spot he had told Sandy about ten years ago, George stopped to make some notes in his pocket notebook and to draw a rough little map. As he put his engineer's hieroglyphics on the paper, a laugh tinkled behind the jutting stone of the

hill whose top he meant to reach in a little time, and he looked up with his heart suddenly beating uncertainly.

A lady in white and scarlet riding clothes moved toward him, a lady as rosy and golden as the June sunlight, picking her way in the oozing ground with due regard for bright leather riding boots, and leading her horse by its white bridle with no self-consciousness of the picturesque entrance she made on the green and golden stage—or with scarcely any self-consciousness. For the lady had sung Brünnehilde and knew how to hold a bridle and face the audience with poise. And if she now peeled off her gauntlet with a gesture faintly suggestive of the pause the prima donna makes for the applause of her first entrance, the gesture had trained grace and was pleasant to see.

For one second George MacGrath stood still, letting his heart-beat slow down; then he put his notebook in his pocket and pronounced the lady's long unused name as if it were a familiar sound.

"Julie!"

"George! To think of passing you on the road! I did not know you, you were so young and slim and erect. My dear George, *how* young you are! It is incredible!"

"Maybe youth is like beauty, Julie; in the eye of the beholder. Did you bring the others with you?"

He took her outstretched hand a moment and released it softly.

"*Ciel*, no! I have not seen you for—how many years—a hundred, surely; for the hedge has grown tree-high, and you—you, I think, are still asleep. These others know nothing of sleeping beauty—and very little of wakening it."

For a moment his eyes seemed to leave her face and look beyond her up the hillside, where at the top stood sharp stone crags that from below might be thought of as watching figures.

"You do not say that I am young, George." She pouted. "I gave you such a pretty way to say it—a hundred years' sleep while you were gone—and the lady wakening just as she was a hundred years ago."

"Oh, oh! I thought it was I who had been asleep, not you, Julie."

She laughed, the same little tinkle laugh that had startled him so a few minutes ago. "Well, I think you have slept, George—uncommonly well and long. And as for being your awakener—I like the idea—I always did. Did

you know I was staying here? At Judge Randolf's. I came down with Bertha, when her husband said she had to testify. Such a mixed set of grudges Bertha had! She didn't know whether to tie to her past, her present or her future; and now that she is tied, she doesn't know which she's tied to."

"Do you know?"

"That's like you. I know which I'm tied to, yes. Isn't everybody tied to it?" She lifted her eyes, warm and glowing, to him. "You were not so sound asleep in that past I'm tied to, George dear."

"Yet I dreamed many dreams, Julie."

She moved a little closer, brushing the jutting rock with her crop.

"You dear! Think of finding you this way! and I didn't greatly want to come to Lindanburg with Bertha; she was so spiteful about poor old Shelly. I thought Shelly ought to have one human being to stand by him. Then I didn't get up in time to go to court this morning, and so I would have come in vain—but for this. It's always some unexpected moment, isn't it, that pays us for the stupid planned-for hours?"

He smiled in sheer pleasure at this thing in her that had survived time and tide; a hundred times he had known Julie to carefully plan for that one unexpected moment that was to pay her for the other stupid hours.

"Did you come to see me—all the way to Virginia?" he asked boldly.

She brushed his shoulder with her crop. "If I had, would I be going back to New York to-morrow?"

"Why, yes, if you expected me to follow you."

"Oh, George, you haven't changed one single bit! I adore you; I always did. Will you dine with me in New York, next week—yes, and go to the opera? It will be the destruction of all the hundred years if we two go to the opera together again. Will you?"

Once more his eyes seemed to leave her face and look beyond her to the top of the hill where the watching stone figures stood.

"What's up there; the mind you make up?" There was impatience lurking under the voice trained to liquid music. "Will you come?" The voice lowered to wistfulness. "It has been so long since I have been as young as we used to be—since I have had such fun—as we had it—just fun, playing ——"

"You! Why, you have had nothing else, Julie! And what is all this I hear of your forging chains for great men's feet since you came from Paris?"

She gave a French shrug. "*Boulevardier!* I suppose you mean Shelly. He'll have a ball and chain not of my forging, if he isn't more careful. Are you going to let him off?"

"Do you want to marry him, my dear?"

"Which would you do if I wanted to marry him—let him off, or send him to prison?"

"You shall hear—say, next week, when I dine with you in New York."

She leaned a little away from him. "How like you; you mean by next week you will have found out who it is I want to marry. Only, that shows you are asleep. Back there in Paris you would have found out the next minute."

She flashed a brilliant look at him, amused and sophisticated, and the years fell away from him as he met the look, laughing.

"All men are vulnerable—shoulder or heel."

She stretched out a rosy finger. "I choose the heel, Achilles. I don't want you running away again. What night will you dine with me in New York? On Wednesday they sing 'Romeo and Juliet'—our own opera. Shall it be Wednesday?"

He remembered; never the uncertainty for Julie, the one woman who was punctual, who knew just what each day promised and what each hour should bring, and where to look in other friends for what the one friend could not give.

He sighed. Suddenly he felt quite tired before this vitality that could say, On Tuesday I will dine, on Wednesday I will go to the opera. He who on Tuesday might be too tired to dine, or who on Wednesday might be coughing.

"Come early, George, and we'll get there for the overture. Do you remember that first time we heard the waltz song of 'Romeo and Juliet'?"

"You could always remember the month and the day, Julie."

She took it as praise and she smiled graciously. "It is not all I remember. That first time we walked in the Bois and you said even the trees were French, because they were slim and elegant; and Versailles when the

fountains flowed; and the Seine at twilight—have you ever gone back, George?"

"No. They would not let me go to the War."

"Oh, your lovely voice, George; it is just the same. I always said you could have sung with me. If you only had—I wouldn't have married Chevonnes."

He leaned back against the jutting rock. How should a man ever be paid for loss of youth?

"I think you would have married him. Did you not call it triumph?"

She was not displeased. "You are still bitter about it. But we expected the impossible, George. After all, that's one of the flaws of youth, isn't it? We know how to make allowances now, do we not? What friends we should be, now."

"With our old youth and our young maturity?"

She waited for another answer than this. Perhaps it was this other answer she had come across the hills to get, and through the oozing ground. She waited a moment longer and then, as women must, she turned his unproductive answer to what account she could.

"You expected me to look at no other man, and I expected you to love me always."

"Are you done with all such expectations, Julie? Did I not hear only a few minutes ago about a man who was to be released to marry you?"

She sighed, knowing—as women know—the time was not yet, but unable—as women are unable—to believe in her knowledge.

"You heard me speak of a man and of marriage but of what man and what marriage you would not hear."

She knew—no woman better—when to leave the man whom she wanted to follow her. Yet for a moment she could not bring herself to go. And in the moment she too wondered what payment could ever be made for lost youth. Her hands fell lax at her side; the effort seemed so great for results so uncertain. And though she pushed the admission from her, she knew that it was moments like this, multiplying, that made the difference for her between youth and age.

With a delicate swift movement full of grace she bent toward him and brushed his forehead with her fingers.

"That's for a dream you say you once dreamed, Sleeping One. There are those who live on dreams; and maybe dreams are meant for age as well as for youth. I must go now. No, don't go with me. Bertha is waiting out on the road. I'd rather leave you here. Until Wednesday, at seven."

She put her shining little riding boot in his cupped hand, but he found her heavy to lift, or perhaps he did not lift burdens lightly now that he was always tired, for after she had turned her horse he had to hold fast to the rock to steady himself. For she turned and looked back at him over her shoulder as she rounded the corner of the bluff, with the finished grace of one who knows how to leave the stage under eyes watching every movement, and he would not have liked to have failed her in watchfulness.

After she had gone he leaned his head back on the rock and shut his eyes a moment. Then he sat down and rested. Curious that this vision of his young years should hurt as it unrolled before him—a physical pain at his heart. Or was it that? Who could be sure that pain was physical? What he was feeling now was a strange emptiness: the feeling a man has when his work is done, and he sits quietly, his concentration, his will, his thought given up for the hour of rest. What comes next? Was his work done, and had the doing of it, the patience it had taken, the days when he could only look ahead at his goal and hope, lest the dreariness of the days hold him back, the mistakes he had had to make to learn how not to make them, the failures he had had to wring success from—had all these things made lesser living impossible, an emptiness that meant pain, not pleasure?

If a man's work and a man's fight that carried him forward made it impossible for him to go back, what then? He had thought it so easy to return to his young joy in a pretty woman, and the bright gayety of the ways they walked when the whole world was young for them.

He rose with a sigh and looked up at the top of the hill. There used to be a way up through the niche in the ledge. The Sentinel stood behind the first ledge. He mounted the first steeper ascent and stopped to get his shortened breath, turning to look back over the valley. Perhaps the gayety and the young joy were stopping places in a man's climb where he could get his breath, and look out at the pictures unfolding as he climbed and so go on to a higher level, taking with him the picture he had seen. But after a while a man got impatient of pictures and of pauses, and the climb became the real joy.

Yet his own climbing had narrowed his horizon, not enlarged it. It had put him in a little city, struggling with a hundred little problems; not all his

own. Little problems of other men making a like struggle; of a little girl learning how to think; of an older girl learning how to act. Problems of young lads who had never worked before; of seasoned workmen who were so tired of working success meant sleep to them. Problems of inhibition and deletion—he wearied with the memory of them. And always the problem of balance; not easy balance, but the balance to be struck with the thin fingers of stark penury stretched out to tip the scale; the balance to be struck between restraint and initiative; the hard-won balance of wisdom that brought success; never his own success, but the success of the man who owned the newspaper he did not edit; the success of the young boy learning to work; the writer learning to make a picture with words that were but symbols.

George pulled himself up a slippery patch of sand by holding to the slim trunk of a silver birch, and stood leaning against it. The pain at his heart had lessened, but the flow of his blood was swinging into a curious rhythm.

Why, all men worked in small places, whether on a hearth or on a battle field. These problems were problems of growth, and if a man solved them, whether for himself or another, he grew. The problem was always worked out in a small place; a cleared space on a man's desk; the pillow on which he laid a tired head; the chair before the fire some loved woman had kept burning. Concentration is a narrowing. In the largest city, on the deepest sea, on the widest plain, the solved problem narrowed the horizon. As a man climbs he limits his outlook. It is only when he stops that he looks about and away. It is when he pauses to get his breath, that he can see how far he has climbed, and if he looks down he can sometimes see the little oil pools below and the chattering creek.

George smiled over his breathlessness and his pain. He had wanted the chattering creek, all glitter and shining shallows up here on the mountain top; and creeks were for the valley. The waltz song in "Romeo and Juliet", how it glittered! This scarcely forgotten perfume of her hair, how it shone! And there it was for him, if he cared to climb down.

He looked up at the Sentinel. It seemed no different from the tree Linda Paget and himself had saluted so gayly so many years ago. Its outflung branches waved like pennants far over the valley. It would be the same years from now, or it would be so little different that one who sought it in memory would not be hurt as he was by the thought of change.

He climbed a little slowly now. This curious rhythm swinging within his mind was becoming a lovely current a man might make his own if he could

but hold it. The pennants swinging from the Sentinel moved with it, whispering something—almost he got it—he would presently, after he had rested and his own swinging blood was not so noisy in his ears.

So long ago he had helped her through this gap in the ridge, and she too had been breathless, and flushed with wild-rose color. He paused before the Sentinel and whispered her name. At the end of the climb, what then? Only a whispered name?

Wide arms of old roots carpeted in brown velvet opened for him. He sat down quietly.

"I've come to tell you, dear," he murmured, "about all this wealth we are going to wring from these places touched by your step; to tell you that though it came too late to make you well, it shall not be too late for those other mothers who need to be made well that they may stay longer with their children. I have come to tell you, dear, that because it was too late for you, it shall be in time for them."

He leaned his head back on the moss-pillowed roots and looked up at the swinging pennants, listening. After the climb, what—only emptiness? After the work done—only the tense mind relaxed, the strong will at rest?

Why, after the work was finished as well as a man could do it, then he must commit it to—what—to Life; to Fate; to Chance? Rhythmically the words swung forth and were rejected by him. Yet what was this a man did, when his work was done? He gave it up, and he gave himself with it to something greater than the work, something greater than himself. The work was still the man, but the strong will that had moved it was needed no longer when the work it had moved was done. That was what a man did when he finished his work; he committed it to a greater Will than his own; he gave up his own will to that greater Will.

The rhythm reaching from heart to mind swept deeper to something both heart and mind were part of, something as deeply himself as heart and mind were, as work and will were.

Perhaps no man went on, his work done, until he *could* give his own will into the keeping of that greater Will. And no man would want to so give his will until it was a fit gift to offer—to offer to what; to God?

The rhythmic flow grew stronger. If a man had done his work, if he had won his growth, what could it be for but for finer work, for greater growth; not for emptiness. Not to go back, but to go on; in his hands all he had won, fit to offer—yes—he saw clearly now—fit to offer to Love.

CHAPTER XXX

Amanda had served high tea on the gallery—English high tea, with crumpets and cake for those who had no luncheon on this day in court. As she now cleared the tea table she looked up at Linda with crinkled eyes of veiled satisfaction.

"It's all your'n now, Mis' Linda. No more trouble; no more lawyers; nothin'?"

"All mine to use, Mandy."

"Yas'm, you talks like all the Lindans." And Mandy looked out to the curved notch of the hill where the road climbed to the place where the Lindans slept. "Your father, Mis' Linda, he feels it same as you do. He done gone up the hill with roses he picked offen Judge Randolf's po'ch when he took his horse back. And I say to him, 'Marse George, you comin' back for dinner;' and he say, 'Yes, Mandy, but don't wait. I got a little errant that'll take some time.' And I 'low he tired, 'cause he flushed-like and I say, 'You ain't goin' to walk far, Marse George?' And he say, 'Mos' to the horizon, Mandy.' And I say, 'What horizon, Marse George?' And he say, 'Where the sun sets, Mandy.' And I done tole you, Mis' Linda, 'cause that's a long walk."

Linda looked troubled. "How long will it be before dinner, Mandy?"

"Not so long, Mis' Linda. That Miz Gassan, she make that ornery nigger Sam work, she do. Not so long, Mis' Linda."

"Well, I think I'll go up the hill after Father, Mandy."

"He done lef' that hill thar. Mis' Val'ntine, she come back, and I ask her. She say he went down the road."

"Well, I'll ask Mr. Steffin to drive me down the road, and we'll bring him back in the car."

"Yas'm. He is in the lib'ary going over papers with the doctor. Mis' Linda, he's a gran' young man; he stand up well on his hind laigs and ain't nobody goin' knock him down. Will yo'-all live here when you're married, Mis' Linda?"

"Some of the time, Mandy."

"I done hear he got houses and houses."

"None I care for as I do for this one, Mandy."

Linda went inside to where Steffin and Lansell sat over documents and papers. Steffin drew up a chair for her with his hand on her shoulder as he seated her.

"We were about to send for you. We won't let Valentine give us her money and she thinks we are unkind. If it's well invested, she'll have a modest income of one hundred and fifty a month. And we're going to secure that for her, if she'll keep out of it. Then the way she spends the income is her own affair; if she wants to spend it here, that's all right. But I'm sure Ned would rather have it this way. You see, Valentine may marry some day."

Linda looked at him thoughtfully. "You know you don't see that at all, Win. Are you nearly through with your papers? Father has gone walking down the road and I think after the long day in court, he'll be tireder than he counts on. He is not used to the uncertainties of his strength yet. Would you drive me down the road and bring him back?"

Lansell regarded Steffin with the friendliness a tired world bestows upon a lover. "He has every appearance of being willing to drive you anywhere any time. Sits well on you, Win."

But after they had gone, the affection faded out of Lansell's face. He folded the papers carefully and filed them in the old mahogany desk, then he went out on the gallery and smoked moodily. Far down the road the two in the little open car leaned together. He turned his head away from them, trying to get out of his mind the swift words with which Bertha had explained on the witness stand how she happened to be in Sandy MacGrath's house at six o'clock on the day Ned Lindan died.

On the corner of the gallery, Valentine stood watching the setting sun fling across the mountain a path of gold. Once more Fergus Lansell looked away. For love was there—love the miracle, remaking life, rebuilding character, molding, weaving, creating.

Fergus Lansell sighed. Love had once been as young to him as to the two riding down the road, and it had once been as strong as the girl watching the setting sun was finding it—strong enough to live through not one death, but many deaths. But now it seemed to him a great waste, unless perhaps it had taught him how to use death among those he healed, when to fight it and when to cease fighting, when to give up and when to defy it.

The sun drooped behind the hill. Purple shadows stole over the little ways of earth.

Amanda came to the door, looked on the two figures standing lonely on the terrace, and whispered to Mrs. Gazann, "She ain't just right to-day, Mis' Val'ntine ain't. She done seein' somethin' we don't see, Miz Gassan. And the doctor he try not to see somethin' we do see."

Mrs. Gazann looked about her from the old portraits to the purpling hills. Her heart was full of a vast content—quiet, beauty, gentleness, work to do, people about her who were glad to have her there. The noisy clatter of her life, its contentious people to whom she was a menace and not a pleasure, the struggle and the sordidness, were falling from her. With them fell the years; for the first time in her life Mrs. Gazann was happy and looked it.

"Oh," she sighed, "how can she see or hear too much of this beautiful place? It is lovely."

Amanda gave her a slanting look. "Yas'm. 'Pears like love is everywhere hereabouts; you done get it yoursel', Miz Gassan, effen you keeps on a gettin' younger. You done shed ten years right here in this house. I done hearn a man say to Jedge Randolf yistiday, 'Who that brown-haired lady of 'stinction you ridin' with all de time?' And the jedge he say, 'Do you mean the Doochesse?' And the man said, 'No, I mean the brown-blond, not the yaller-blond.' And the jedge he just laffed and say nothin' at all. Miz Gassan, when a man say nothin' at all, he gwine say somethin' soon."

"Oh, not so very soon, Mandy. We're both pretty young."

"Well, the jedge he been mahried befo'; he ain't so pow'ful young, but he's most good as new."

The little open car, hired in the village, came rattling up the hill and Linda and Steffin got out.

"We couldn't find father," said Linda. "Has he come, Mandy?"

"No'm. And dinner is ready."

Valentine came toward the door and paused.

"What is it, Valentine?" asked Lansell.

"I don't know—I—somebody wants Linda."

"I want her," said Mrs. Gazann promptly. "Dinner is served and I want her to get hot soup in her while it's hot." She gave Valentine an impatient look. Then she turned to Linda. "Your father is probably walking slowly

back and resting on the way. You know how he hates to have meals kept waiting for him." She explained to the others, "He never used to like to put other people out; he didn't want it on his mind if he had something to do."

"Well, then," said Linda doubtfully, "let us go in."

She slipped her arm shyly into Steffin's, flushing as he held it close to his body.

"The tomatoes in the soup," said Mrs. Gazann, "are from our own garden. All my life I have wanted a garden and chickens with somebody to help me look after them. What is the matter, Miss Brinsley?"

For Valentine had arisen and moved to the open window. "Somebody is calling," she said.

Silence fell on the group.

"Where, Valentine?" said Linda softly.

"Out beyond the hill."

"But you couldn't hear that far," Mrs. Gazann objected.

"Oh, yes, if they called this way I could. Will you excuse me? I must go."

She stepped through the long window and ran rapidly down the gallery steps. Linda hurried after her.

"Oh, wait for your dinner," moaned Mrs. Gazann. "She's that way so much now."

"Linda's worried about her father, Mrs. Gazann; we'd better go with her, Steffin and I," said Lansell.

But Steffin had already joined Linda. Valentine, in her black dress, was moving with incredible swiftness. Little crooning words escaped her. Only once did she hesitate—at the road that climbed the Hill of Sleep, and it was there the others caught up with her. But she left the road and took the ridge along the lower hill that ascended above the creek behind the bluffs that overlooked the valley.

"Hurry," said Valentine. "Somebody is calling you."

Straight along the narrow ridge the dark figure sped until the ridge began to rise into ledges of rock that made the edge of the bluff into odd human shapes in the purple dusk.

"Where is she going?" whispered Linda.

"Let her go," said Lansell sharply. "She can hear. These things happen."

Around a jutting curve slipped Valentine and came to a stop on the edge of the bluff. About her were a few tall pines. Far below came the tinkle of the stream. She stood perfectly still, listening, then very softly she moved down a tiny rocky declivity covered with pine needles as a stair with carpet. She paused, bending toward a tall pine whose roots carpeted with the same brown needles made velvet chairs to rest those who had climbed so far, and whose branches were flags flung forth, from the tower of rock, to storm and sunshine. Valentine put out her hand and touched the two men, holding them back.

In one of the low velvet chairs sat a quiet figure, tired head resting on a mossy root, one arm flung along the back of the chair as if it held one loved there, for the hand was curved to a clasp and the head was turned that way, and in the purple shadow there was shining peace in the quiet face—the peace of one who has waited long and hungered unceasingly, and for whom the long wait is over at last and the hunger forever gone.

Linda bent over him, searching his face. Youth was on his brow; youth, serene in its finished work. But something more was there; some dim promise of power to come, the touch of what shall be, because of what has been; the power that enfolds the fighter who has won.

George MacGrath had opened that Gate of Love that swings out only at Death's call, where the Sleep He gives to His beloved is Love.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *The Cobweb* by Margaretta Tuttle]